

## **Boom or Bust for Seniors?**

We hear in the media that the Western Australian economy is booming, with property prices and wages going through the roof. On the other hand, we hear at COTA (WA) that seniors are increasingly doing it tough.

While the continued residential property boom is proving to be a blessing for some seniors who own their own homes and others who have invested in the property market, for many it is proving to be a curse. Rents are rising rapidly, and those who are on low incomes and living in private rental accommodation, face unsustainable levels of rent.

Some seniors face financial disaster. Commonwealth Rent Assistance, which is payable to people who meet the assets and income test and are eligible for the Age Pension is a maximum of \$100.60 a fortnight, making a total fortnightly income for a single age pensioner of \$600.30. With rents and other housing related costs exceeding \$400 a fortnight for many, that doesn't leave a lot left for food and other essentials.

Others in dire straits include people who have sold their homes, often to down-size to more suitable homes, and who are caught by building delays. Centrelink quarantines monies received from the sale of a home for 12 months, but after that period, the asset is taken into account and pensioners may lose their whole entitlement to pension and fringe benefits, leaving them no alternative but to live on the money set aside for their new home which is under construction.

Housing affordability, long thought of as an issue only for young first home buyers, is very much a seniors' issue. Homeswest waiting lists for seniors accommodation are long, and affordable alternatives few.

Retirement incomes are being stretched beyond capacity. Few retirees can keep up with increasing prices. Petrol prices have a disproportionate effect on seniors who depend on their cars for leisure opportunities. Country seniors are even worse off as they often have to travel long distances to access basic services, and there is little public transport available.

For many retirees, the safety net is full of holes – going bust is booming!

COTA WA will be taking these issues to both State and Federal governments. Let me have your stories to convince them that this is an area where they could, and should, do better.