

**MEDIA RELEASE**

16 March, 2020

## **Supermarkets congratulated for supporting older Australians during COVID-19 crisis**

The peak body for older consumers today congratulated Woolworths for initiating measures to ensure older Australians have greater access to groceries during the current COVID-19 health emergency, and thanked Coles for following suit.

Council on the Ageing (COTA) Australia Chief Executive, Ian Yates, said many older Australians were understandably deeply concerned about how they would access essentials, including food, with so many empty shelves and freezers in supermarkets.

“Frail older Australians, and those with mobility restrictions, and the many who rely on public transport, cannot hop from suburb to suburb looking for supermarkets with toilet paper and pasta.

“Today’s announcements initially this morning by Woolworths, and Coles later this afternoon, that they will open specifically for most older Australians and people with disability for the first hour every morning, until at least Friday, will help ease concerns and assist people to access the essentials they need to stay safe and comfortable during this crisis.”

Mr Yates said opening stores at the beginning of the trading day for concession card and Seniors Card holders would hopefully mean that shelves are as well stocked as possible – although some key products may still not be immediately available.

However, he said many older Australians would still need a family member or a carer to accompany them at that early time to help them shop and asked supermarkets to understand and accommodate this.

Woolworths have also that announced from Thursday they will make care packages available during the day for older people and people with disability, with details still to come.

“COVID 19 is presenting unprecedented logistical challenges for Australia and globally. Woolworths is to be congratulated for recognising the problem and quickly working towards a solution that will make sure we all pull together to get through such a difficult period.”

Mr Yates also called on the public to stop buying up large amounts of basic and essential goods, whether they are panic buying or seeking to take advantage of the health emergency.

“Hopefully this action by Woolworths and Coles will make more people reflect on the immorality of acting in ways that deprive more vulnerable people of the basic necessities.

**Media contact: Ian Yates 0418 835 439; Jenny Stokes 0478 504 280**