



**Media release  
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## **Older people could cut food and healthcare to keep private health insurance; COTA urges older Australians to voice opposition to changes**

Older people are considering cutting spending on food, healthcare, energy bills and other essentials to keep their private health insurance if proposed rebate changes go ahead, new COTA Australia survey findings reveal.

The findings come as today's Senate inquiry report revealed a lack of support for the proposed removal of the age-based health insurance rebate proposed by government.

COTA Australia Chief Executive Officer Patricia Sparrow said COTA welcomes the Greens' and Coalition's dissenting reports outlining their concerns with the Government's Bill in its current form – particularly the impact it would have on low and fixed-income older Australians such as pensioners – and said new findings from COTA Australia's survey of older Australians reinforce the serious concerns about the changes.

New findings from the survey of 1,332 COTA Australia supporters aged over 65 found one in three respondents said they would cancel or change their private health insurance if the additional age-based rebate was removed.

Almost half said they would keep their existing cover, including the one in three (34.2 per cent) who said their most likely response would be to cut spending elsewhere to do so.

When all respondents were asked where they would consider cutting spending if they kept their insurance and premiums increased, many nominated needing to cut back on basics including 41.2 per cent who nominated food or groceries, 54.7 per cent who nominated at least one health or aged care expense and 26.3 per cent who nominated energy costs.

More than two-thirds (68.1 per cent) nominated reducing social activities or interactions, risking increased isolation amongst older people.

Just 6.8 per cent said they would not cut back on other spending, demonstrating that the vast majority would have to make difficult choices if their government rebates were lowered.

Ms Sparrow said the findings showed retaining private health insurance should not be mistaken for being able to afford higher premiums.

"Older people are telling us they want to keep their private health insurance, but many are looking at some incredibly difficult sacrifices to do so," Ms Sparrow said.

"People should not have to cut back on groceries, medicines, dental care, physiotherapy, GP appointments, or their power bills, just to find the money to keep their health insurance.

"Our survey's evidence that some older people could be forced to choose between one essential and another is just devastating.

"Government should be making it easier for older Australians to look after their health, not creating a situation where paying for one form of healthcare means cutting back on another.

"This is especially concerning when you consider that the Parliamentary Budget Office evidence revealed almost half of the \$3 billion budget savings from cutting the age-based additional private health insurance rebates will come directly from pensioners.

"Protecting access to healthcare should never come at the expense of food, medicines, power bills or the other essentials people need to live well.

"Parliament has the power to stop the Government's proposed changes, and we hope all Senators and Members will consider the full consequences of these changes for older Australians

"We're urging all Australia who care about this issue to help make sure the Government and Parliament hears about their concerns by signing COTA Australia's petition."

**3600 people have signed COTA Australia's petition calling on the government to halt the proposed changes so far. Add your name to the call at <https://cota.org.au/project/fix-private-health-insurance-for-older-australians/>**

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