

 **WESTERN AUSTRALIA SELF FUNDED RETIREES Inc.**

**2014 - 2015 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION**

**FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

**OCTOBER 2013**

**WESTERN AUSTRALIA SELF FUNDED RETIREES Inc.**

 **Introduction:**

Western Australia Self Funded Retirees Inc. ( WASFR ) is an organisation registered under the Associations Incorporation Act (1987) of Western Australia. Most members have had experience with similar organisations and our primary Objective is to protect and advance the interests of retirees who have funded, in whole or in part, their own retirement.

Although a WA-based organisation, we seek Federal Government concessions that will benefit all retirees throughout Australia.

Self Funded Retirees are proud of their ability to provide for their advancing years**,** withsome assistance from Government. However, many who strive to remain outside the Aged Pension system often experience reduced financial capabilities to fund their retirement. A greater level of Government assistance is required to help maintain their independence from the Centrelink Aged Pension.

The delivery of increased health benefits and aged care services are areas where the Government can be of greater assistance to all retirees.

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 ***State & Federal Advocates for Fully and Partly Self Funded Retirees page 2***

S**ummary of Recommendations**

 Following is a summary of the recommendations included in this submission from Western Australia Self Funded Retirees Inc. We sincerely request that your full consideration be given to each of the issues raised.

 The Rationale for each recommendation follows this summary.

**Recommendation 1:**

 That the upper income thresholds for the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card (CSHC) (a) be immediately increased to $60,000 for a single person, and to $90,000 for a couple, and (b) that these amounts are then automatically increased, on an annual basis, by the same method as is used for the indexation of the Centrelink Age Pension.

**Recommendation 2:**

 That all Commonwealth superannuation, and Defence pensions, be indexed consistently using the same formula as is used to adjust the Centrelink Age Pension.

**Recommendation 3:**

 That the Medicare and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme Safety Net thresholds for single retirees be restructured so that access for them becomes available at 65% of the levels applicable to couples/families.

**Recommendation 4:**

 That retirees be enabled to transfer funds into superannuation, at the prescribed contribution levels, without having to meet any “Work Test”.

**Recommendation 5:**

 That retirees be enabled to transfer funds into superannuation, at the prescribed contribution levels, irrespective of their age.

**Recommendation 6:**

 That the components of a retiree’s income derived from an untaxed superannuation scheme and from non-superannuation sources, be assessed separately for taxation purposes as is the case with a retiree who derives an income from a taxed superannuation scheme.

**Recommendation 7:**

 That retirees over 65 and in possession of a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card (CSHC) be granted the same concessions regarding the fitment and supply of Hearing Aids as is currently available to Age pensioners in possession of a Pensioner Concession Card (PCC).

**Recommendation 8:**

 That consideration be given to widening the scope of the NDIS/DisabilityCare Australia parameters so as to include all Australian citizens, including those over the age of 65.

 ***State & Federal Advocates for Fully and Partly Self Funded Retirees page 3***

**Rationales Underlying the Preceding Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:**

*That the upper income thresholds for the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card (CSHC)*

*(a)**be immediately increased to $60,000 for a single person, and to $90,000 for a couple, and (b) that these amounts are then automatically increased, on an annual basis, by the same method as is used for the indexation of the Centrelink Age Pension.*

The CSHC was introduced in 1994, and was intended to give some relief to those retirees, of pensionable age but who were not eligible for the Age Pension, some of the accompanying concessions in relation to pharmaceutical prescriptions. Originally there was both an Income test, and an Assets test. As from 1 January 1999, the Assets test was discarded and eligibility for the CSHC wasdetermined solely on Taxable Income. The new levels were then raised to $40,000 for singles (previously $21,000), and to $67,000 for couples (previously $36,000).

On 1 July 2001, the levels were again raised to $50,000 for singles, and $80,000 for couples. In the past twelve (12) years there has been no change in these eligibility levels. We believe it is time for a rational examination of the changes that have occurred in the last 12 years, and that the current thresholds are well overdue for an increase.

It is a matter of great interest that the Age Pension for a single person hasrisen by 105.6%, yet the CPI has risen by only 39.1%, since 1 July 2001. It is clearly evident that the CSHC has not kept pace with either of these methods of measuring inflation.

Whilst a valid request could be made for a commensurate increase in the limits of the CSHC, we are cognisant of the current financial events that have engulfed the world in the past few years. It is for this reason we are seeking a 20% increase in the eligibility threshold level for a single person (to $60,000) and a 12½% increase (to $90,000) for a couple.

The main reason for seeking a 20% and a 12½% increase is to maintain the degree of relativity that now exists between the single rate of Age Pension and the couple rate of Age Pension (since 20 September 2009 the single rate of pension is 2/3 of the rate paid to a couple).

The second part of this recommendation is that in future years the eligibility levels be indexed annually at the same level of indexation as is used to index the Age Pension.

**Recommendation 2:** *That all Commonwealth superannuation, and Defence pensions, be indexed consistently using the same formula as is used to adjust the Centrelink Age Pension.*

The pensions paid to ex-Commonwealth, and ex-Defence Force personnel, are currently indexed by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) alone.

As from 1998, pensions paid to Age Pensioners have been indexed by whichever is the greater of the CPI and MTAWE (Male Total Average Weekly Earnings). In 2009, as a result of the Matthews Report, another index, called the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index (PBLCI) came into play. The PBLCI was developed by the Bureau of Statistics and

 ***State & Federal Advocates for Fully and Partly Self Funded Retirees page 4***

Is claimed to better reflect changes in the cost of living experienced by pensioner and beneficiary households rather than the wider community.

In his report handed to the Federal Government in December 2008, Mr. Trevor Matthews is quoted as saying: “*That if a robust index which reflects the price inflation experience of superannuants better than the CPI becomes available in the future, the Australian Government should consider its use for indexing Australian Government civilian and military superannuation pensions.”*

There have been two Senate Select Committees, one in 2001 and one in 2002, that made enquiries into the manner of indexation and in both cases came out with a recommendation that the CPI should be discarded in favour of a wage-based index such as MTAWE. In addition, there was another Governmental enquiry into the cost of living for older Australians (March 2008), that also recommended abolition of the CPI for Government pensions in favour of whichever index was the greater of the CPI and MTAWE.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has clearly stated that the CPI should not be confused with a cost of living index. Over the past decade, the CPI has been changed significantly a number of times. The objective of these changes has been to improve its use for setting monetary policy at the expense of reducing its effectiveness as a cost of living index.

One issue often overlooked by many is that this matter of indexation of Comsuper and Defence Force pensions is a diminishing problem. The 2007 *Intergenerational Report* said that as a percentage of GDP Commonwealth superannuation unfunded liabilities would fall from 0.5% to 0.2% by 2046/47.

This is supported by the fact that these defined benefit schemes were closed off to any new appointees as from July 2005.

Prior to the 2013 Federal election, the then Leader of the Opposition announced that, if elected to Government, the pensions paid to ex-military personnel who are members of the DFRB, and the DFRDB military schemes, would be indexed by the greater of the CPI, the MTAWE or the PBLCI as from September 2014. WASFR is of the opinion that this policy should be extended to all ex-Commonwealth employees on the basis of fairness to all.

**Recommendation 3:**

*That the Medicare and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) Safety Net thresholds for single retirees be restructured so that access for them becomes available at 65% of the levels applicable to couples/families.*

Currently, a single retiree needs to spend the same amount on pharmaceutical prescriptions before reaching the Safety Net as does a couple. Once the designated Safety Net level is reached (in a 12 month period), then any additional prescriptions are either free (to a retiree with a Pensioner Concession Card), or drop to the concessional level applicable to Pensioners (currently $5.90), to those retirees not in possession of a PCC. A similar situation exists for the Medicare Safety Net.

 ***State & Federal Advocates for Fully and Partly Self Funded Retirees page 5***

There is obvious discrimination in that one person needs to incur the same total expenditure as does a couple before any concessional treatment is allowed. WASFR therefore recommends that the Medicare and PBS Safety Nets for singles be set at 65% of the threshold requirement for couples.

**Recommendation 4:**

*That retirees be enabled to transfer funds into superannuation, at the prescribed contribution levels, without having to meet any “Work Test”.*

Retirees aged between 65 and 74 who wish to contribute funds to a superannuation fund are required to pass a “Work Test” before they are permitted to do so.

In order to qualify, this “test” requires them to be “gainfully employed” for a minimum of 40 hours in any consecutive 30 day period throughout the relevant tax year. This “test” is considered an outdated, arbitrary hurdle with negligible practical value. It encourages the elderly to stretch the truth, or maybe manipulate the circumstances with family or friends, wherever that may be possible.

Provided the funds involved come from an after tax source, and are within the legal limitations regarding maximum amounts in force at the time, we request that this iniquitous restriction be abolished.

**Recommendation 5:**

*That retirees be enabled to transfer funds into superannuation, at the prescribed contribution levels, irrespective of their age.*

Those people over the age of 75, and still in the workforce, are now eligible to have the Superannuation Guarantee Levy (SGL), currently 9.25% of salary, paid into a recognised superannuation fund of their choice. However, anyone not employed is prohibited from contributing any funds into a superannuation fund if they are over the age of 75.

Many retirees over the age of 75 did not have the benefit of being able to contribute to superannuation during their working lives. They had to accumulate their retirement assets under various policy settings that could be restrictive and subject to change. Consequently (where they could), they invested in other assets such as property and shares but now find that they are denied the benefits from receiving a concessional income from a superannuation fund. It is noted there are statutory limits on the amount of funds allowed to betransferred by a person into superannuation in any tax year. This request does not attempt to circumvent this requirement. It simply seeks to allow those over 75 years of age to be allowed to contribute funds into superannuation in the same manner as other people, of the same age, who happen to be in the workforce.

It should be noted that this issue was one of the recommendations of the Henry Tax Report in 2009 (recommendation # 20).

We should not be encouraging discrimination against fellow Australians based purely on age.

 ***State & Federal Advocates for Fully and Partly Self Funded Retirees***  ***page 6***

**Recommendation 6:**

*That the components of a retiree’s income that are derived from an untaxed superannuation scheme and from non-superannuation sources, be assessed separately for taxation purposes as is the case with a retiree who derives an income from a taxed superannuation scheme.*

Those retirees who obtain their income from a taxed superannuation scheme are treated differently, for taxation purposes, from retirees who obtain their income from an “untaxed” superannuation scheme ie. a retired ex-Commonwealth, State or Defence Force employee.

The pension component from a taxed superannuation scheme is disregarded when calculating the tax payable on total income ie. it has a zero value. Any additional income from outside the superannuation fund is then assessed at normal taxation rates as if it were the sole income for taxation purposes (and so attracting lower marginal tax rates).

However, any pension received from an “untaxed” superannuation scheme is counted towardstotal income and any additional “outside superannuation” income is added to this amount, often involving a higher marginal tax rate. There is a concessional 10% tax offset (only from the “untaxed” pension element), but that does not prevent the higher marginal tax rate from still being applicable.

This anomaly was addressed in the Report of the Senate Economics Committee (February 2007), which recommended that the two types of income should be assessed separately.

 *“The Committee is of the view that the Government should reconsider the way in which total taxable income is classified for those in untaxed schemes. Instead of combining both a superannuation income stream and additional income to produce a total assessable income, the two types of income should be assessed separately. This would enable additional income received by all superannuation income stream recipients to be assessed for tax purposes from a starting point of zero.”*

*“The Government should consider separately assessing, for taxation purposes, superannuation income streams and assessable income.” (Recommendation 4 in the abovementioned report).*

**Recommendation 7:**

That *retirees over 65 and in possession of a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card (CSHC), be granted the same concessions regarding the fitment and supply of Hearing Aids as currently available to Age pensioners in possession of a Pensioner Concession Card (PCC).*

Age Pensioners are provided with a Pensioner Concession Card (PCC) entitling them to free Hearing Aids up to a certain value, provided certain requirements are met. Aged Pensioners are also provided with a free hearing consultation from qualified practitioners. The funding for this concession is controlled by the Federal Government through the Office of Hearing Services (Dept. of Health and Ageing) in Canberra.

 ***State & Federal Advocates for Fully and Partly Self Funded Retirees page 7***

There is no similar concession available to other retirees. WASFR requests the same concessional treatment be granted to those retirees who are in possession of a CSHC (i.e. their income is below the $50,000/$80,000 current limits).

**Recommendation 8:**

 *That consideration be given to widening the scope of the NDIS/DisabilityCare Australia parameters so as to include all Australian citizens, including those over the age of 65.*

 The new NDIS scheme commenced several pilot operations, in selected locations, in July 2013. An increase in the Medicare Levy is due to commence in July 2014 with the expectation that the full roll-out of the NDIS will not be completed until 2019/20. The current guidelines are quite clear that this scheme will not cover any person who contracts a recognised disability after reaching the age of 65. Current information is that those people who contract a disability before the age of 65 (and are covered by the NDIS), will be allowed to continue to be covered by the provisions of the NDIS after the age of 65.

 An official response from the Federal Government indicates that the Government is relying on the capabilities of the Aged Care system to adequately cater for those over the age of 65.

 Unfortunately, the Aged Care system is struggling with inadequate funding and other resources, and will be unable to cope with any additional burden.

 A recent Media Release from the National President of Alzheimer’s Australia called for the co-ordination of the two reforms under the oversight of a senior Minister. The comment was made “*The Aged Care system is aimed at frailty and residential care - not disability.”*

 A recent (13 March 2013), Senate Community Affairs Committee that enquired into the NDIS Bill, made the following recommendation

 **4.38** *The committee recommends that the Government, through COAG processes, identify mechanisms by which to provide adequate specialised disability support for people 65 and over who have disabilities not resulting from the natural process of ageing.*

 Quite possibly, some changes/refinements will occur to the existing provisions of the NDIS over the next 6 years. As an organisation concerned with the welfare of elderly Australians, we request that strong consideration be given to including those unfortunate people, who contract a recognised disability after reaching the age of 65, within the limits of the NDIS.

 ***State & Federal Advocates for Fully and Partly Self Funded Retirees page 8***