



# One-off payment runs dry

By KATELIN NELLIGAN

AGED pensioners are in desperate need of further financial help as their \$1400 December payments run dry, the Council on the Ageing says.

COTA SA chief executive **Ian Yates** said many pensioners had already spent their one-off Federal Government bonuses on debts, or home maintenance, and were still struggling to make ends meet.

"I think pensioners overall are having as much trouble coping as they were late last year before the bonus," Mr Yates said last week.

"They have to keep making daily and weekly decisions on food, housing costs, transport, medical costs and things like their grandchildren, which are decisions they shouldn't have to be making in this day and age.

"We've just been through our second longest heatwave and many (pensioners) were not using their air-conditioning because they couldn't afford it."

Mr Yates said if pensioners did

not receive an increase in their fortnightly payments, they would be left "in an appalling position".

"Every quarter that goes past, they're falling further and further behind."

A *Messenger Community Newspapers* survey of nearly 1200 pensioners in October revealed many were isolated and struggling financially, with nearly half eating less than three meals a day and 90 per cent spending less than \$25 a week on entertainment or activities.

Mr Yates said COTA had received calls from pensioners frustrated by missing out on last week's \$42 billion government stimulus plan, with would give one-off payments of up to \$950 to families and low and middle income earners.

He said COTA would continue its campaign to raise the aged pension by \$100 a week, to \$381, with increases staggered over the next "couple of years".

"We are taking the government

at its word that there will be an increase in the pension of an ongoing nature.

"That's not to say we wouldn't have welcomed it if pensioners were included (in this round of one-off payments)."

Mr Yates said the projected budget deficits – which will hit \$22.5 billion this year and \$35.5 billion in 2009/10 – should not affect the chances of a pension increase.

"My sense is that the majority of the population thinks pensioners deserve this increase."

He said a rise in the pension would also help stimulate the economy because "pensioners spend their money".

Walkerville pensioner **Edith Henkel**, who took part in the *Messenger* survey, said her payment had gone towards dentist fees and much-needed window blinds (see separate story).

"I'm OK (financially) because I have government housing. But I do worry about other pensioners."