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Action on ageing is shared commitment

with **IAN YATES** COTA chief executive

COMMENT

ageing: AFTER the Cabinet reshuffle when Jay Weatherill became Premier, questions are being asked about the Premier's and the Government's commitment to older South Australians.

Ironically, this comes just after we achieved for the first time an ageing target in the South Australian Strategic Plan, seeking to increase mature-age workforce participation.

We all know that South Australia is the oldest Australian mainland state and in aged care has been a leader for many decades.

We were also the first state to appoint a Commissioner for Ageing in the late 1980s and to have a Minister for Ageing with responsibility for ageing issues in all areas of government.

Yet it took many years to get a state plan target related to population ageing and to get the achievement of some other targets measured against age cohorts.

In the first Weatherill ministry, responsibility for the ageing portfolio was transferred from the former Families and Communities Minister to Health Minister John Hill. That is not necessarily a bad thing. It could be positive or negative.

Within the former Families and Communities department the Office for Ageing had been absorbed into a broader disability, ageing and carers division, which many thought diluted the

ageing focus. The move to the Health Department could create similar concern if ageing is just seen as a health issue, rather than as a multi-faceted set of challenges and opportunities across all government portfolios.

Some senior bureaucrats have been suggesting that the new Premier is not that interested in ageing issues but only focused on child development.

Yet Jay Weatherill was Minister for Ageing for more than four years to July 2008 and he did a good job. Giving the ageing portfolio to a senior minister in John Hill can be seen as a positive move.

The fact that the Office for the Ageing is established by a specific Act of Parliament is something senior officials and sometimes ministers often seem to want to ignore, as if no mere Act of Parliament should thwart their bureaucratic plans.

COTA takes the Office for the Ageing Act 1995 seriously and expects governments to do likewise. We also expect government to have a strong policy framework with a proactive and positive approach to population ageing and the rights of older South Australians.

We hope we can be confident that the new Premier and Minister both share those expectations. »