



We built the country and still contribute

with IAN YATES COTA chief executive

COMMENT

fairness: The release last week of the third Intergenerational Report raised big issues and questions, preceded as it was by a nationwide round of speeches by the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd.

The core messages of Intergenerational Report 3 are similar to IGR1 and IGR2, and of the Productivity Commission's 2005 report on the Economic Implications of an Ageing Australia.

An ageing population is inevitable whatever happens to birthrates or immigration.

In particular, the proportion of very old people – those over 85 years – will double over the next 20 years and more than quadruple by 2050.

That has major implications for our health and aged-care budgets.

In health, older people are only one of the issues; increasing costs of drugs, equipment and the medical workforce are bigger.

The aged-care implications are more obvious although the IGR3 expects we will expand expensive residential facilities rather than provide preferred care at home.

Income security is also a challenge, one that cuts both ways.

A country that refuses to set the age pension at fair levels can hardly complain

that its pensioners demand large concessions so they can afford food, electricity, water and health care.

IGR3 also ignores the enormous contributions older Australians make to the economy as workers, volunteers, mentors, consumers, investors and many more billions of dollars we don't measure.

The Productivity Commission told us there need be no crisis if governments took early and decisive action.

Five years later, the warnings are still being issued but we still await the action.

On mature employment, a modest investment of \$10 million a year has been made in programs to prevent older workers becoming unemployed and to assist them immediately if they do.

It is a good first step but one that will need to be multiplied tenfold to have real impact on workforce productivity.

A real danger in the media circus generated by the Government over recent weeks is the "blame the victim" syndrome.

"Older people are the problem" is what many are hearing.

Sorry, Prime Minister. We built this country, we still contribute and we are citizens.

We deserve a fair go, even if in our later years some are frail and in need of care.