

**Commissioner
for Senior
Victorians**



Inquiry into the Multi Purpose Tax Program (MPTP) - Submission

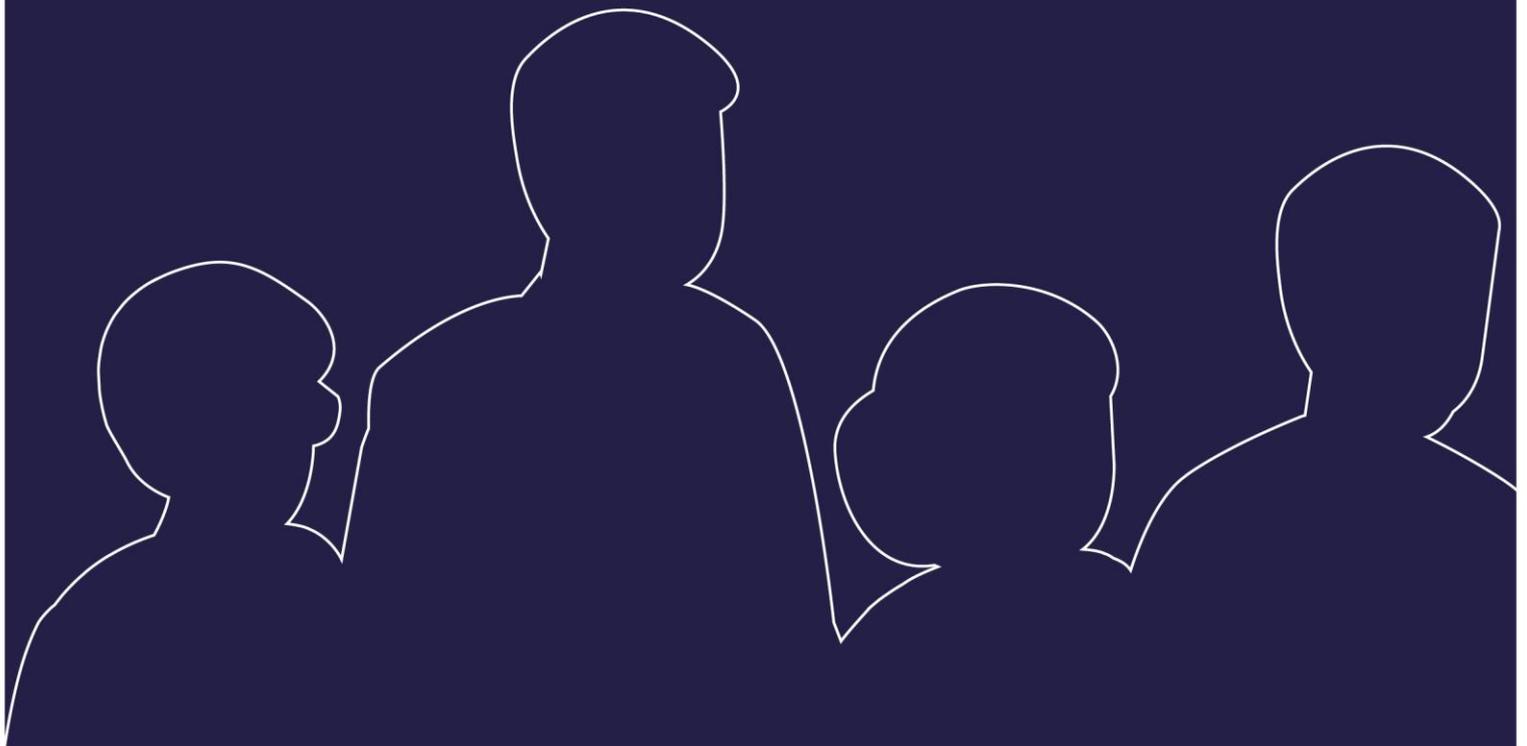


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Commissioner for Senior Victorians

<https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/services-information/commissioner-for-senior-victorians>

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Introduction

Commissioner role

The Commissioner for Senior Victorians provides advice to the Victorian Government on issues relevant to senior Victorians and positive ageing and participation, as well as being an independent public voice to educate the community on seniors' issues, actively promote the positive contribution of seniors and encourage seniors to fully participate in our community.

A key component of the role is to actively advocate for a "seniors' perspective" in government deliberations on issues relevant to senior Victorians including positive ageing, participation, and the needs of vulnerable, at risk and disadvantaged seniors. More information about the Commissioner is at [Attachment 1](#).

In November 2020, the Commissioner's report *Ageing well in a changing world* was released.¹ Background research included an online survey, responded to by 4,726 individuals, who were asked to rank factors that research has identified as being important to independence as one ages.

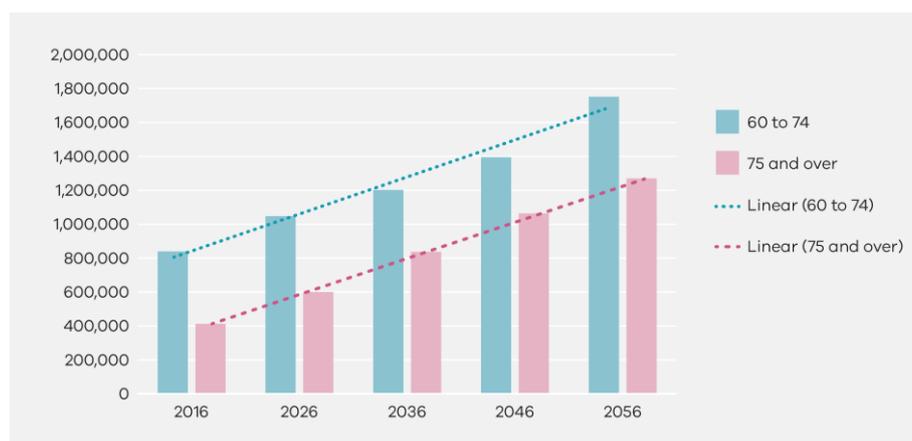
Most relevant to this inquiry, 92 per cent of respondents ranked 'personal mobility' as 'highly important'. This was the second highest rated factor of importance in the survey results after 'having secure housing or accommodation'. The Commissioner's report includes eight key attributes of ageing well from the perspective of older Victorians, one of which is "being able to get around".

Ageing in place

Current generations of older people are living longer on average than prior generations, and this trend is expected to continue.

[Figure 1](#) shows predicted population growth rates of people aged 60 to 74, and 75 and over. The 60 to 74-year-old population is predicted to grow at an average of 2 per cent per annum over the next four decades. The 75 years and over population is predicted to grow at an average of 4 per cent per annum for the next two decades, slowing to an average of 2.3 per cent per annum for the following two decades.²

Figure 1: Victorian population aged over 60 – predicted growth 2016-2056



One of the most deeply held desires of older people is to remain in their homes and in their communities for as long as possible as they age. The survey data and other evidence of older people's housing decisions unambiguously reveal that the majority of older people prefer to 'age in place'.³

¹ Commissioner for Senior Victorians (2020) *Ageing well in a changing world*. <https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/services-information/commissioner-for-senior-victorians/ageing-well>

² State of Victoria Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2019). *Victoria in Future in 2019*. Cited in <https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/services-information/commissioner-for-senior-victorians/ageing-well>, p. 8 - accessed 27/9/21

³ Australian Productivity Commission, *Housing Decisions for Older Australians*, 2015, p. 5

Ageing in place is also a core policy driver for federal, state and local government. The Commonwealth Government’s aged care policies have evolved over the past couple of decades to encourage people to age in their own homes and communities rather than be prematurely admitted to residential aged care. Home based aged care funding programs range from low levels of support to help people to continue to live independently through to care and support programs for people with greater or more complex care needs.⁴

In practice, this means people with higher levels of frailty are living in their own homes in the community for much longer periods, supported by a range of services. The desire to ‘age in place’ includes maintaining mobility within the community. Initiatives such as the Multi Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP) are increasingly a necessary part of the ‘package’ of support services for older people at home. The importance of the MPTP as a key element connecting people with places, services and other people is increasing.

The Multi Purpose Taxi Program

As a door-to-door service, the MPTP provides a very significant service for older people who cannot drive or access other transport. It helps them access health appointments, shop for food and maintain their connections in their local neighbourhoods.

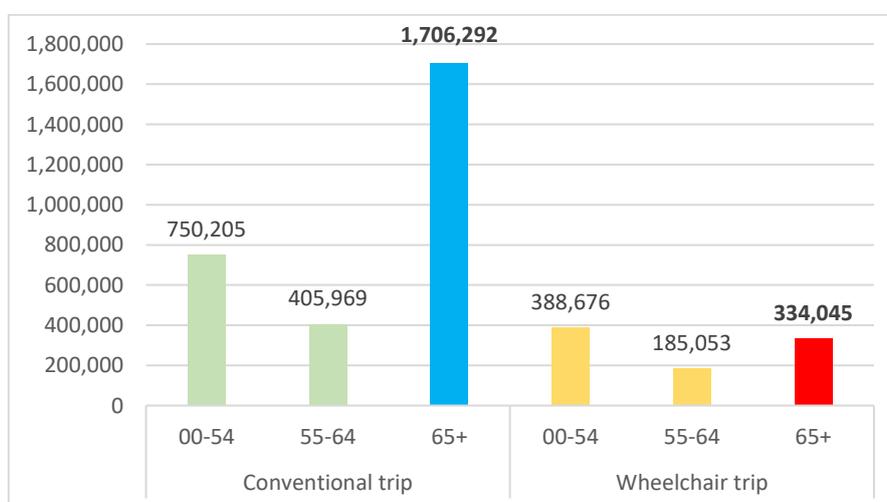
The ability to maintain personal mobility and have transport options are major enablers of social participation, health management, ageing in place and prevention of social isolation and loneliness. The MPTP plays a key role in enabling older people to meet and take advantage of social participation opportunities.

In 2020-21, MPTP members aged over 65 years took a total of 1,706,292 subsidised trips in conventional vehicles. In the same period, an additional 334,045 trips were taken using wheelchair accessible vehicles by members aged over 65 years.

Sixty per cent of trips in conventional vehicles were taken by people aged over 65 years, compared to 40 per cent for members aged up to 64 years. Wheelchair accessible vehicles were used for 37 per cent for members aged over 65 years compared to 63 per cent of trips for the younger age cohorts, who may also be participants of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Figure 2 shows the number of subsidised trips taken by all MPTP members.⁵ More than 2 million trips were taken by older MPTP members during 2020-21, a period which included extended COVID-19 related restrictions on movement and community engagement. The level of usage is evidence of the crucial role that access to subsidised fares for commercial passenger vehicles plays in the social and economic inclusion of older people with mobility impairment.

Figure 2: 2020-21 number of trips by Victorian MPTP members by age and vehicle type



⁴ <https://www.myagedcare.gov.au/help-at-home> - accessed 27/9/21

⁵ Unpublished data provided by Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria - accessed 27/9/21.

Affordability and consumer decision making

Affordability

Older people want to maintain their independence and functional abilities so as to be self-reliant for as long as possible. Use of support services is crucial to maintaining functionality as people age, and access to support is often linked to the financial position of the individual.

Financial limitations experienced by older people include cost of living, such as rent and utilities costs. Managing the cost of living on a fixed income such as a pension can mean little is left for social and community participation. There is a risk of disengagement from usual activities if appropriate and affordable alternatives to self-driving are not available. Older people who attended community consultations held to inform the Commissioner's report *Ageing well in a changing world*, commented on barriers to mobility within the community. Listed below are quotes from the report.⁶

'Not possible to access all services or (meet) needs due to financial limitations. Choice and access to services is sometimes reliant on sufficient money.'

'Able to be involved including able to transport yourself.'

'Loss of licence and not being able to drive. The impact is financial too and means you have to rely on others, but they are not always available.'

Quotes from Commissioner's consumer consultations 2019

One of the common reasons to use the MPTP is for transport to health related appointments at local practices and hospital clinics. The MPTP provides a cost effective and safe option compared to the more expensive patient transport services.

Paying transport costs, even with the 50 per cent subsidy as an MPTP member, is a significant pressure point for older people. When faced with a decision to pay a utility bill or a part fare for a commercial passenger vehicle to travel to and from a seniors group meeting, some members may find even a 50 per cent contribution too costly and elect to stay at home.

To improve affordability of the MPTP, there is a need to look at ways of providing greater flexibility within the level of subsidy. A positive example is the short term increase in the MPTP subsidy from 50 to 70 per cent per fare announced by the Victorian Government in mid-2020. This initiative made rides more affordable for the people who needed them the most during the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For consideration: Provide greater flexibility in the application of the subsidy, such as a variable per cent of the fare up to an annual subsidy cap, to address the barriers of affordability experienced by a number of older people.

Increasing consumer choice

A key purpose for the MPTP is increased mobility and participation for members who need higher level support. Consumer focused approaches to service delivery in disability services and community based aged care include increased choice in how funding is spent. The changing way that programs are being delivered across government, nationally and international, where consumers are increasingly being given opportunities to make decisions about the provider/s and types of services they receive can be applied to the MPTP.

⁶ Commissioner for Senior Victorians (2020) *Ageing well in a changing world*. Op cit.

Many older people are drawn to traditional 'taxi style' commercial passenger vehicles as their preferred and familiar mode of transport. However, access to options such as ride share are important for expanding choices for consumers. Concerns have previously been raised with the Commissioner about taxi drivers' reluctance to transport older people on short trips, e.g. to the local medical practice or shopping centre. Inclusion of ride-share vehicles appears to have addressed this issue. MPTP members can choose which service they book based on various factors such as local availability, pricing, sex of the driver etc. The desire for choice does not disappear because you are ageing and the MPTP provides a range of affordable choices to enable older people to get to their required destination.

However, while ride share vehicles are being used by some MPTP members, it is important to note that many older people will face practical 'technology' based barriers, for example, those without online booking options or credit card payment facilities. Consequently, it is likely many senior Victorians will continue to use more traditional 'taxi style' services within MPTP.

Given the MPTP is a capped program, there is also an opportunity to provide greater empowerment of consumers through choice in how the subsidy is maximised for the benefit of the individual.

For consideration: In recognising the critical role that the MPTP program has in providing transport options that are central to the wellbeing of older people, consider opportunities that strengthen consumer choice by investigating other potential providers such as community transport providers.

Safety and vulnerability

Safe passage and driver training

The MPTP is a vital form of affordable door-to-door transport for many vulnerable people, including some older people and people with disabilities. Mobility impairments and disabilities increase as people age and many older MPTP members are not eligible for support under the NDIS.

Safe transport options play a key role in enabling older people to meet and take advantage of the MPTP. It is important that MPTP members perceive the service as safe and secure. This includes secure tethering of wheelchairs in wheelchair accessible vehicles and appropriate support for people using walker frames when entering and leaving the vehicle.

MPTP members also need to feel confident that their drivers will transport them to the correct destination.

The training for drivers needs to be strengthened. This may include:

- understanding ageism, seeking to avoid ageist comments and the risks of exploitation
- increasing the knowledge of drivers about diversity of senior Victorians, including training in core values like respect, and
- identifying who may be at greater risk of injury due to slips, trips and falls and may need additional support, especially when entering or exiting the vehicle.

Training needs to be more than a minimalist approach. Ongoing and refresher training is important to maintain knowledge and skills including key attributes such as diversity. Older people who are uncertain about their personal safety and security, or who feel discriminated against and devalued will not avail themselves of available supports. This includes important services such as the MPTP.

For consideration: Consider ways to broaden the knowledge of senior Victorians about how to access the MPTP program.

Strengthen driver training, both initial and periodic refresher training, focused on the specific needs of older people as MPTP members, noting the diversity of the seniors population and increased numbers living with frailty or disability.

Commissioner for Senior Victorians

Gerard Mansour was appointed Victoria's first ever Commissioner for Senior Victorians in August 2013. The Victorian Government created this role as part of its response to the Victorian Parliamentary *Inquiry into Opportunities for Participation for Victorian Seniors*.

At the end of 2016, as part of the Victorian Government response to the Family Violence Royal Commission, the Commissioner was asked to play an additional role as Ambassador for Elder Abuse Prevention.

In May 2019 the Victorian Government announced the reappointment of Mr Mansour as the Commissioner for Senior Victorians for another four years.

The Commissioner for Senior Victorians provides advice to the Victorian Government on issues relevant to senior Victorians and positive ageing and participation, as well as being an independent public voice to educate the community on seniors' issues, actively promote the positive contribution of seniors and encourage seniors to fully participate in our community.

A key component of the role is to actively advocate for a "seniors' perspective" in government deliberations on issues relevant to senior Victorians including positive ageing, participation, and the needs of vulnerable, at risk and disadvantaged seniors.

The Commissioner meets regularly with seniors and seniors' organisations from across Victoria to discuss a wide range of matters relevant to people as they age, provides an independent public voice to educate the community on seniors' issues including prevention of elder abuse, actively promotes the positive contribution of seniors, encourages seniors to fully participate in our community and seeks to building greater respect for the rights of older people.

The Commissioner also promotes community awareness and understanding of other matters such as advance care planning, powers of attorney and loneliness and isolation.

As the Ambassador for Elder Abuse Prevention, he has provided significant policy advice on the prevention of elder abuse, and the importance of supporting multicultural and emerging communities.