

MEDIA RELEASE

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Fuel Card Welcome Relief for Some

The Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) has today welcomed Minister Brendan Grylls' announcement of a \$500 fuel card for country age-pensioners, but cautions that the scheme may not go far enough.

"We congratulate the Minister on this new scheme for pensioners living in the country, who face significantly higher fuel costs than those living in metropolitan Perth. We know it will provide significant benefit for those who have their own transport or rely on taxis", said Ms Sue Ash, Chief Executive Officer of WACOSS.

"However, we remain concerned that there are many pensioners living in outer metropolitan areas who rely on public transport, which remains expensive and inaccessible."

Affordable transport is a vital means for all West Australians, regardless of age, race or geographical location to remain connected to community services, employment opportunities and health care facilities.

As well as targeted assistance towards running a motor vehicle or catching taxis, the State Government needs to invest in long-term, sustainable public transport networks in metropolitan and regional areas.

"In addition to this, the scheme is poorly targeted towards Indigenous seniors. We feel that State Government should consider increased eligibility for Aboriginal people. This should come as part of a renewed focus on 'closing the gap' and improving outcomes for Indigenous West Australian across a range of indicators."

"Currently, the cut-off to receive a Pensioner Concession Card is age 60. An Aboriginal male's average life expectancy is 61 and an Aboriginal female's is 67¹, approximately 14 years lower than non-Indigenous West Australians," continued Ms Ash.

Under the scheme, age pensioners living in regional Western Australia will be eligible for \$500 a year to help with their travel costs following the launch of the Country Age Pension Fuel Card Scheme in Albany today. The State Government's Royalties for Regions program will provide \$500 per eligible applicant each financial year, for the next four years towards the cost of fuel and taxi fares.

For further comment:
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¹ Health Department of WA (2008)