



SACOSS

State Budget Snapshot 2015-16



SACOSS

*South Australian Council
of Social Service*

June 18, 2015

Overview

SACOSS has prepared this snapshot of the 2015-2016 South Australian State Budget for the benefit of its members. It is divided into areas of interest to the SACOSS membership, not into specific portfolios, and is underpinned by SACOSS' Strategic Plan and our budget submission.

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Each of these areas is assigned a table that summarises key Budget initiatives in the relevant area, providing SACOSS members with a quick reference with which to frame responses to the State Budget. Not all areas are covered in this Snapshot due to both time restrictions and availability of detail in the Budget Papers.

Cost figures are for four years unless otherwise referenced.

1. Economic Data

This Budget comes against a backdrop of economic challenges which are most evident in the estimates of economic growth in the coming years. The projected growth rates have been revised down from last year’s budget by ½ a percentage point, and given the impact of the closure of Holden and uncertainty around defence industries, South Australia’s projected economic growth remains significantly below the national growth rate (SA 2% average over five years against a national average of close to 3%).

The headline economic data for South Australia is as follows:

Item	2015-16 Budget	2014-15 Estimated Result	2014-15 Budget
Gross State Product - growth	2%	1.75%	2.25%
Net debt	\$4238m	\$4,108m	\$4,511m
Employment Growth	1%	0.5%	1%
SA Wages Growth		2.5%	
Unemployment Rate (Trend)		7.2%%	
Gross State Revenue	\$17,097	\$16,468m	\$16,067m
Gross State Expenditure	\$17,055	\$16,748m	\$16,547m
State Budget Surplus/Deficit	+ \$43m	- \$279m	- \$479m

The Budget Strategy and Revenue Sustainability

Against this economic backdrop the government has chosen to utilise a bigger than expected GST income to fund a range of tax cuts to business to stimulate the economy. These measures include:

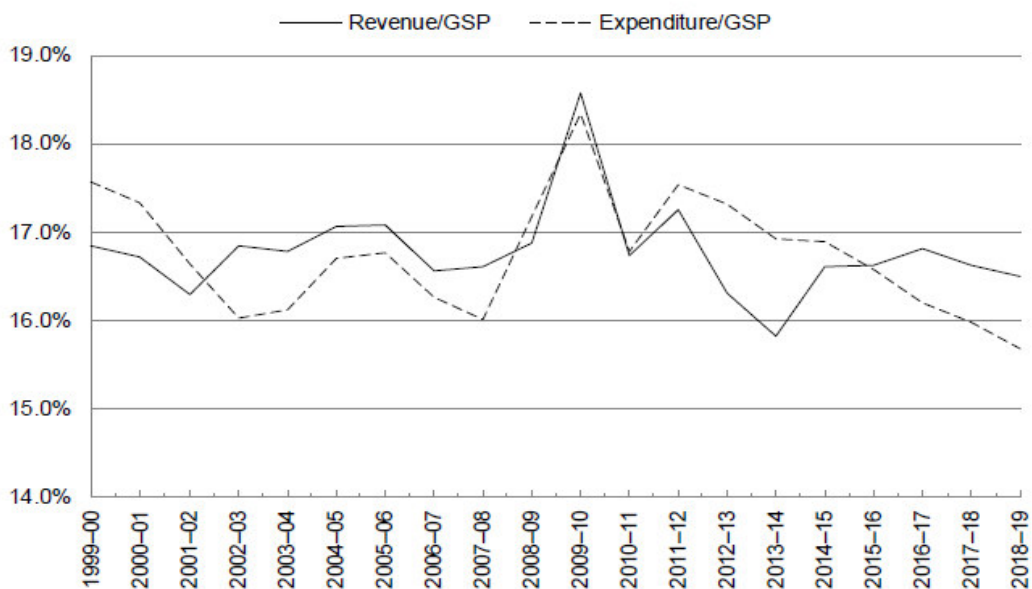
- Abolishing share duty;
- Abolishing stamp duty on non-real property, corporate reconstructions and non-residential property transfers (phased from July 2016);
- Extension of the small business payroll tax rebate; and
- Indexing land tax thresholds.

It should be noted that while much of the presentation of the budget is around a “\$985m stimulus”, overall budget expenditure declines over the forward estimates. This is evident in the figure below from the Budget Statement (Budget Paper 3, p 8). In this sense the budget is not classical Keynesian counter-cyclical stimulus (which would have utilised deficit expenditure rather than budget surpluses). Rather, the

budget seeks to encourage investment and economic growth by decreasing taxes and trying to out-compete other states in terms of business costs.

While SACOSS hopes that South Australian business will rise to this challenge to invest and grow the economy, we note the strategy comes at some cost to the long term revenue base of the government – and therefore any future government’s ability to fund the vital services we all need and want as a community – especially services for vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

Figure 1.2: General government revenue and expenditure as a percentage of GSP



Beyond this headline trend is an equally concerning realignment of state taxes with a marked decline in the state tax base and an increased reliance of GST revenue (over which the state government has little control). In 2013-14, state taxes accounted for 26.8% of state revenue with GST receipts accounting for 30.3%. By the end of the forward estimates, SACOSS calculates that state taxes will have shrunk to 26.1% with GST receipts rising markedly to constitute 34.5% of state revenue. Given that the GST is a regressive tax which impacts disproportionately more on low income households, this has social justice implications – as well as raising concerns about a sustainable revenue base (although we note that many state taxes are also regressive).

These concerns over the long term revenue base highlight the importance of ongoing tax reform to ensure that the government has adequate revenue to fund public investment and the services that our communities need. The current federal taxation reform process is one avenue to advance these discussions, but it is imperative that this is not the end of the State Review process launched by the SA government last year.

We note that in this budget the government has explicitly ruled out the introduction of a broad based property tax in place of other current taxes including conveyancing charges on residential properties. SACOSS argued in its submission to the State Tax Review that we believe that there is still considerable merit in properly modelling the potential implications and possible transition arrangements that might enable fairer and more efficient property taxes.

SACOSS therefore calls on the state government to commit to extend its conversations about appropriate reform of SA's tax system that move well beyond those measures introduced in this budget.

2. Poverty and Cost of Living

Poverty remains a persistent feature of South Australian society and is multi-dimensional. The inability to meet basic living costs is a key indicator of poverty and in turn a driver of other aspects of poverty and disadvantage.

Cost of living pressures affect all households, but impact more significantly on lower income households both because they tend to spend proportionately more of their income on the necessities (prices of which are rising), and because they do not have the reserves or flexibility in their budgets.

Government taxes, fees and charges add to cost of living pressures, although the revenue is needed to fund the vital services that our community relies on. In this context, the fairness of taxes is crucial, and a system of proper concessions and support services for low income households is vital for protecting vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
Local Government Rate Concessions \$ 148.2m	The state government will continue to cover the cost of Council Rate concessions, and has increased the rate from \$190 to \$200 per year and expanded the concession scheme to assist low income renters (with a new \$100 a year payment).	SACOSS welcomes this initiative as a real contribution to assisting low income households meet the cost of living.
Abolition of the Save the River Murray Levy \$109m in lost revenue	Abolition of the tax levied on households and businesses paying water bills. As a flat rate tax it is regressive and the government argues that it was redundant with the national Murray River plans. The abolition will save households \$40 per year.	SACOSS has concerns about hypothecated (purpose-constrained) taxes, as well as the regressive nature of this tax. While we continue to be concerned about the revenue base, we welcome the cost of living relief in this initiative.
Emergency Service Levy Increase \$19.8m in revenue for 2015/16	This increase was announced in May and equates to a 9% increase or about \$23p.a. for an average house of \$426,000. The revenue collection from ESL continues to rise over the forward estimates, but the impact on household budgets	This follows substantial increases in the ESL last year, but household impacts are mitigated by initiatives above. The ESL is also a broadly progressive tax impacting most on those with the highest value property. However, it may

	is not spelt out in the budget papers.	impact adversely on people who are asset rich but income poor.
Government Fees and Charges: Motor registration, public transport	<p>Metroticket price rise from \$5.10 to \$5.20.</p> <p>Motor vehicle registration fee price rises of \$3, \$6, and \$8 for 4, 5-6, and 7+ cylinder cars respectively.</p> <p>Driver's licence up by \$1 per year.</p> <p>Compulsory Third Party premiums (standard) up by \$8p.a. and the Lifetime Support Scheme Levy up by \$4.</p>	<p>These increases in range from 2% to a 3.8% (the LSS levy), while the average increases in government fees and charges is 2.4%.</p> <p>All these rises are more than CPI (1.5% over the last year) and so will impact particularly on people whose incomes are fixed to CPI (such as those on Newstart or Youth Allowance) or grow at a rate lower than the rate of actual increases.</p>

3. Utilities

The cost of utilities (electricity, gas and water) has been a focus of cost of living debates and a particular concern for vulnerable and disadvantaged people because these expenditures are essential, hard to budget for, and impact disproportionately on low income households. Last year’s budget delivered on a number of election commitments in relation to utilities, including increases in the energy concession and funding for solar hot water systems for SA Housing Trust properties.

Since the election, utility prices in Adelaide have risen by 2.8%, well above the generic CPI of 1.1%. This has been largely driven by an 8.7% increase in gas prices, while water and sewerage have also increased by 3.0%.

Item	Description	Comments
Funding for consumer energy advocacy	Funding for SACOSS to continue energy advocacy on behalf of vulnerable and disadvantaged people.	<p>SACOSS welcomes the continuation of this funding.</p> <p>Our research, advocacy and sector support is critical to ensuring balance in public policy debates on energy and that the interests of vulnerable and disadvantaged are considered.</p> <p>In the last year our advocacy and representation has contributed to the government making significant increases to concessions and was recognised as a key in successfully arguing for a major price decrease to apply from July 1 to SAPN’s network charges.</p>
Utilities Literacy Program	Program to provide utilities literacy to consumers and community sector workers.	The Government did not take the opportunity to extend this important program beyond its 4 year duration, currently ending October 2016.
Water: Consumer Advocacy and Research Fund	Budget papers report \$499,000 estimated result for 2014-15 and \$506,000 budgeted for 2015-16.	<p>This is a very important source of funding designed to fund advocacy in water pricing, hardship and regulation.</p> <p>It is unclear how, or if, this money has actually been spent. SACOSS</p>

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		has been awarded one contract for the delivery of a CARF project but there is no public statement from the Department of any other tender outcomes, including that of the SACOSS tender.
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4. Child Safety and Wellbeing

SACOSS continues to argue for instituting a public health model for child safety and wellbeing in South Australia that directs resources towards prevention and early intervention, rather than a crisis model that directs funds and services towards the tertiary end.

This budget provides for a number of valuable initiatives, but SACOSS is most concerned with the predictions for growth in the numbers of children involved in child protection services and the need for significant changes to our systems to ensure the safety of children while addressing financial pressures.

Most importantly, it is imperative that these new initiatives are undertaken in genuine partnership with non-government organisations working in this arena.

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
Children in Care \$1.9m	\$475 000 per annum (indexed) to expand the frontline support team and increase the use of other person guardianship orders under the Children’s Protection Act 1993. This allows a child to be under the guardianship of a person other than the Minister, including relatives.	SACOSS recognises that frontline services in child protection are overburdened and are in crisis and this is a modest investment. SACOSS welcomes this initiative which aims to increase the use of other person guardianship orders, which will lead to more permanent arrangements for care of young people within foster families.
Children in Care \$4.4m	\$1.1m per annum (indexed) to implement initiatives to increase the number of foster carers. This initiative is expected to improve outcomes for children in care by transferring children from emergency or other care accommodation into home based foster care.	SACOSS recognises that appropriate placement into foster care is currently the best option for children who have been removed from parents and who cannot be cared for by other family members. We welcome this modest investment in the recruitment of foster carers where this will lead to reducing the use of residential and emergency care. Further support for foster carers is needed to build capacity in caring for children with high needs and to stabilise and lengthen placements.

<p>Children in Care \$4m</p>	<p>\$1m per annum (indexed) to implement a program to reunite adolescents currently in out-of-home residential care with their families. This initiative will be targeted at teenagers who want to return to their parent(s) who, with additional support provided by this program, are able to provide the appropriate level of care.</p>	<p>SACOSS recognises the importance of biological connections for young people in our child protection system and welcomes this initiative.</p> <p>SACOSS cautions though that these processes need to be carefully safeguarded so that young people and biological parents are supported throughout the process and especially in the event of relationship breakdown and/or other crises.</p>
<p>Children in Care \$8.8m</p>	<p>\$2.2m per annum (indexed) to expand the existing Positive Parenting Program (Triple P). This program provides additional training and support to both government and non-government organisations in order to increase parenting capacity for families at risk.</p>	<p>SACOSS welcomes this initiative to build the capacity of workers to intervene early where children are at-risk of abuse and neglect in order to support families to better address the needs of children and to remain intact.</p>
<p>Children in Care \$31m</p>	<p>This initiative also provides \$31m over four years for the projected growth in the number of children in care.</p>	<p>SACOSS is disappointed that new government initiatives included in this budget are not predicted to stem the projected growth of numbers of children in care.</p> <p>Investment in initiatives that prevent children from needing investigations and interventions are vital to address issues in our child protection system.</p>

5. Disability

Given the federal government’s commitment to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, state government support for people living with disability and for disability services is particularly important throughout the roll out of the Scheme. It is important that state government services complement and support the NDIS’ underpinning purposes of social inclusion and self-determination.

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
Highgate Park upgrade \$1.5m for 2015-16	Upgrades infrastructure at Highgate Park, accommodation for people with severe and multiple disabilities.	SACOSS understands that these are critical upgrades to facilities that ensure the health and safety of a number of people who continue to live at Highgate Park. However despite longstanding proposals to transition people to more appropriate community-based housing these proposals appear stalled. This is regrettable.
Incapacitated persons stamp duty exemptions	Provides an exemption from stamp duty on motor vehicle transfers where the parent or legal guardian of an incapacitated person who is a minor purchases a vehicle to transport the minor.	This is a sensible and welcome simplification of current arrangements.
Special Disability Trusts \$6.4m	Exempts principal place of residence property transferred to Special Disability Trusts from conveyance duty and land tax	This is a sensible and welcome simplification of current arrangements.
Improve facilities for disadvantaged schools and early years facilities \$50m over 3 years	See section on Employment, Education and Training	

Duty and land tax \$6.4m	Exempt principal place of residence property transferred to Special Disability Trusts from conveyance duty and land tax.	This is a sensible and welcome simplification of current arrangements.
Stamp duty	An exemption from stamp duty on motor vehicle transfers where the parent or legal guardian of an incapacitated person who is a minor purchases a vehicle to transport the minor. This exemption will replace the current ex-gratia relief scheme. This change will take effect from the date of assent of amended legislation	This is a sensible and welcome simplification of current arrangements.

6. Employment, Education and Training

Education and training are vital for a strong economy and vibrant society. They are vital to enable young people in particular, to have access to future employment opportunities.

South Australia currently has very high rates of unemployment and this budget appears to contain few new investments in employment, education and training. SACOSS notes the disputes around implementation of WorkReady and remains deeply concerned about the impact of the changes on the community services sector more broadly.

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
Improving Schools Facilities \$25m (over 3 years)	Approximately \$25m will be invested in improving facilities at Fremont-Elizabeth City High School, Le Fevre High School, Swallowcliffe School P-7, Christie Downs Primary School and the disability unit at Christies Beach High School. The works will include refurbishment of specialist and general learning areas and upgrade of information technology infrastructure. A feasibility study on secondary schools in Whyalla will also be undertaken.	SACOSS welcomes this initiative which will improve facilities at a number of schools in disadvantaged areas and also provide a useful economic stimulus.
Early years facilities \$25m (over 3 years)	Approximately \$25m will be invested in early years facilities. This includes five additional children's centres at Renown Park, Pennington, Mount Barker, Roxby Downs and Seaton to achieve the government's election commitment of 47 children's centres. In addition, general improvements will be undertaken at a number of existing early years facilities, including an upgrade of the children's centre at Keithcot Farm.	SACOSS recognises the valuable services provided through children's centres and welcomes the announcement new centres and upgrades.
Skills Training – additional resources \$26.1m	This initiative provides additional resources for vocational education and training, including the new WorkReady program. The future direction of the vocational education and training sector in South Australia will be	SACOSS believes it is imperative to build investment in training and education as a critical pathway for entry or re-entry to the workforce. It is difficult to determine,

	<p>refocused through the introduction of the new WorkReady program from 1 July 2015.</p> <p>This program will ensure that the government's investment in training is targeted to areas of strategic need to industry and a transitioning economy. It has been designed to improve training completion rates, strengthen connections to employment opportunities, and connect people to the training best suited to them over a working lifetime.</p>	<p>from the budget papers, exactly what these expenditures will deliver.</p> <p>SACOSS notes that the government has made a deliberate decision to bias TAFE as the primary provider of subsidised training in 2015-16. We remain concerned about the implications for many existing training organisations and their strong relationships with the sector which have historically led to quality training outcomes and employment.</p>
<p>Northern Economic Plan</p> <p>\$960,000 (over 1 year)</p>	<p>The plan will focus on job creation and skill development in northern Adelaide.</p> <p>The objectives of the plan are to deliver market driven industry growth, short term bridging infrastructure projects, education and training for jobs, increase collaboration and strengthen partnerships for sustained economic growth in northern Adelaide.</p>	<p>SACOSS welcomes investment in northern Adelaide aimed at addressing the lack of employment opportunities and community resources.</p>

7. Health

An efficient and effective SA Health Service is vital for health equity in our state. Health expenditure makes up a substantial proportion of the state’s budgetary commitments which is an ongoing challenge for our state.

SACOSS recognises South Australian Government is currently responding to a significant withdrawal of funding from the federal government with its Transforming Health Strategy. SACOSS remains concerned that to date, Transforming Health has focused on tertiary health services i.e. hospitals. We continue to argue that investment in primary and preventative health initiatives would have a positive impact on the health of South Australians and diminish costs of expensive medical treatments. In fact, failure to invest in these activities almost certainly results in pressure on tertiary services almost all of which will cost SA taxpayers more to fund.

Item	Description	Comments
SA Ambulance Service-stretcher replacement program \$4.8m	This initiative provides funds which in addition to \$10.8m from existing annual programs will replace mechanical stretchers and handling units in all South Australian Ambulance Service vehicles with automated stretchers and handling units.	This upgrade to ambulance vehicles is a positive initiative aimed at reducing workplace injuries for paramedics and ambulance officers.
SAHMRI Research – grant funding \$5.05m	This initiative provides additional grants to the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) to support its health and medical research projects.	SACOSS welcomes the ongoing investment in the work of SAHMRI.
Transforming Health	<p>\$159.5m at the Flinders Medical Centre for a new 55-bed rehabilitation centre, a new older persons mental health service and new multi-level car park.</p> <p>\$32m at Modbury Hospital to develop a new dedicated eye clinic, a new hydrotherapy pool and more than double the number of rehabilitation beds.</p> <p>\$20.4m at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital to add an additional level to the Allied Health and Rehabilitation Building, a new hydrotherapy pool and on-ward gyms.</p> <p>\$16.1m to increase the ambulance fleet</p>	<p>This funding is a reallocation of existing expenditure. While these initiatives are of value, SACOSS is unsure where funds have been drawn from and what cuts have been made.</p> <p>SACOSS remains cautious that Transforming Health is primarily focused on reforming South Australia’s hospitals. It is important that we have a hospital system that works efficiently and provides high quality care.</p> <p>However it is equally vital that</p>

	<p>by 12 vehicles and to build new and expand existing ambulance stations.</p> <p>\$15m for a new Post-Traumatic Stress Centre for Excellence.</p> <p>New investments in both the southern and northern suburbs, with improvements to the Noarlunga and Lyell McEwin hospitals.</p>	<p>our health system contains multiple elements and extends way beyond hospital service delivery.</p> <p>Investments in primary and preventative health initiatives are required to make fundamental changes to our health system. This would lead to better outcomes for South Australians and would deliver long term financial savings.</p>
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8. Housing and homelessness

Access to safe and secure housing is a key determinant of health, well-being and life experience. Having affordable housing supply remains a critical issue for South Australia as does the issue of homelessness. SACOSS recognises that these issues have been partly addressed in this budget but notes that they remain a challenge for both state and federal governments.

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness \$36.6 million (over 2 years)	This funding announced in March will see the continuation of services provided under the National Partnership for a further two years, including early intervention, medium-term accommodation options and home-based support to sustain the transition to independent living.	SACOSS welcomes the extension of this important funding, but reminds the government that homelessness is a wicked problem requiring long-term planning and funding. We are not going to solve homelessness in two years, so a two year funding cycle is still very short-term.
<i>Extension of Council Rate Concessions and New Concession for Renters</i>	<i>See description under heading: Poverty and Cost of Living</i>	
Funding for refurbishment of Housing SA properties \$??	Bringing forward \$65m funding allocated for refurbishment of Housing Trust properties so that work is done sooner to create immediate job stimulus.	The budget papers are confusing. While some parts of the papers describe this as a new funding to be made available immediately, SACOSS understands from the budget papers that there is no new funding available in 2015-16. The budget measures document shows the expenditure has already been made in 2014-15 and therefore there will be less money available over the next two years. SACOSS hopes this does not undermine the ability for future housing upgrades.

9. Justice

SACOSS has long been concerned that the overwhelming priority of government justice policy is around surveillance and punishment rather than investment in crime prevention, early intervention, rehabilitation, restoration, reparation and access to justice. Although there are a few welcome initiatives, this budget appears to continue this broad direction.

Item	Description	Comments
Additional prisoner accommodation Mount Gambier \$28.6m	Provision for an additional 84 prisoner beds at Mount Gambier Prison.	This may provide needed economic stimulus for this region and may also help to address reported overcrowding in our current prison system. However SACOSS is not at all convinced that continued investments in building more prison infrastructure is efficient without parallel investments that seek to prevent incarceration and contact with the justice system in the first place.
High dependency unit Yatala Labour Prison \$20.7m	Construction of a new high dependency unit at Yatala Labour Prison.	Note commentary above.
Electronic Court Management System \$20.3m	Provision for an Electronic Court Management System.	SACOSS welcomes this measure which will ensure more efficient document flow and court processes.
Justice reinvestment	In its pre-election commitments, Labor promised to introduce two justice reinvestment programs in its first year of Government. The budget has made no provision for justice reinvestment.	This election promise has not been fulfilled. This is enormously disappointing and SACOSS believes this is an important opportunity missed.

10. Transport and Infrastructure

Transport and infrastructure is vital, not just for the economy, but for society. People rely on our transport system and other public infrastructure to connect them with employment, education and training opportunities, health and community services, and for social participation. Given that many South Australians do not own a car, public transport is even more vital for low income and disadvantaged people.

While there were a number of transport and infrastructure proposals in the budget few of them were likely to directly impact on the many people SACOSS is generally concerned with.

Transport fees and charges see Cost of Living section.

11. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander South Australians are significantly more likely to live on a lower income than the wider population, and have a much lower life expectancy. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are also more likely to be incarcerated in the overstretched and under-resourced prison system. There is an urgent need to address the societal contributors to poverty and disadvantage within this community and to improve standards of and access to health, housing, employment and essential services to ensure a fairer and more equitable South Australia.

It is noticeable by omission that there is very little effort identified in this budget that would seek to help address many of the issues confronting these members of our community.

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
Municipal and essential services on regional and remote Aboriginal lands \$11.2m	The ongoing provision of municipal and essential services to Aboriginal communities outside the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands. This initiative represents a transfer of responsibility from the federal to the state government for which the Commonwealth paid a once-off payment of \$15.0m in 2014–15.	SACOSS recognises Aboriginal people’s connection to country and welcomes the government’s commitment to provision of municipal and essential services to remote communities. SACOSS remains concerned that these remote communities are supported to thrive and develop through coordinated and well targeted support.

12. Culturally and Linguistic Diverse Communities

Approximately 25% of the South Australian population is comprised of culturally and linguistically diverse people. These communities are an essential part of the rich and vibrant South Australian landscape, and positively shape a multicultural and harmonious society. Through promoting community capacity and community harmony, the South Australian community enables the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity in our society to flourish.

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
Multicultural Initiatives \$8m	Expand cultural festivals, develop community programs and improve infrastructure	SACOSS supports funding for migrant communities as a positive recognition of the contribution made to South Australia’s economic, cultural and artistic life by these communities.

13. Older People & Aged Care

There are many challenges and opportunities associated with our ageing population and our challenge is to ensure our elders remain as valued contributing members of the community.

As the second fastest ageing state in Australia, South Australia's over the age of 60 have a diversity of ageing experience. Geographical location, cultural and linguistic diversity, gender, income and wealth, Aboriginality and remoteness are all important considerations in addressing the needs of the ageing population.

This Budget has limited new initiatives that directly address the interests of older people; however, in delivering the Budget, the state government has paid special attention to the needs and interests of pensioners by maintaining the concessions for the Emergency Services Levy and by implementing a new cost of living concession to replace the council rate concessions (see Concessions section).

14. 2015 – 2016 Budget Proposals

SACOSS Proposal	Outcome
A Fair and Sustainable Tax Base	
Funding to support SACOSS to support the community services sector to engage in the tax debate and to work with stakeholders for a fairer and more sustainable tax system.	While not made clear in the budget papers SACOSS understands we will be provided with \$150,000 for two years to work on this vital area and we look forward to making a valuable contribution to state and federal discussions.
Cost of Living	
Maintain concessions for local council rates.	Concessions replaced by new cost of living concession and increased by \$10.
Commit to ongoing funding for the utilities literacy project.	No additional funding.
Health & Housing	
Fund an independent review of hospital discharge planning and post-hospital services.	Not funded.
Transfer Housing SA stock title to the community sector as promised.	This election promise remains unfulfilled.
Commit to maintaining current State NPAH funding over the next 5 years (irrespective of the Commonwealth's commitment).	Funding agreed with Commonwealth for 2 years.
Support for the Health and Community Services Sector	
Funding for SACOSS to engage the sector in collaboration on State Grant Guidelines.	Not funded.