

Age Friendly Victoria – *NOW* is the time

COTA'S Priorities for Action 2011-14

Recognition of Victoria's ageing population, with commitment to addressing their needs and concerns, and enabling the on-going participation of our seniors is now urgently required.

We urge the State Government to prioritise the development of a 10 year action plan for the creation of an Age Friendly Victoria.

COTA calls on the Baillieu Government to work towards an Age Friendly Victoria, by

- Making ageing a policy priority, and
- Committing to action on key issues impacting on older Victorians now and into the future.

COTA's priorities for action over the next term of government are built on three pillars for achieving an Age Friendly Victoria:

1. Equity and Social Inclusion
2. Sustainable Planning and Community Development through a whole-of government approach
3. Health and Well Being

1. Equity and Social Inclusion

1.1 Addressing Age Discrimination

The most important step our governments can take to make sure seniors are valued and included in all aspects of our community is to address ageism and age discrimination. Older people must be recognised as citizens with the same rights and responsibilities as any group in society.

Ageism is discrimination based on age, and is often directed towards older people. We know that ageism undermines the rights, dignity, participation and independence of older people. It is deep-rooted throughout our society. It is experienced by older people in the way others talk to, and about them. It is in the media where older people are often presented in negative ways. It is in our health systems, where doctors and other health professionals tend to give older people and their illnesses a lower priority.

Age discrimination is a particular problem in the area of employment. It impacts on older workers in a range of ways. Older people have problems in finding employment, employers have poor attitudes towards older workers, they are less likely to be given training and professional development, and generally, the skills, experience and wisdom of older people are not valued.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission's Annual Report (2009/10) highlights a significant increase in workplace discrimination for older workers in the past year. Dr Helen Szoke, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner, said that complaints of age-related discrimination in the workplace had more than doubled this year with 107 people lodging complaints at the Commission - up from 50 complaints in the previous year (2008/09).

In a study by the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, age discrimination was found to be the biggest barrier older people faced in the work place. The Commissioner responsible for Age Discrimination says that as we are now living longer, it should follow that we are working longer. But she describes our longer life span as a double edged sword. On one hand there employers are beginning to see the contribution older people can make to businesses and industry. However her work at the Commission has also shown the attitudes our society holds about ageing – that is, age discrimination is ingrained and invisible, denying the older person choice and control.

Our society mostly sees older people according to stereotypes and myths. They are seen to be progressively deteriorating in physical and mental capacity, socially isolated, without sexuality, lacking creativity and as a financial and social burden to the community and their families. This attitude to older people is demonstrated in all areas of our society. It can be seen in government policies and programs, in way services operate, and the limited opportunities older people have to be active participants in their communities.

Ageist attitudes can mean that older people are treated differently in terms of the types of services which are available to them, and also in the ways in which their opinions or preferences are viewed. It has a very real impact in the way it undervalues the important economic and social contributions older people make to our community. For example, predictions and policies about the future economic situations are based on the assumption that all people between 14 and 64 years of age work, while everyone over the age of 65 does not. It is also assumed that older people do not have any private incomes, support their families, or contribute to through unpaid voluntary work.

The introduction of the Victorian Charter of Rights and Responsibilities has been an important step in making sure the human rights of all people are protected in Victoria. However, the government needs to look at the way ageism and age discrimination affect the health and well-being of older people in a range of places and ways.

Without commitment to fight age discrimination at all levels in our community, age discrimination will continue, and there will be no real change for older people now, and into the future.

COTA calls on the Victorian Government to make an Age Friendly Victoria a reality by:

- Funding an education and awareness raising program for employees and staff of government departments and agencies to assist in understanding the implications of ageism and the implementation of strategies to overcome its perpetuation.
- Developing and funding a broad community awareness raising campaign aimed at reducing ageism and addressing discrimination in the workplace.
- Examining Government policies and programs through an 'ageism lens' by Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission

Further Reading

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|---------------------------------|--|
| Angus, J. and Reeve, P. | Ageism: A threat to 'Ageing-well' in the 21st Century |
| Elizabeth Broderick 2010 | Is it time for a Convention on the Rights of Older People?
IFA Global Conference, |
| JobWatch Victoria 2009 | Workplace conditions and practices: Barriers to older persons participation |
| National Seniors 2009 | Valuing and keeping older workers |

1.2 Access to Technology and Information

Older people are able to make more informed decisions if they get information when they need it, and that is relevant and helpful to them. It can also increase their involvement in their community, which in turn improves health and well being.

Older people say that access to information is of high importance to them. This includes information about government, community and local services, as well as health related services and community activities.

Seniors say that they want information in a variety of formats to meet the diverse needs of older people. How information is provided and the ability of individuals to use the information must be considered. Language spoken and cultural background, literacy and education levels, and the preferences of older people about how they receive information are all vital factors in meeting the information needs of older people.

The Government must make sure there is a well developed and coordinated approach to meeting the information needs of older people. Such an approach should increase the opportunities for older people to get information, and include the use of well-recognised community information points, such as pharmacies, neighbourhood houses, and community centres. Other key contacts for older people include GPs, seniors groups and ethno-specific groups. Telephone information services, or face to face services, are also important to older people, especially when there is capacity to provide interpreter services, and allow for personal interaction.

When thinking about access to information and its benefits for older people, it is also important to consider access to technology. The availability and affordability of communication technology in particular, must be seen as critical for older people on low incomes. Many older people are unable to access the internet. It is estimated that around 60% of retired people do not have a home connection. The reasons for this include cost, maintenance and capacity to use the technology.

Changes in technology are occurring at a rapid rate in all areas of our lives. Older people must be informed about these changes, so they can get best use from the technology that is available now and in the future. And they should be assisted to access the technology which will enable them to be connected to their communities and wider support networks.

COTA calls on the Victorian Government to make an Age Friendly Victoria a reality by:

- Resourcing COTA to build on its Seniors Information service and lead and implement strategic action to guide the future enhancement of information service delivery and promotion for seniors;
- Facilitating the development and implementation of innovative programs to assist people to access technology to overcome isolation and increase social inclusion.

Further Reading

ATSE

Smart Technology for Healthy Longevity, 2010

**Ministerial Advisory Council
Of Senior Victorians**

Speak Up! 2008

ABS

Patterns of internet access in Australia, 2006

2. Sustainable Planning and Community Development.

There are a number of key issues that are impacting on older people right now, and will continue to have detrimental impacts if action is not taken. A whole-of-government strategic approach is required to ensure that responses to these issues and the outcomes for older people are appropriate and lasting.

2.1 Housing

The availability of suitable housing is essential if older people are to 'age well' and 'age in place'. Housing that is affordable and accessible is fundamental to both the physical and the mental health of older people, and is an important contributor to the effectiveness of the health and care systems.

The lack of appropriate housing for older people is reaching crisis point. There is growing evidence to show that there are more older Australians are facing poverty, disadvantage and homelessness as a result of this shortage. The availability of appropriate housing in the rental market already falls well short of what is required. Over the next 20 years this situation will worsen dramatically, as the number of older people seeking housing in the private rental market increases. Low income, sole person households will have the most significant increase, and about two thirds of these households will be sole women.

In addition, it is clear that much of the public housing stock built in earlier decades is now unsuitable for older people. It has become run down or does not have the simple design features that would support older people to age in place, such as accessible bathrooms and open plan living areas.

Investment in new social housing developments and opportunities through the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) are welcome. However many of the "affordable housing" initiatives and benchmarks are out of the reach of people on an age pension (e.g. 75% of market rent, 30% of income). These initiatives address the supply side of the housing affordability issue, but to ensure low income older people's rights to adequate and affordable housing are upheld, well developed policies and benchmarks are required.

An appropriate and adequate response to the housing needs of low income older people that enables their positive ageing and ageing in place is required. This would be best achieved through an integrated approach across all levels of government, and all housing sectors.

COTA calls on the next Victorian Government to make an Age Friendly Victoria a reality by:

- Establishing an Older Persons Housing Unit in the Office of Housing
- Developing and implementing an integrated strategic policy framework for older people's housing with a focus on low-income tenants
- Increasing the public/housing stock that is appropriate and accessible by older people

Further Reading

Ludo McFerran

**It could be you: female, single, older and homeless
Homelessness NSW 2010**

Jeff Fiedler

**The Ageing Elephant in the Room
Parity, Vol 23, Issue 2 March 2010**

The Benevolent Society

**Apartments for Life in Australia-Lessons for Australia from
Humanitas in the Netherlands 2009**

2.2 Transport

Many older people rely on public and community transport to get to local facilities, to shop, to stay connected to their families and social networks. They also need it to get to essential services. Access to good transport is vital for their involvement in their communities, and reducing isolation.

The use of private cars dominates in the planning and development of our communities. Our transport systems mainly cater for those who travel to work and school, and people without cars are faced with services that can be infrequent and limited in where they go. They are unlikely to take them to friends and relatives. Furthermore public transport is designed for mobile, well balanced and agile people.

Older people identify transport as being the issue of most concern to them, and as having significant impact on their independence and quality of life. A National Aged Care Alliance Position Paper, *Transport and Access to Health Care Services for Older Australians* (May 2007) documents the limited capacity of existing transport options to get people to the health care services. Community and demand responsive transport can be crucial in enabling older people to enjoy a good quality of life, and maintain their health and well-being.

COTA is concerned about the disadvantage faced by older people in country areas and the lack of transport options available to them.

Older people who hold a Victorian Seniors Card, or receive an eligible pension, enjoy free travel on metropolitan trains, trams and buses on Sunday. However, older people who meet the same criteria, but who live in country Victoria only have access to free travel on Sundays in some of the major regional centres. Furthermore, they do not get additional concessions for Sunday travel. Many seniors tell us they are disadvantaged by having to pay *higher* fares on Sunday.

The lack of transport and the high cost of travel is a significant problem for many older people in rural Victoria. That they do not get the same benefits available to those in metropolitan areas is unfair and a further disadvantage to them.

COTA calls on the next Victorian Government to make an Age Friendly Victoria a reality by:

- Developing an Accessible Transport framework to integrate and increase the availability of public, community and demand responsive transport options
- Ensuring equity for seniors in regional areas
- Improving safety for older people with mobility problems on public transport.

Further Reading

National Aged Care Alliance, Transport and Access to Health Care Services for Older Australians, Position Paper (May 2007)

VCOSS Community Transport Snapshot Project, 2008

2.3 Climate Change

Climate change will have severe impacts on households and individuals who are financially disadvantaged and vulnerable to extreme weather conditions. The most significant areas of impact facing these groups include:

- higher temperatures and longer and more significant heat waves
- increased costs for essential goods and services
- damage to housing and the built environment.

Many older people will be amongst those hardest hit by these changes.

Householders can expect significant price and cost increases in water and energy in the coming years. This is a result of the need for expansion to infrastructure, the roll out of smart meters, and the high cost of new sources of water such as desalination. At the same time increases in food and fuel prices can also be expected. Low income groups, such as pensioners, will be the most affected by these increases. These groups commonly have less energy- and water- efficient housing and appliances, and their utility bills can take up a higher proportion of their spending. People in rental accommodation may be even more vulnerable.

Better thermal efficiency of homes will reduce the extent of heating and cooling required, and therefore the costs for households. It will also protect vulnerable people from extreme temperatures.

Improved standards for new homes will help reduce greenhouse emissions and the impacts of climate change over time. But to ensure the most disadvantaged groups will be protected, significant upgrading of the water and energy efficiency of existing homes will be essential.

COTA calls on the next Victorian Government to make an Age Friendly Victoria a reality by:

- Addressing the energy efficiency of older people's housing as a priority
- Ensure affordability of essential services and in particular the value of utility concessions. The concessions framework must alleviate the cost increases that will result with the introduction of Time of Use Tariffs and Smart Meters.

Further Reading

One Million Homes Alliance

One Million Homes – A 2010 Energy and Water Efficiency Campaign, 2010

VCOSS

A future focused housing standard, 2009

VCOSS

Energy and ER: A snapshot of electricity and gas services and their impact on households seeking emergency relief, 2010

3. Improve Health and Well-Being

3.1 Positive Ageing

The World Health Organisation's (WHO) definition of health is 'a state of total wellbeing, not just the absence of sickness.' The health of individuals and societies can be directly related to social inclusion or exclusion.

A positive ageing experience depends on a variety of influences or factors that surround individuals, families and communities. Healthy ageing has three interrelated aspects: health, participation and security. It requires inclusive communities that foster and value the participation of all people, create 'age friendly' environments, and promote positive attitudes and behaviours that prevent disease and promote well-being. There is a strong correlation between socio-economic status, wellbeing and health status across all age groups, no less for older people. Underemployment and unemployment also result in a lack of wellbeing and deteriorating health status. All these factors, and the interaction between them, play an important role in affecting how well people age.

Social Inclusion has emerged internationally as a key theme in current social and political policy agendas. It aims to address disadvantage and the complex factors that interact to socially exclude a range of groups. Current policy frameworks that use this approach recognise that problems build up over years across several aspects of people's lives. They also have a strong emphasis on geographic location and community disadvantage. However, older people are often absent from current discussions on social inclusion. There needs to be specific action to address causes of exclusion in later life as well as the impacts of life-long exclusion.

The WHO *Active Ageing Framework* provides a basis for the development of action plans and policies that promote health, participation and security for older people. While many of Victoria's Local Councils have developed Positive Ageing Plans, leadership and ongoing support is required to see age-friendly communities continue to develop.

COTA calls on the next Victorian Government to make an Age Friendly Victoria a reality by:

- Adopting the World Health Organisation's Active Ageing Framework to enable the participation and leadership of older people across a range of policy and planning areas
- Further development of positive ageing strategies in local communities and state-wide.
- Facilitate civic and community participation by identifying and implementing models of the Active Ageing approach

Further Reading

World Health Organisation	Active Ageing Framework
Municipal Association of Victoria	WHO Age Friendly Cities Guide & Checklist by Victorian Councils, 2010
Municipal Association of Victoria	MAV/COTA Positive Ageing in Local Communities Project Evaluation Report, 2009
COTA Victoria	The Voice of Older People on What makes a Decent Life, 2010
COTA Victoria	The Voice of Older People on..... Independence, 2009

3.2 The diversity of the ageing population

The aged population cannot be viewed as one homogenous group. It is important that the diversity of the aged population be considered addressed, including culture and language, life experience and sexuality.

By 2011, nearly 23 percent or more than 1 million Australians aged 65 years and over will have come from a culturally and linguistically-diverse background; by 2021, this figure will reach 30%. The post war migrant cohorts from source countries such as Italy, Greece, Germany, Netherlands and Poland are ageing more rapidly than the rest of the Australian population. It is vitally important that any discussion on the needs of older people reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity and needs of older migrants and refugees.

It is essential that people have access to culturally and linguistically appropriate information and services. Language and cultural issues can prevent people accessing information and service provision when and as they need it. Organisations and services need to be adequately trained and resourced to cater to these varying needs.

Indigenous seniors must be acknowledged in any strategic approach to ageing issues. Their particular health and well-being needs should be addressed as a priority. Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders have a shorter life expectancy than other Australians with many dying from preventable diseases. Available evidence from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) shows that older Indigenous people suffer a greater burden of ill health than other Australians. They experience lower incomes than the non-Indigenous population, higher rates of unemployment, poorer educational outcomes and lower rates of home ownership. All these factors impact upon health and wellbeing.

COTA calls on the Victorian Government to make an Age Friendly Victoria a reality by:

- Ensuring people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have access to information about health, aged care service provision, and essential services in community languages
- Fund a comprehensive Indigenous Seniors Strategy developed in collaboration with indigenous elders.

Further Reading

**Ethnic Communities Council
their Victoria**

**Unready, Unwilling and Ageing Ethnic Baby Boomers and
Parents, 2009**