



cotawa.org.au

(08) 9472 0104

# A VOICE FOR OLDER WESTERN AUSTRALIANS

Currently, just over 31% of people in WA are aged over 50. By 2030 it is estimated this figure will be 34.5%. In 2050 the number of people aged 65 to 84 will double and those over 84 will quadruple.

COTA (WA)'s vision is for an equitable, just and inclusive society in which older people can flourish through advancing their distinctive rights, needs and interests. As the peak advocacy organisation for older people in WA, we seek to identify areas of critical need and inform government policy to ensure we can respond to, and promote, the interests of an ageing population.

#### COTA (WA) progresses our vision by:

- Partnering with our national network of State and Territory COTAs to understand issues impacting across Australia and ensure the Western Australian experience is understood at a national level:
- Engaging in consultative committees, expos and working parties and regularly connecting with over 3000 individual and 170 organisational members as well as other older Western Australians online and face to face;
- Engaging in governmental consultations and reference groups such as the Housing Advisory Round Table, Elder Abuse Awareness Summit, Frail Older Oral Health Working Group;
- Delivering programmes and initiatives that address the needs of an ageing population, including computing and cyber safety workshops, Living Longer Living Stronger and Mall Walking programmes with 4,500 participants annually.

### SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

#### DIRECTION 1: A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO ACTIVELY PROMOTE AGE-FRIENDLY CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

**Recommendation 1:** Co-design the Age-Friendly Strategy 2020 - a state-wide, evidence-based action plan with identifiable targets for WA Government agencies and local government authorities in collaboration with older Western Australians, COTA (WA) and other key stakeholders.

**Recommendation 2:** Expand the scope of the criteria for age-friendly communities' local government grants to enable the expansion of initiatives and programmes through the wider participation of the community sector.

**Recommendation 3:** Commission a study in partnership with COTA (WA) to ascertain "What does being well served by public transport mean for seniors?" with particular reference to the implementation of Metronet and transport hubs in key areas.

# DIRECTION 2: PROMOTE AGEING IN PLACE BY ENSURING THAT PEOPLE CAN ACCESS THE RIGHT HOME, IN THE RIGHT PLACE, AT THE RIGHT TIME

**Recommendation 4:** Re-focus on the Seniors Housing Strategy, with an emphasis on the needs of older Western Australians on low to medium incomes including:

- a) Increasing investment in social and affordable housing for older people.
- **b)** Establishing a specialist advice, advocacy and support service in the non-government sector that provides a one stop shop with case-management and linkage to appropriate, affordable housing options.

**c)** Strengthening the rights of tenants in relation to security of tenure; removal of any 'no grounds evictions', ensuring that tenants have the right to make suitable modifications and prescribing minimum standards of dwellings and maintenance protocols.

**Recommendation 5:** Engage proactively with the building industry to promote the benefits of universal design standards and age-friendly liveable housing certification for all new residential construction.

**Recommendation 6:** Review the mandate and scope of the WA Government's Seniors Housing Advisory Centre and ensure that comprehensive housing information and appropriate referrals for older people, especially on low incomes or at risk of homelessness, are readily available.

DIRECTION 3: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT POLICIES WITH AN EMPHASIS ON PREVENTATIVE MEASURES AND THE PROMOTION OF ACTIVE AGEING WITH REGARD TO PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

**Recommendation 7:** Reinstate funding to enable COTA (WA) to maintain and expand the Living Longer Living Stronger program and the Mall Walking program to ensure the long-term viability of both and to offer these programs in outer metropolitan and regional areas.

**Recommendation 8:** Provide funding for an education campaign aimed at preventing elder abuse in collaboration with organisations including COTA (WA) and Advocare. Such a campaign would be directed towards older people, carers and family members.

**Recommendation 9:** In relation to oral and dental health:

- a) extend the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS) to cover dental treatment related travel.
- **b)** extend the provision of and access to oral and dental health services to all older people, regardless of their physical location.

Recommendation 10: Provide funding to examine the issues impacting on people aged 50 and over (and their carers) with the transfer of funding and responsibility for aged care services to the Commonwealth Government and the transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Particular note should be taken of impacts to the WA Health system and programs that have traditionally supported older people with disability and /or chronic health conditions or frailty to avoid or reduce hospitalisation.

# DIRECTION 4: EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR OLDER PEOPLE TO ENTER THE WORKFORCE, CONTINUE EMPLOYMENT OR TRANSITION TO WORKING DIFFERENTLY

**Recommendation 11:** The Government of Western Australia commits to becoming an exemplar employer for older workers across State Government, promoting and publishing leading age-friendly policies and measured workforce diversity within the Age-Friendly Strategy 2020 framework.

**Recommendation 12:** Provide resources for the Equal Opportunity Commission to prioritise working with WA Government organisations and business to raise awareness that age-discrimination is contrary to State legislation as well as a cost to the state. COTA (WA) stands ready to assist utilising our experience in working on employment matters with mentors, job-seekers and employers.

**Recommendation 13:** Expand the Mature Age Employment Expo series piloted by COTA (WA) in 2018 to raise the awareness of businesses and the knowledge base of job-seekers in relation to the benefits and opportunities of mature-age employment.

**Funding Requested:** \$100 000 to conduct four mature aged employment expos in three key metropolitan and one regional area of the State, building on the success of similar initiatives in 2018.

# WHAT MATTERS TO OLDER WESTERN AUSTRALIANS

COTA (WA) has consulted with our constituency to ascertain their views on the issues that matter most to them through a number of key initiatives:

- The COTA State of the (Older) Nation Survey 2018, which attracted 2,500 responses nationally and 307 WA responses;
- The COTA (WA) Seniors Week Survey 2018, with 174 responses locally;
- The Rockingham Mature Aged Careers Expo and Kalamunda Careers Expo, with over 1100 participants as well as a mature aged employment business leaders' symposium;
- The COTA (WA) Policy Exchange Group, which brings together leaders representing 20 key service providers working with older Western Australians.

Our engagement with older people has identified the importance of age-friendly communities and the aligned issues of housing, health, and paid employment.



Discussions with older people also highlight that ageism is endemic in many people's lives. Investigations into ageism published over the last decade by the Australian Human Rights Commission, and our ongoing conversations, have reinforced the negative impact that arises when the voice of older people is not heard. Ageism is implicated with difficulties in finding secure housing, access to paid employment, uneven servicing in healthcare and marginalisation and isolation.

The State Government has a significant opportunity to make a lasting contribution to the lives and well-being of the State's fastest growing segment of the population by addressing these issues.

## **AGE-FRIENDLY STRATEGY 2020**

Western Australians are living longer, healthier lives, and constitute a growing resource for their communities and the economy as a whole.

In 2017, the Government of Western Australia joined the World Health Organisation's Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities. Age-friendly environments are critical to enabling older people to actively participate in their community. COTA (WA) is encouraged by the WA Government's commitment to collaboration across government and the community sector as evidenced by the machinery of government changes, the Supporting Communities policy and the establishment of the Supporting Communities Forum.

Collaboration will be essential to progressing the age-friendly agenda and the ageing of the Western Australian population makes it imperative that the WA Government renew and invest in its commitment to actively promoting age-friendly communities and expanding the global age-friendly network across more regions state-wide.



"Keep encouraging the elderly to walk, use their brains, meet friends, socialise, get to know their neighbours, volunteer, laugh and enjoy life!"

COTA (WA) Seniors Week Survey 2018

COTA (WA) urges the State Government to embark on a co-design process with older Western Australians and their representative organisations to develop an Age-Friendly Strategy 2020 that builds on the Seniors Strategic Planning Framework and the work being undertaken by numerous state departments. The Age-Friendly Strategy 2020 needs to clearly acknowledge the demographic imperative and opportunities that it presents, express a firm commitment to listening to the voices of older Western Australians and address their concerns regarding exclusion from social and economic participation in the community, including access to appropriate transport, health, housing and employment through the development of targets.

An integral element in age-friendly communities is a transport system that allows for access to family, friends, employment, volunteering and services. In WA, recent consultations have revealed that the public transport system can be difficult to access. Particular problems entail trip planning, suitability, especially in outer-metropolitan areas, lack of seating and inadequate shelter at many bus stops. It is proposed that as a part of the Age-Friendly 2020 Strategy a study be undertaken to understand what being well served by public transport means for older Western Australians. The outcomes of such a study would be invaluable in informing public transport policy in matters relating to the ageing population.



#### DIRECTION 1: A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO ACTIVELY PROMOTE AGE-FRIENDLY CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

**Recommendation 1:** Co-design the Age-Friendly Strategy 2020 - a state-wide, evidence-based action plan with identifiable targets for WA Government agencies and local government authorities in collaboration with older Western Australians, COTA (WA) and other key stakeholders.

**Recommendation 2:** Expand the scope of the criteria for age-friendly communities' local government grants to enable the expansion of initiatives and programmes through the wider participation of the community sector.

**Recommendation 3:** Commission a study in partnership with COTA (WA) to ascertain "What does being well served by public transport mean for seniors?" with particular reference to the implementation of Metronet and transport hubs in key areas.



### HOUSING

"A home is somewhere I know I can put down my roots."

Ageing on the Edge, Older Homelessness Project 2018

A series of recent reports from the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, The Australian Housing Urban Research Institute and the Department of Communities focus on the difficulties experienced in securing a home for Australians entering middle-age or transitioning towards retirement. This is exacerbated by the fact that even for older Australians who do own a home, mortgage debts for those 55-64 years have more than tripled.<sup>4</sup>

Older people require a variety of housing options that allow them to meet the cost of living expenses on a fixed (and often low) income, access to transport, health care and community services, and remain living in a community with opportunities for social participation and the maintenance of connections to family and friends. House sizes, dwelling types and the needs of seniors are currently often misaligned.

Overall, 23.6% of households in WA are single person<sup>5</sup>, while a growing cohort of older singles and couples, suggests that the dominant trend of separate houses needs to give way to a mix of semi-detached and apartment living options, with universal design certification<sup>6</sup> and a smaller footprint.

The needs of older tenants in the WA private rental sector are currently being documented by researchers producing the WA report for the National Ageing on the Edge Project. COTA (WA) has hosted this important work with the WA community sector and government throughout 2018 and anticipates the final report in early 2019 will shine a light on areas requiring action. It is evident that older Western Australians now constitute one of the fastest growing cohorts of renters.



"I would like housing that provides for my needs over time. I would like a garden with fruit trees and vegetables in a safe environment with access to places, events and venues..."

COTA (WA) Seniors Week Survey 2018

A very low percentage of private rentals are affordable: just 1% in the Perth metro area for a single person relying on the aged pension, with consistent reports charting rental affordability stress for older persons, as well as heightened vulnerability indicators for older renters. The private rental market is now housing a cohort of older people lacking choice, security and significantly more likely to report below normal levels of personal wellbeing. It is now estimated that by 2036, 25% of all retirees will be renters.

Navigating housing options is increasingly complex, partly due to the interface between private and other forms of rental accommodation and aged-care. COTA (WA) is receiving feedback that affordability is a major factor in people opting to enter residential aged care when their strong preference is to age in community.

Homelessness in WA has impacted unevenly on the population, with the number of homeless persons 55 and over increasing steadily from the past three Censuses and the rate of older people experiencing homelessness has also grown. People sleeping on the street or in makeshift, transient shelters, so-called 'rough sleepers', represent only one facet of modern homelessness. Being without a home for an older person can also include living in severely overcrowded housing, transitional housing and 'couch surfing'. There is also a critical emerging cohort of older, single women experiencing homelessness and housing stress.



# DIRECTION 2: PROMOTE AGEING IN PLACE BY ENSURING THAT PEOPLE CAN ACCESS THE RIGHT HOME, IN THE RIGHT PLACE, AT THE RIGHT TIME

**Recommendation 4:** Re-focus on the Seniors Housing Strategy, with an emphasis on the needs of older Western Australians on low to medium incomes including:

- a) Increasing investment in social and affordable housing for older people.
- **b)** Establishing a specialist advice, advocacy and support service in the non-government sector that provides a one stop shop with case-management and linkage to appropriate, affordable housing options.
- c) Strengthening the rights of tenants in relation to security of tenure; removal of any 'no grounds evictions', ensuring that tenants have the right to make suitable modifications and prescribing minimum standards of dwellings and maintenance protocols.

**Recommendation 5:** Engage proactively with the building industry to promote the benefits of universal design standards and age-friendly liveable housing certification for all new residential construction.

**Recommendation 6:** Review the mandate and scope of the WA Government's Seniors Housing Advisory Centre and ensure that comprehensive housing information and appropriate referrals for older people, especially on low incomes or at risk of homelessness, are readily available.



## **HEALTH**

"I had a vacuum in my life, I was isolated, but I've always been a person who needs to help others. In my group I found I was able to help and connect again."

Mall Walking 2018

Health is the number one factor influencing both high and low quality of life in nationally surveyed older Australians. COTA (WA) is committed to the philosophy and practice of healthy and active ageing. This encompasses inclusivity, social connectedness, age friendly communities and positive behaviours that prevent disease and promote wellbeing.

There is strong evidence that investment in prevention and early intervention programs have significant benefits for both individuals and the broader health system. On average, 51% of older Australians do less than 2 hours of exercise per week. Programs that support older people to remain active and engaged are critical to reducing hospitalisation (and post-hospitalisation recuperation periods), loneliness and isolation.

The resourcing of initiatives that deliver health benefits, especially preventative, to older people should be a key priority. COTA (WA) is concerned that with the transfer of responsibility for aged care services to the Commonwealth, including the funding of measures to support people to stay in their own homes for as long as possible, there could be a diminution of an emphasis on, and funding available for preventative initiatives.

Since 2004, COTA (WA) has been running the Living Longer Living Stronger (LLLS) Program, an evidence-based program to improve the quality of life and fitness of people over 50 years old. Currently, COTA (WA) has over 60 accredited organisations across the State delivering individually customised programs to in excess of 3,500 people. The efficacy of LLLS has been evaluated in detail and is in line with current best-practice for fall prevention.

While some private health insurers provide small rebates to participants in recognition of the benefits of the program, COTA (WA) has not received WA government funding since September 2015 for this program.

Given the strong and well-established evidence base for the efficacy of the Living Longer Living Stronger program it is important for government to understand that its lack of support has threatened the viability and curtailed the potential of this program.

COTA (WA)'s newer Mall Walking initiative is also proving extremely successful in encouraging older people to engage in physical activity in a social setting. It currently attracts over 900 participants in five shopping centres across the metropolitan area. COTA (WA)'s ability to deliver such services to outer metropolitan and rural communities in Western Australia is significantly constrained by the lack of ongoing funding.

COTA (WA) also supports and embraces preventative health measures and the research required to ensure that evidence-based policies can be developed to alleviate the impact of the growing incidence of dementia and to examine the nexus between disability and ageing and the needs of family carers.

Increasing public concern about elder abuse reinforces the need for a rights-based collaborative strategy for preventing and responding to it. COTA (WA) supports many of the recommendations outlined in the Final Report of the Select Committee into Elder Abuse (September 2018). In particular we support the view that one of the most effective ways of preventing elder abuse is to educate the community about elder abuse and its recommendation that a public education campaign should be funded by the WA Government.

COTA (WA) stands ready to collaborate in any campaign and will utilise our extensive reach into the community of older people through our membership and wider constituency, including participants engaged in our Living Longer Living Stronger and Mall Walking Programs.

COTA (WA) believes the provision of good dental and related services should be recognised as essential to the physical, social and emotional well-being of all older people. These services should be universally available and accessible. As many people cannot afford private services, a reduction in the co-payment required by the WA government to access public dental facilities, especially for the more complex problems, should be considered. Older people living in rural and remote areas are particularly disadvantaged.

DIRECTION 3: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT POLICIES WITH AN EMPHASIS ON PREVENTATIVE MEASURES AND THE PROMOTION OF ACTIVE AGEING WITH REGARD TO PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

**Recommendation 7:** Reinstate funding to enable COTA (WA) to maintain and expand the Living Longer Living Stronger program and the Mall Walking program to ensure the long-term viability of both and to offer these programs in outer metropolitan and regional areas.

**Recommendation 8:** Provide funding for an education campaign aimed at preventing elder abuse in collaboration with organisations including COTA (WA) and Advocare. Such a campaign would be directed towards older people, carers and family members.

**Recommendation 9:** In relation to oral and dental health:

- a) extend the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS) to cover dental treatment related travel.
- **b)** extend the provision of and access to oral and dental health services to all older people, regardless of their physical location.

**Recommendation 10:** Provide funding to examine the issues impacting on people aged 50 and over (and their carers) with the transfer of funding and responsibility for aged care services to the Commonwealth Government and the transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Particular note should be taken of impacts to the WA Health system and programs that have traditionally supported older people with disability and /or chronic health conditions or frailty to avoid or reduce hospitalisation.



### **EMPLOYMENT**

"For the first time in a long time I feel confident that my dreams are not impossible thank you for making me feel that I'm NOT too old, I'm not too uneducated and I'm not a dreamer."

Rockingham Mature Aged Career Expo 2018

As our population ages, people are working longer, sometimes motivated by choice and at other times by financial imperatives. Federal and State Governments have encouraged an increase in labour force participation among older Australians. Feedback from our constituency demonstrates that older people want to work but face issues such as ageism, longer periods of unemployment than other age groups, difficulty navigating employment services and hardship living day to day on Newstart. Older people understand the message from the Commonwealth that they need to work longer and financially prepare for retirement. However unemployment erodes people's capacity to save and prepare for their non-working years.

As an indication of the number of mature aged unemployed, 39,116 people are receiving Newstart in WA, with those over 45 representing approximately 45% of recipients. Older people want to contribute to society and have secure finances while at the same time, one-quarter of older persons surveyed by COTA (WA), are still unsatisfied with the number of paid hours of work available to them. However, a major problem still exists for those wishing to enter or re-enter the paid workforce with consistent reports of age-discrimination.

In 2018, the Australian Human Rights Commission reported that age-discrimination remains a persistent barrier for workers over 50,19 with COTA Australia finding 22% have reported experiencing work-related age discrimination.20 The period a person remains unemployed increases sharply with age so that by 55 individuals are at risk of long-term unemployment, on average spending over 12 months job seeking.21

These statistics are likely an undercount, as COTA (WA) has confirmed over the previous year that long term unemployed older people experience discouragement, worry and significantly lowered wellbeing? that weaken their ties to employment and support networks and exacerbate the difficulties of finding and staying in employment.

# "I am 'retired', but willing to do some work if it was available." Rockingham Mature Aged Career Expo 2018

Given that by 2050 it is estimated that there will be only 2.7 people of working age for every Australian over 65, it is imperative older workers are encouraged to remain engaged in work and that opportunities for mature-age employment and intergenerational exchange are promoted broadly. The trend of increasing retirement ages, coupled with continuing evidence on the economic and social benefits of retaining older workers, is an opportunity for the WA Government and business to engage with older Western Australians.

COTA (WA) has been involved in a number of initiatives to improve employment outcomes for older people: these have involved a number of symposiums and expos. Most recently, the Rockingham Mature Age Employment Expo 2018 attracted over 600 participants and 45 exhibitors and expert presenters. In addition, the organisation is currently responsible for a major Commonwealth Government initiative, Mentoring 2 Work, involving intergenerational mentoring with a view to getting long-term unemployed young people into the paid workforce.



# DIRECTION 4: EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR OLDER PEOPLE TO ENTER THE WORKFORCE, CONTINUE EMPLOYMENT OR TRANSITION TO WORKING DIFFERENTLY

**Recommendation 11:** The Government of Western Australia commits to becoming an exemplar employer for older workers across State Government, promoting and publishing leading age-friendly policies and measured workforce diversity within the Age-Friendly Strategy 2020 framework.

**Recommendation 12:** Provide resources for the Equal Opportunity Commission to prioritise working with WA Government organisations and business to raise awareness that age-discrimination is contrary to State legislation as well as a cost to the state. COTA (WA) stands ready to assist utilising our experience in working on employment matters with mentors, job-seekers and employers.

**Recommendation 13:** Expand the Mature Age Employment Expo series piloted by COTA (WA) in 2018 to raise the awareness of businesses and the knowledge base of job-seekers in relation to the benefits and opportunities of mature-age employment.

**Funding Requested:** \$100 000 to conduct four mature aged employment expos in three key metropolitan and one regional area of the State, building on the success of similar initiatives in 2018.



### REFERENCES

- 1. Australian Bureau of Statistics. "3101.0 Australian Demographic Statistics, Mar 2018." Table 8 Estimated Resident Population, by Age and Sex–at 30 June 2017, Data Cube: Excel Spreadsheet. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018.
- **2.** Australian Bureau of Statistics. "3222.0 Population Projections Australia" Series C, Table C5 Population projections, by Age and Sex–2030, Excel Spreadsheet.

  Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018.
- **3.** Government on Western Australia. *Seniors Strategic Planning Framework*, Government of Western Australia, 2016.
- **4.** Ong, Rachel., Wood, Gavin., Whelan, Stephen., Cigdem, Melek., Atalay, Kadir and Dodson, Jago. "Inquiry into Housing Policies, Labour Force Participation and Economic Growth," June 28, 2017. https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/285.
- **5.** Australian Bureau of Statistics. "2016 Census QuickStats Household Composition," Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018.
- **6.** Liveable Housing Australia. *Universal Design Standards*. ACT: Liveable Housing Australia, 2016. https://www.cota.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/COTA-National-Policy-Forum-2017\_Ms-Denita-Wawn.pdf
- **7.** Anglicare WA. *Snapshot 2018*. Perth, WA: Anglicare WA, 2018. https://www.anglicarewa.org.au/docs/default-source/who-we-are/research---housing-and-homelessness/rental-affordability-snapshot-2018.pdf?sfvrsn=38c80fc3\_2.
- **8.** Hodgson, Helen., James, Amity and Webb, Eileen. *Older Renters in the Western Australian Private Rental Sector*. Perth, WA: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, 2018.
- 9. COTA Australia. State of the (Older) Nation 2018. ACT: COTA Australia, 2018.
- 10. COTA (WA). Seniors Week Survey 2018. WA: COTA (WA), 2018.

- **11.** Hodgson, Helen., James, Amity and Webb, Eileen. *Older Renters in the Western Australian Private Rental Sector*. Perth, WA: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, 2018.
- **12.** Kaleveld, Lisette., Seivwright, Ami,. Box, Emily., Callis, Zoe and Flatau, Paul. Homelessness in Western Australia: A Review of Research and Statistical Evidence. WA: Department of Communities, 2018.
- **13.** Australian Bureau of Statistics. "2049.0 Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness, 2016." Table 1.1 Homeless Persons, Selected Characteristics, 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016, Data Cube: Excel Spreadsheet. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016.
- **14.** Launch Housing. *Australian Homelessness Monitor 2018.* Vic: Launch Housing, 2018.
- 15. COTA Australia. State of the (Older) Nation 2018. ACT: COTA Australia, 2018.
- 16. COTA Australia. State of the (Older) Nation 2018. ACT: COTA Australia, 2018.
- **17.** Department of Social Services. "DSS Demographics June 2018." Department of Social Services, 2018.
- 18. COTA (WA). Seniors Week Survey 2018. WA: COTA (WA), 2018.
- **19.** Australian Human Rights Commission, *Employing Older Workers*. Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018.
- 20. COTA Australia. State of the (Older) Nation 2018. ACT: COTA Australia, 2018.
- **21.** Australian Human Rights Commission, *Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability*, Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016.
- 22. COTA (WA). Seniors Week Survey 2018. WA: COTA (WA), 2018.
- **23.** Australian Treasury. *Australia to 2050: future challenges*. Australian Treasury, 2010.