

Council on the Ageing (WA) Inc.

Submission to State Government

WA Seniors Strategy 2022-2032



COTA 
WESTERN AUSTRALIA
for older Australians

Council on the Ageing (WA) Submission to State Government for the WA Seniors Strategy 2022-2032

Overview

There are now multiple generations of older Western Australians who fall into the category of 'seniors', each with different challenges, attributes, issues and priorities. With an ageing population and people living longer than ever before, there is an increasing number of adult children (baby boomers), many of whom are themselves seniors, who are involved in the care of ageing parents.

Members of the COTA (WA) facilitated consultative group, the Seniors Sector Partnership, represent the grass roots connections to seniors. They understand the issues and are best placed to develop solutions. However, with limited financial resources, many seniors organisations are struggling to meet the growing demands of our rapidly increasing ageing demographic.

The challenge for the State Government in developing the WA Seniors Strategy is to ensure that seniors' sector organisations are adequately funded to meet the broad range of community needs, with no older Western Australians left behind or disadvantaged.

COTA (WA) appreciates the opportunity to have input into the WA Seniors Strategy and encourages the government to engage the Seniors Sector Partnership at every stage of the process to support a strategy which is comprehensive, realistic and achievable.

More details about COTA (WA) proposals are outlined in this submission.



COTA WA proposes the appointment of a ‘Commissioner for Seniors’ to headline the 2022-2032 Seniors Strategy and to demonstrate the State Government’s commitment to escalate seniors’ issues in its priority areas.

It is imperative that seniors have an independent, prominent and influential representative to advocate within all levels of government, the private sector and other appropriate platforms. It is also important that the ‘Commissioner’ establish a presence in all forms of media, including TV, radio, newsprint and social media.

The Role of ‘Commissioner for Seniors’

- Provide independent advice to the Minister for Seniors and Ageing and State and Federal Government Departments.
- Create submissions (on behalf of the sector) for Government or Public Inquiries and Royal Commissions.
- Promote awareness of and for the rights and interests of older people.
- Challenge discrimination and ageism.
- Provide an independent public voice to educate the community on seniors’ issues including prevention of elder abuse.
- Engage with the Seniors Sector Partnership through COTA (WA).



A number of the strategies or actions identified in this submission would support the work of the ‘Commissioner for Seniors’, including oversight of the development of:

Seniors Information Service

This service will provide information (telephone, email, face-to-face or virtual) and/or referrals for all matters of concern for seniors.

This would be available to individuals, carers, GPs or community service organisations. It will be a general information service and a referral pathway. The queries and requests would capture valuable intelligence and feedback on issues that older Western Australians are struggling with and highlight the barriers to finding solutions.

Establishment of a (One Stop Shop) ‘Seniors Hub’

The ‘Seniors Hub’ could be the location for the ‘Seniors Information Service’. Additionally It could house a range of shop fronts for general advocacy and information on how and where to access relevant support and further information on issues such as elder abuse, legal matters, housing options, advance care planning, wills and legal documents such as Powers of Guardianship and Attorney, carers’ support and information, aged care navigation, multilingual and translation support, disability services, dementia support and any other support or social services aligned with seniors’ interests and concerns. The Hub could house specialist ‘Navigators’ to provide individual support in areas such as housing and aged care.

In addition, the Hub could provide meeting and training rooms to provide one on one help or small classes on topics such as digital and financial literacy.



Key Focus Areas

Although COTA (WA) believes that the appointment of a ‘Commissioner for Seniors’ represents a key element of the Seniors Strategy, based on feedback and consultation with our cohort, we have identified the key focus areas to be addressed in the Strategy.

An outline of the ‘Nine (9) Key Focus Areas’ is provided below. We would invite the developers of the draft strategy to meet with us to explore these suggestions in greater depth.

1. Access to Information and Resources

This key focus area is a major concern and underpins many of the disadvantages facing seniors. It includes barriers such as culture and language, digital literacy and access to ‘easy to understand’ information and ongoing education.

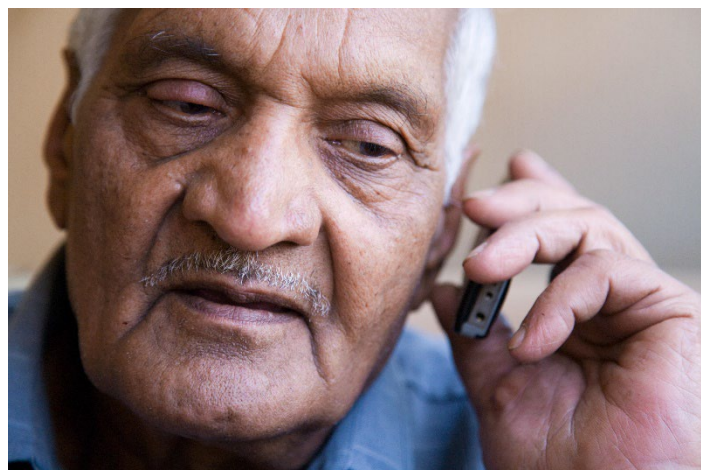
This requires the development of a state-wide education strategy that can be delivered in multiple formats, settings and languages.

2. Digital Divide

As the world increases its reliance on people’s use of digital technology, many seniors are left behind. Within the 65-100+ age range, the older cohort (80 years+) are less likely to use technology.

While the 65-80 years cohort are more likely to adopt technology, clear evidence shows that many are not doing this safely and are either seeking assistance from family or friends or trying to struggle on with low levels of digital literacy. This has resulted in a sharp increase in both cybercrime and financial elder abuse against older Western Australians.

A strategy is required to address education, support and access to all forms of digital technology.



3. Vulnerable Cohorts

Language and Culture (First Nations Australians, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, LGBTQI communities and People living with a Disability)

As the origins of new migrant populations grow, the number of languages spoken will increase, creating the demand for a broader range of multicultural support and services.

Effective communication is essential for all of these communities to feel included and it is vital that information and services are provided in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner.

People living with a disability will have their specific needs identified and addressed including aged-related impairment such as hearing and vision.

4. Social Connectedness

While COVID has emphasised the issues of social isolation and loneliness among older people, for many this has been their long-term predicament. The media has consistently highlighted the danger to seniors and while this is accurate, it has also generated a sense of fear and trepidation among seniors that has impacted their physical, social and mental health and wellbeing. While it is critical that vulnerable seniors are safe from COVID, self-imposed social isolation can lead to multiple physical and mental outcomes. There is evidence that seniors are suspending home care services, avoiding medical appointments, deferring exercise and cancelling social activities during periods of anxiety.

Many issues associated with social isolation could be at least partially addressed by the availability of a 'One-Stop-Shop Seniors Hub'. COTA (WA) is also addressing this need through the development of Guides which aim to provide user friendly support to help older people take advantage of readily available resources.

5. Rural and Remote

Seniors living in rural and remote Western Australia have very little access to information, services or supports compared to their counterparts who live in metropolitan Perth and its regions. The funding and priority given to rural and remote seniors is vastly inadequate, resulting in the reach of Seniors Sector peaks and community service organisations being severely limited.

A strategy is required to ensure all seniors living in rural and remote areas have at the very minimum access to information via the proposed state-wide 'Seniors Information Service'.

6. Ageism and Discrimination

Every issue highlighted in this document emanates from society's negative attitudes or indifference towards ageing. This does not imply that seniors are being mistreated, rather that they are not treated equally in terms of status, value to the community or as respected peers.

COTA (WA) recommends a series of ongoing major campaigns to change community attitudes and behaviour.

This will need to be preceded by educational programs which focus on the contribution and value of older people to our society.

7. Elder Abuse

Although Elder Abuse is a key priority, COTA (WA) acknowledges the significant work already being undertaken by the State Government, COTA (WA) and other sector organisations and consultants and therefore does not include any suggestions for a strategy, other than where it relates to the impact on other priority areas such as the digital divide.

COTA (WA) recommends a comprehensive public awareness campaign on Elder Abuse to build on the previous work undertaken by COTA (WA) in 2020.

Following on from increased public awareness, an ongoing strategy is required to focus on changing people's attitudes and behaviour.

8. Housing

Senior Western Australians have a strong preference to 'Age in Place' which aligns with the findings of the Federal government 'Aged Care Royal Commission'.

In addition, we are seeing an increase in the number of older people with age-related disabilities entering the rental market when demand is high amid a critical shortage of suitable accommodation.

One of the barriers to older Western Australians is negotiating the complexities of the array of housing alternatives and support available to them.

This could be alleviated to a greater extent by:

- **Expanding the information available through the existing Seniors Housing Advisory Centre.**
- **Funding COTA (WA) to provide a 'Seniors Housing Navigator' to provide a 'hands on' approach for seniors who are embarking on a quest to ascertain the alternatives available to them.**

9. General Advocacy and Support

COTA (WA) is responding to an increasing number of telephone calls and emails from seniors (or their family member or carer) who have exhausted all previous lines of enquiry. This is in addition to calls from local MPs and local governments, as well as referrals from advocates to deal with the many requests for information or support across a broad range of issues and concerns. There is currently no service that is funded to fulfil this role. Although COTA (WA) responds within its capacity, our callers become distressed and anxious when there is no ongoing support available.

A recent example of a call to COTA (WA) is from a lady supporting an elderly Croatian gentleman (who is an Australian citizen) to access a pension. He is being asked to provide original birth certificates and other documents that he does not have and Centrelink has advised they cannot help him until he can provide these documents. The lady is looking for an advocate to support them and she does not know where to turn. This is typical of the kind of help we are being asked to provide – and there is currently no organisation that is paid to provide this type of general advocacy or support service.

Dedicated funding is required for COTA (WA) to meet the increasing demand for this service.

Recommendations

1. The State Government appoint an independent ‘Commissioner for Seniors’.
2. A Seniors Information Service be established.
3. A ‘Seniors’ Hub’ be developed to provide a ‘one-stop-shop’ for seniors.
4. That the key focus areas identified in this submission be prioritised.

The recommendations outlined above in this submission would address many of the major issues in regard to safeguarding, empowering and supporting all older Western Australians.

About Council on the Ageing Western Australia

Council on the Ageing (WA) Inc. (COTA (WA)) was established in 1959 as the peak body representing the interests of people aged over 50 in Western Australia.

As a member of the COTA Federation, COTA (WA) collaborates with the other state COTAs as well as COTA Australia to advocate and influence (on a state and national level) on matters that are important to older Australians.

In July 2020, COTA (WA) was formally appointed by the State Government as the first ever Vulnerable Seniors Peak in Western Australia.

COTA (WA) represents the interests of Western Australia's seniors on many advisory committees and reference groups. Our advocacy work includes collaboration with sector partners on issues such as health, elder abuse, affordable housing, mature age employment and vulnerable cohorts including First Nations Australians, CaLD and LGBTQI.

Some of the current programs include:

- Strength for Life™
- Aged Care System Navigation

Publications currently in circulation are:

- The Goodbye Guide
- The At Home Guide
- Interruptions to Daily Living Guide (English, Simplified Chinese, Polish, Italian + Greek)
- Understanding the Mistreatment of Older People

Acknowledgment of Country

COTA (WA) acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country. We pay our respects to their Elders both past and present and acknowledge that the land on which we live and work, is and always will be, Aboriginal land.

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