

Joint Communique on an Agenda for Ageing in Victoria

Council on the Ageing, RMIT *Future Social Service Institute*, Health Issues Centre, Carers Victoria, Dementia Victoria, Victorian Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisation, Victorian Council of Social Services, Ethnic Communities Council Victoria, Housing for the Aged Action Group, Office of the Public Advocate, Consumer Action Law Centre, National Ageing Research Institute, Financial and Consumer Rights Council.

On July 28th 2017 thirteen organisations attended a round table discussion to consider long-term planning for the increased longevity of our state's population and the opportunities and challenges this may bring. We are keen to work with the Victorian Government and community to plan the policies and programs that are needed across portfolios including health, housing, access to services, transport, infrastructure, justice and consumer protection, carer support and community inclusion.

As not for profit, peak representative bodies and community organisations that are engaged with issues of ageing – through service delivery, policy, research and education - we share mutual concern and a commitment to address the *state of ageing* in Victoria. As we live longer and healthier lives we need to plan carefully for the ageing of the population. This is a multi-generational issue that affects all of us. A vision is needed for how we plan for our current ageing and future selves.

Valuing the diversity and contribution of older people

Older people are an invaluable part of the Victorian population. Older people are active in volunteering, with 35% of people aged 65-74 taking part in voluntary work¹. The evidence shows that they are *not* a burden to society²; rather the benefits they provide socially, economically and to the health and wellbeing of others is a significant contribution to all generations. Over 162,000 carers are aged over 65+, providing care for their spouses, adult children and their own parents aged over 85. Increasingly, grandparents are called upon to provide kinship care, and more baby boomers are making up the 'sandwich generation', caring for older parents, adult children and grandchildren. People are working longer and embarking on new business ventures in later life. Older people are also highly diverse; 41% of Victorians aged 65+ and 45.6% of Victorians aged 85+ were born overseas. Older people nation-wide are becoming increasingly physically active, with the percentage of older people that participated in physical activities for exercise or recreation increasing from 44.5% in 2012 to 49.2% in 2015.

Addressing the 'real' issues

Contrary to public perception just 5.2% of older people live in residential facilities. The needs of older people are often framed around aged care however these needs are much more diverse and span a range of issues. Approximately 35% of Australians aged 55-64 years and 43% of Australians aged 65+ years have experienced age discrimination³. Housing stress is increasingly an issue, especially in the context of a lack of retirement village regulation, rising housing prices and

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014, General Social Survey: Summary Results, (cat. no. 4159.0)

² Temple, Rice & McDonald, Mature age labour force participation and the life cycle deficit in Australia: 1981–82 to 2009–10, *The Journal of the Economics of Ageing*, December 2017

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212828X17300099>

³ Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013

inappropriate public housing for people to be able to age in place. Older people are also contending with issues such as elder abuse, transport accessibility, social and digital inclusion, and a lack of adequate end of life care planning.

Demographic and Planning Opportunities

Currently in Victoria 1.25 million people are aged over 60 years accounting for more than 20 per cent of the population. The percentage of older Victorians is set to increase to 22.2% in Greater Melbourne and 30.5% in regional and rural Victoria by 2031. This diverse and ageing population presents significant opportunities and challenges.⁴ There is an opportunity to include developing policies and programs that keep our older population contributing to our communities and the economy.⁵ The increasing numbers of older people also creates new markets and opportunities for innovation and economic development. The challenges include addressing systemic ageism and age discrimination in employment and training and ensuring that our social and health policies support older people to be connected to their communities and healthy.

These demographic changes also coincide with significant policy reform occurring in the areas of aged care, disability and health policy.

A Statewide Agenda for Ageing

In Victoria there is no state-wide plan for the increased longevity of our population. This results in a fragmented approach to policy relating to older people. This is particularly concerning for older people in rural and regional areas in Victoria who are more likely to be socially isolated⁶, experience the digital divide and have poorer access to transport, housing, health and other essential services. While a number of state and local programs have been successful in engaging communities, a comprehensive and strategic approach is required to ensure inclusive ageing practices are adopted across all policy and program portfolios. This is particularly vital at a time when significant policy changes are occurring in the provision of services to older people.

A Victorian Agenda for Ageing will facilitate planning across a range of current and emerging health, housing and wellbeing issues for older Victorians. As organisations directly involved in the wellbeing of older Victorians, we recognise the diversity of life experiences, individual needs and range of policy responses required to create an inclusive ageing Victoria.

A comprehensive Victorian plan should be evidence based, well-researched, well-resourced and underpinned by guiding principles and a vision. This plan should have broad cross-departmental support and commitment and report to the Premier or a senior minister.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017, 3101 Australian Demographic Statistics, Table 52 Estimated Resident Population by Single year of Age, Victoria

⁵ Edgar D, Edgar P, Birrell B, Betts K, Dow B, Lovell C (2017) The New Middle age: ways to thrive in the longevity economy. National Ageing Research Institute. <http://www.nari.net.au/policy/papers>

⁶ COTA Victoria's Social Isolation Working Paper (2014:9) identified the limited research into the experiences of older people in rural areas in regards to social isolation

The plan should include a comprehensive range of initiatives that include the following:

EMPLOYMENT

- Create meaningful employment opportunities for older Victorians.
- Address the discrimination of older people in the workforce with regards to gaining employment and receiving professional development, promotion and retention opportunities.
- Examine opportunities for economic development and innovation where older Victorians can be involved in the co-design of products and services that will support their independence and continued contribution.

HEALTHY AGEING AND PARTICIPATION

- Keep older people well, by promoting healthy ageing and resilience while reducing inappropriate hospital admissions.
- Design health services that take into consideration the needs of older people.
- Improve health services in areas such as dementia support, falls prevention, mental health and palliative care.
- Support the development and sustainability of age-friendly communities that enable older people to age positively.
- Create social inclusion and community awareness of people with dementia through dementia friendly communities and provide access to quality dementia supports and programs aimed at risk reduction.
- Create approaches for living well, including increasing older people's participation in cultural and recreational activities.
- Extend Seniors Card discounts to encourage community participation and reduce the cost of living for older people on fixed incomes.
- Address Victoria's fragmented and poorly funded community transport system, acknowledging the true extent of isolation, and develop remedial strategies.

STRENGTHENING CULTURE, SUPPORTING DIVERSITY AND ADDRESSING VULNERABILITY

- Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and people from CALD communities are included in any plan. Supporting them to age well in ways that are appropriate to their needs and culture, and recognising the prevalence and significance of the informal carer role of elders in these communities.
- Promote and celebrate culture as a protective factor and support elders in their role as keepers and teachers of culture.
- Create strategies that support older LGBTIQ people to age well. Reinforce the message through policies and programs that they are valued and safe in their community and ensure they are included in the plan.
- Create opportunities for inclusion of diverse groups in advocacy processes, for example through ministerial advisory committees and mainstream ageing consultations.
- Conduct research into inequalities across various and diverse older population groups in the community relating to access to health and community services, and mental and physical health outcomes.

PREVENTION AND RESPONSE TO ELDER ABUSE

- Empower older people who are experiencing abuse by providing them with effective tools and services to live free from abuse.
- Create opportunities to work with service providers in a variety of fields to reduce the occurrence of elder abuse.
- Ensure that older people remain in control and are at the centre of making decisions for themselves for as long as possible.
- Increase community awareness of elder abuse through education and information.
- Provide an avenue for concerned citizens or family members to seek advice about how to address suspected abuse of an older person.
- Recognise that elder abuse is a form of family violence and support reforms to the family violence sector that address elder abuse.

CARER RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT

- Recognise and support aged carers who may be caring for their partner, another older person, an adult child with a disability or for younger children (grandchildren) including:
 - Minimising the negative social, emotional, physical and financial impacts of caring (so they can age well while maintaining a care relationship)
 - Recognise older people in care relationships in line with the requirements of the Victorian Carers Recognition Act (2012) and develop policies, programs and services that positively support people in care relationships
 - Consider the prevalence and significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island grandparents as informal carers in many communities and the impact of this (positive and negative) on the health, wellbeing and resources of elders.

ACCESS TO SERVICES AND AFFORDABLE, SAFE AND FAIR HOUSING

- Address the specific crisis accommodation needs for older women facing homelessness across in rural and metropolitan regions
- Resource the development of affordable, appropriate and safe housing options that are close to public transport and other community services so that people can age in place.
- Ensure retirement housing in Victoria is safe and suitable for older people through:
 - Easy access to free and effective dispute resolution by establishing a retirement housing ombudsman.
 - Fair contracts with transparent pricing by strengthening regulation of the deferred management fees business model and greater clarity in governing legislation.
 - Accredited training and qualification requirements for retirement housing employees.

Older people as citizens and voters, make a significant and productive contribution to Victoria through work, volunteering, caring, community roles, and financially supporting the younger generation. Alongside these strengths we need to recognise the vulnerability of some older Victorians and ensure that they receive appropriate support and protection.

An Agenda for Ageing will ensure creative solutions so that older people can thrive and continue to contribute to society. Our organisations support a Victorian Agenda for Ageing that will guide practical action to improve the quality of life for ALL Victorians as we age.