



COTA

For older Australians

ANNUAL REPORT
2016-17



About COTA ACT

COTA ACT is the peak organisation for older Canberrans working to promote and protect the well-being, rights and interests of all older people in the ACT and their carers, irrespective of socio-economic, ethnic, religious or cultural backgrounds.



Welcome

Our mission – “To be the leading voice and advocate to advance the interests of older people in the ACT”.

This year COTA ACT identified several specific targets as part of the ongoing implementation of its Strategic Plan and continued efforts to achieve more outcomes. These target areas included adopting an enhanced role in policy formulation, developing greater efficiencies in key project areas and commencing preparations for a major change of emphasis in the organisation nationally.

COTA ACT has continued strong involvement in developing a new national focus for all State and Territory COTAs to better position COTA as an organisation servicing the needs and interests of senior Australians. COTA ACT continued to contribute to the operation of the COTA Federation, including the definition of a new ‘purpose’ for future modes of operation.

The COTA ACT Policy Council was initially split into separate Policy and Research committees to place more emphasis on research with the aim to convert research into policies and policy statements. The groups were re-merged with a bi-monthly emphasis on the respective issues. A semi-private portal has been created on the COTA ACT website for Board directors, Policy Committee members, staff and researchers to share developments and information on approved and likely research topics.

There has been a significant increase in the participation and output from policy volunteers which adds to the knowledge bank and reputation of the organisation.

(Presidents Report)

The Seniors Week program has been progressively improved over recent years and now shows potential to deliver real benefits to COTA ACT.

A focus on the management of the Hughes Community Centre has resulted in increased usage and caters well for U3A classes and many community meetings and events.

Communications have been significantly improved following the appointment of a dedicated communications and marketing specialist.

Relationships with a wide range of other stakeholders and interest groups continued to improve due to COTA ACT's willingness to collaborate and discuss issues of mutual interest.

COTA ACT actively participated in a wide range of community events and programs with significant involvement by staff and volunteers in promoting COTA ACT throughout the year.

Membership of COTA ACT continues to grow steadily.

Preparing COTA ACT For The Future

Our broader remit is to service all age cohorts from 50 years of age onwards (plus their families) and to be able to deliver the types and range of services and information that they need.

An efficient highly respected COTA ACT will be better placed to represent the growing population of senior

Canberrans. We recognise that seniors in the future may be more motivated to exercise greater control over their lives.

In 2016-2017 the COTA ACT Board varied its governance role by placing more focus on operating committees reporting to bi-monthly Board meetings. It will be important to adopt new ideas for future COTA ACT engagement with the Canberra seniors' community.

I wish to thank all those Board members who actively contributed to the improved status of COTA ACT during the year and for their participation in productive Board meetings and committee activities. I express my appreciation of the dedicated efforts of CEO Jenny Mobbs and her staff. Thank you to all the volunteers whose valuable contributions enable COTA ACT to continue to provide vital information on a huge range of issues to Canberra seniors and older citizens.

It is a pleasure to be associated with such a respected organisation!

Ewan Brown
President



COTA ACT in 2016-17

COTA ACT maintains its position as the peak organisation for all issues relating to older Canberra citizens, seniors, those of mature age and their families to achieve policy, program and service outcomes that work to protect and promote the well-being, rights and interests of all older people in the ACT.

COTA ACT talks to Government, the media and the community about issues of direct concern to all older people in the ACT. We make regular submissions to government on issues affecting older people.

As a member of several ACT government standing committees, such as the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing (MACA), and special committees of enquiry, COTA ACT has ongoing input into the advice going to government.

2016-17 was a busy year for COTA ACT with a local election, and with that a new Minister for Veterans and Seniors in Gordon Ramsay MLA. Our election forum in the lead up to the ACT election was a lively affair, with more than 60 community members hearing from candidates from ACT Labor, the Canberra Liberals, ACT Greens, Sustainable Australia and independent candidate David Pollard. COTA ACT promoted our policy priorities during the election campaign and then engaged with the re-elected Labor government on key policy issues.

“I believe that the increasing number of older Canberrans is a gift and an asset for us to celebrate” – Gordon Ramsay, Minister for Veterans and Seniors.

Both the ACT and Federal budgets needed to address serious financial pressures and while we are coming to terms with the implications, and of the changing demographics, COTA ACT needs to find ways to continue our important work in challenging political and economic circumstances.

The escalating cost of living, energy costs, housing, health care, transport and age discrimination (especially in the workforce) remain major concerns. We also continue to focus on issues such as transition to retirement, advanced care directives, legal issues, elder abuse and mature aged employment.

Policy, advocacy and engagement

A key achievement in the last financial year was the updating of the COTA ACT Constitution. The new Constitution was approved at the AGM on 26th of October 2016.

COTA ACT works with all other states and territory COTAs and with COTA Australia.

We attended two COTA Australia National Policy meetings and the COTA Australia forums on reframing primary healthcare for older Australians in July 2016 and

housing in June 2017 and continue to contribute to the national ONECOTA magazine.

In the past year, the COTA ACT Policy Committee membership was reviewed and expanded to represent a wider diversity of backgrounds and experience in order to better inform policy priorities and proposals. The members of this committee are such a positive group to work with and their range of work experience which includes the legal profession, social work, pharmacy, nursing and different areas of government enhances all discussion and leads to good outcomes for older Canberrans.

One of our key priorities for the 2016-17 financial year was to strengthen our policy and advocacy work to improve the lives of older people in Canberra. This has allowed COTA ACT to focus on influencing government policy and decision makers. We make it our business to connect with the ACT Government, non-government organisations and other community advocacy groups, and work with them to achieve evidence-based change.

With the assistance and involvement of the Policy Committee members there has been considerable work in a number of key policy areas.

We prepared and forwarded submissions on:

- Aged Care Legislative Review (Dec 2016)
- Protecting the Rights of Older Australians from Abuse Inquiry

- Submission to the ACT Stage Two Light Rail Study
- Wayfinding for the Canberra Light Rail
- Better Access Medicare program – and mental health
- The Energy Efficiency (Cost of Living) Improvement Act 2012 (the Act) and
- The Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme (EEIS)

COTA ACT focussed our resources on several key policy and advocacy priorities during the year:

This year, issues focussed on by the Policy Committee have included:

- Elder abuse, where we are working with ACT agencies and authorities and to recognise and document elder abuse in its different forms, and deal with it effectively
- Housing affordability, where we have shared with ACT politicians our concerns regarding a significant minority of disadvantaged older people, including older single women, who are reliant on private rental
- Retirement villages, where we are ready to engage with the ACT Government, the legal profession and industry to strengthen consumer protection
- Stage Two of Light Rail, where we have put the case to Government for the proposed route to be varied so it includes a stop at the Canberra Hospital.
- Planning the development of the northern Light Rail precinct, where we are consulting with Government on services and amenities for older people

12,933

**calls to the Seniors
Information Line**

2,164

COTA ACT members

**individuals assisted
through the Housing
Options Advisory Service**

560

Seniors Cards issued

15,074

**attendees at COTA
ACT Seniors Week
events**

5,500+

COTA ACT in 2016-17

- Aged care, in which we made independent input to the Legislated Review to emphasise the need for consumer protection and fair pricing of services.
- Health issues, raised with the Minister for Seniors and Veterans, including advance care planning and better access to activities important for maintaining health.

We cemented relationships with a wide range of ACT Government agencies, as well as other stakeholders and interest groups. Our Policy Committee members and staff have been involved in:

- The Western Greenway Community Panel
- ICON Water Community Consultative Forum
- Light Rail Advisory Group – Civic
- Dickson on Northbourne Planning
- Community Facilities Needs Analysis Inner North Canberra
- Active Living Principles in the Territory Plan
- Drug Driving Working Group
- Community Transport Working Group
- Active Travel Advisory Group
- Environment and Planning Forum (EPF)
- ACT Grandparents Network
- Planning Committee for Grandparents Day 2016
- Canberra Business Chamber (Social Enterprise Task Force)
- Capital Health Network Consumer Advisory Committee
- ACT Healthcare Consumers Health of Older People Reference Group
- ACT Law Society
- ACNC Charities Report launch



2016-2017



COTA ACT in the Community

COTA ACT service provision

Canberra is often seen as a privileged city, but its older people do not always have the resources and services they need to ensure their well-being. Our Policy Committee members use their skills and contacts to find out where the gaps are and do research to gather the information we need to put the case for improvement.

COTA ACT also provides services – some on behalf of government – for older Canberra citizens.

Our Housing Options Advisory Service assists hundreds of older people and their families, with our community education programs and community outreach continuing to rise.

We were successful in obtaining a number of small grants which assisted us to deliver successful events and projects such as Seniors Week, and a series of information sessions on Home Care Packages

Seniors Information Line

COTA ACT provides a telephone and face to face advisory service at our office in the Hughes Community Centre. The Seniors Information Line is a territory-wide information and referral service which provides callers with a range of information ranging from health issues, Seniors Cards and discounts, social activities, transport, community and government services, transport and more.

In 2015-16 the Seniors Information Line provided around 13,000 instances of assistance to older people and their families.

Resources

We continue to produce and update a range of brochures and resources on a wide range of topics of interest to older people and their families/carers.

Our largest set of resources is our brochure wall which has dozens of brochures with contact details of a range of Canberra services and activities. These brochures are updated regularly to ensure the information in them is correct.

Our popular Guide to Getting Around Canberra was updated in 2016-17, with more than 4,000 copies distributed since its launch in 2015-16. We thank the ACT Government for financial assistance for the printing of this Guide.

Networking and community

COTA ACT attended a number of expos and conferences in 2016-17 including the Hearing Awareness Expo, Volunteering ACT Expo, Interagency Co-Morbidity Day, SHOUT Self-Help Expo, World Cancer Day and Canberra Carers Expo.

In late 2016, COTA ACT was informed they were the charity recipient of Music at Midday, a joint venture by the Canberra Theatre Centre and the RMC Band. Music

at Midday is a series of concerts by the RMC Band, held six times over the year, where attendees can pay a gold coin donation to attend. In addition to being the charity recipient, Music at Midday gave COTA ACT the opportunity to provide information to attendees, most of whom were aged over 50. The concerts on 11 April saw nearly 1,000 people attend – a great number of whom approached COTA ACT for information and resources.

We also participated in Meet your Community run by CONTACT and Volunteering ACT.

COTA ACT continued to advocate for age friendly communities program after the successful projects being completed in Ainslie, Weston, and an extension of the program into Kaleen and Monash. We look forward to continuing this work in other suburbs across Canberra so that Canberra truly becomes an Age Friendly City.

Workshops and information sessions

2016-17 saw COTA ACT deliver a number of information sessions. These ranged from sessions on housing, retirement, home care, wellness, road safety, and general COTA information.

COTA ACT partners with the University of the Third Age (U3A) to deliver a series of “Tuesday Lunchtime Forums” from March-October each year. These weekly forums cover a range of topics and regularly attract more than 100 attendees.

In May, we partnered with ActewAGL to organise a free energy workshop. More than 80 people attended and received free energy efficient light globes, hand warmers and a wealth of information on how they can save energy (and therefore costs) in their homes.

We also chair an Elder Abuse Prevention Working Party which has members from a wide range of ACT government agencies and community services and NGO's in the ACT.

We held round tables and consultative sessions on:

- Age Friendly Cities (with the involvement of The ARC, Centre of Excellence in Population Ageing Research and Manchester City (UK) officials)
- Adequacy of the Age Pension with the Benevolent Society

and attended meetings on:

- Legislated Aged Care Review, Active Living Principles in the Territory Plan, Restrictive practices, Restorative Justice, Enduring powers of Attorney, Smart City Workshop, Keep Me Posted
- Citizens' Juries - The Answer to Improving Community Engagement in the ACT, and Driving with a Chronic Condition

Drop in information sessions

COTA ACT has built relationships with a range of ACT service providers to deliver Sessions for Seniors where

COTA ACT in the Community

older people can make free appointments with qualified professionals. In 2016-17 these included:

- ACT Policing
- Canberra Hospital - Advance Care Planning
- Legal Aid
- Australian Taxation Office – Tax Help

Hughes Community Centre

COTA ACT continues to manage the busy Hughes Community Centre. The centre is used by a range of community groups and members including U3A, church groups, fitness and social groups as well as individuals hiring the facilities for private events.

We have repainted the walls of the hall which has made this space brighter and more welcoming. There is a continuing challenge with the repairs to an ever ageing building.

Membership

COTA membership services continued to manage individual memberships on behalf of all State and Territory COTA's during the 2016-17 year.

As at 30 June 2017, COTA ACT had 2,164 individual members and 30 organisational members.

COTA members enjoy a range of benefits through the COTA Rewards and Savings Program, including insurance designed specifically for over 50s, two-for-one dining, savings on groceries, electrical, fuel, shopping and leisure activities. Members also access a Wine Club and a Travel Club.





The Music at Midday concerts on 11 April had nearly 1,000 people attend, many over 50. Afterwards a great number of them approached COTA ACT for information and resources.

Community Education

The COTA ACT Community Education Program provides free, practical, and relevant information to seniors' groups and the general community throughout the ACT and surrounding regions. The topics covered by the program are many and various, but all focus on safety, wellbeing, and ways to lead a healthy and happy life.

There are two main components to COTA ACT's Community Education Program – Community Engagement and Peer Education.

Community Engagement enables COTA ACT to stay in touch with the needs and concerns of the community through activities such as public information sessions, community outreach, COTA/U3A Lunchtime Forums, presentations to community groups, and networking with government and community sector service providers and stakeholders. The main topics of interest being transport, changes to Seniors Cards, housing and care options and the services offered by COTA ACT.

The Peer Education program component is structured around a wonderful group of volunteer presenters. COTA ACT trains presenters aged over 50 who then volunteer their time to talk to older people in our community about healthy ageing issues. This group of volunteers dedicate hours of their own time to educate, discuss and share information on the issues that are important to older Canberrans.

In 2016 - 17 the Community Education team (Community Education Manager and Peer Educators) presented

a total of 29 sessions to 1091 participants including 3 sessions to CALD groups (80 CALD participants).

In 2014 COTA ACT received a grant from the NRMA Road Safety Trust to develop a 2 year program designed to promote road safety for older road users. 'Street Smart Seniors' is a one hour information session which explores driver safety, pedestrian safety, alternative transport options, seniors' concessions, and what to consider if contemplating retiring from driving.

The success and popularity of the Street Smart Seniors program prompted COTA ACT to seek further funding to continue this initiative. In 2016 we received a grant from the ACT Government (Justice and Community Safety Directorate) to continue this program until 2018.

After an information session, participants are asked: "What was the most interesting/useful thing you learned today?" Here are some of their responses to the Street Smart Seniors Road Safety session –

"Self-assessment – know your limitations and your strengths"

"That over 70s can get free travel on Action buses"

"All the safety features you can get in modern cars"

"Wearing bright clothes instead of black at night is a great idea"

“The pros and cons of driving, and situations you need to be aware of”

“It’s a good idea to plan ahead if you are contemplating giving up driving”

“I love the ‘Guide to getting around Canberra’ book that was provided”

“It was appreciated that the presenter was a similar age and could readily identify with the issues facing older drivers”.

COTA ACT also offered the peer education sessions – ‘Controlling My Own Life: Making the most of CDC’ – a session on how to get the most out of Home Care Packages, and ‘Step Forward Together’ – a workshop to discuss wellness, enablement and co-production. These national programs were run concurrently by all state and territory COTAs and were funded by the Department of Social Services. Both these programs concluded in June 2017.

7

Volunteer Peer Educators

4

different information sessions available

29

sessions presented

3

Culturally and linguistically diverse sessions

1019

participants



Love later life **ACT Seniors Week**

18–26 March 2017



GOODWIN
THE BETTER LIFE CHOICE

COTA ACT again delivered a highly successful 2017 Seniors Week, with financial assistance from the ACT government and sponsorship from a number of organisations.

The official events program was packed full of open days, information sessions and community events designed to connect, inspire and inform Canberra seniors. 2017 saw a 22% increase in the number of events listed in the program from the previous year.

Chief Minister Andrew Barr launched the week in front of more than 60 stakeholders, community leaders, government representatives and older people in our community on a sunny Friday afternoon in the Canberra Museum and Gallery (CMAG) with Sing Australia performing a musical item.

The ACT Chief Minister's Concert was held at the historic Albert Hall and booked out well in advance of the concert. Despite dreary weather more than 500 people turned up and were entertained by a lively

performance by the RMC Band and the Australian Rugby Choir. We thank them for their time.

The Seniors Expo at Exhibition Park was a resounding success. More than 4,000 attendees had the opportunity to connect with 160 service providers in the ACT region – getting information on retirement and aged care, entertainment and leisure, health, hobbies, social groups and services available to them. Once again the Flexible Bus Service generously supported the event by providing free shuttle buses so that people all across the ACT could easily attend the Expo.

The Positive Ageing Awards had our greatest number of nominees since inception. The calibre of nominees meant the judging panel had a difficult time deciding on finalists and winners.

Senior Volunteer Award

- Winner – Bob Hay
- Finalists – Estelle Barnes, Denise Mott, Brian Triglone

Intergenerational Award

- Winner (organisation) – Mirinjani Hostel
- Finalist – Leslie Morshead Manor
- Winner (individual) – Hamish Balfour
- Finalist – Chandani Ramasundara

Age Friendly Community Award

- Winner – St John Ambulance Australia (ACT)
- Finalist – Mirinjani Village

Senior Advocate Award

- Winner (organisation) – ACT Disability Aged Care Service (ADACAS)
- Winner (individual) – Diane Percy
- Finalist – Suzanne Eastwood

Transport Services Award

- Winner – Woden Community Services Transport Team
- Finalist – Betty Simmonds



Bob Hay



Hamish Balfour



St John Ambulance
Australia (ACT)



Mirinjani Hostel



Woden Community Services Transport Team



ACT Disability Aged Care Service (ADACAS)

Many thanks to our Seniors Week sponsors:



GOODWIN
THE BETTER LIFE CHOICE



ACT
Government

Beyond Bank
AUSTRALIA



TTC Transport Canberra
Flexible Bus Service



st andrews village



*The***Senior**

Love later life
ACT Seniors Week
18-26 March 2017



GOODWIN
THE BETTER LIFE CHOICE







Housing Options Advisory Service

The Housing Options Advisory Service has continued to see a high demand from older Canberrans for support and information on services, accommodation options and the changes to how aged care is delivered, Consumer Directed Care in particular.

Requests for assistance and information relating to a wide range of areas were received including: accessing home care and support services, NDIS packages, transition to retirement villages or residential aged care, downsizing, home modifications, accessing legal services, accessing financial services, availability of community and government support, public and private housing options, respite services, homelessness, elder abuse and de-cluttering. The most common enquiries related to home care packages and residential aged care with a spike in calls about retirement villages following the highly publicised press investigation in June. There is also a demand for assistance to complete or understand forms for Centrelink, Housing ACT and residential aged care homes.

In 2016-17, the service supported 560 individuals either by face to face appointments, over the phone or by email with outreach to hundreds more in the community via events such as those held during Seniors Week, presentations and information sessions and the information brochures available through COTA ACT. Home visits or hospital visits are also available where circumstances such as mobility issues or disability prevent the client from attending an appointment at the Hughes Community Centre.

In addition, a number of community information sessions were conducted in response to demand from the community for information on the processes and costs for entering residential aged care, home care packages and to assist in navigating the MyAgedCare website.

The service also provided information to consumers on the changes to pensions (in Jan 2017 and June 2017) and Home Care packages (Feb 2017).

Our Housing Options Advisor represents COTA ACT on a number of housing related groups and committees including the Canberra Living Conditions Network (CLCN), Joint Pathways, ACT Shelter, and the Review of the Retirement Village Act (2012). COTA ACT has also joined the Transforming Communities Partnership to assist with the relocation of older residents from Northbourne Flats as part of the ACT Government's upgrade of its public housing stock. The Housing Options Advisor also attended information sessions and forums on matters relevant to Seniors in the ACT such as the Light Rail, healthcare and legislation updates.

The Housing Options Advisory Service had a change of staff in 2016-17, with Luke Coniston leaving in March 2017, and Trish Low starting in April 2017. Trish has been working to develop her own connections within the community sector service providers and establish relationships with the various ACT Government organisations such as the Community Services Directorate, ACT Police and the hospitals.

Seniors Card and Directory

Seniors Cards

2016-17 was an eventful year at COTA ACT for the administration of ACT Seniors Cards. In September we announced, in partnership with Transport Canberra, the production of a new, improved Seniors/MyWay card to streamline usage and access for cardholders.

The new look Seniors/MyWay Card was launched featuring updated Transport Canberra branding, a signature strip and a larger card number for ease of use. The signature strip and larger card number on the Seniors Card side of the card, was added after consultation by COTA ACT with Seniors Card holders who had issues using their cards interstate, and in multi-card households where cards were mixed up.

We saw a significant increase in the number of cards issued – both new and replacement cards, driven by a new agreement between Transport Canberra and NSW Transport. This agreement allows ACT Seniors Card holders to be automatically validated for permanent Gold OPAL cards (the previous agreement only allowed ACT Seniors Card holders to hold a Gold OPAL card for 60 days). We thank staff of Transport Canberra for their work to achieve the new look cards and for arranging the link with the Gold OPAL card in NSW.

As a result of these changes, 2016-17 saw unprecedented demand for ACT Seniors Cards, with 15,074 new cards entered on the Seniors Card database

over the year. This was an increase of 134% on the previous year.

In the 2016 ACT Budget it was announced that the eligibility age for ACT Seniors Cards will gradually be increased to 65 by 1 July 2025. In the early part of 2017, COTA ACT worked with the ACT Government, Libraries ACT and ACCESS Canberra to communicate the change in age eligibility for ACT Seniors Cards. From 1 July 2017, the eligibility age will increase to 61.

ACT Seniors Cards are issued through a number of outlets across the ACT, including the five ACT Government shopfronts (issuing 65% of cards), and eight ACT public libraries (25% of cards) and the COTA ACT office (10% of cards).

13,224 ACT seniors received a card for the first time, with the number of active card holders climbing by 22% to 67,963. The number of people over 70 who held and ACT Seniors Card increased by 42%.

We received more than 5,000 calls into our office from Seniors Card holders with questions relating directly to their ACT Seniors/MyWay Card. These calls are taken through the ACT Seniors Information Line where COTA ACT provides advice and referral on a variety of issues relating to ageing such as housing, transport, health, finance, social inclusion and even technology challenges.

Seniors Card Discount Directory

The 2017-19 Seniors Card Discount Directory is currently being printed and features in excess of 250 discounts and offers for Seniors Card holders. Along with the Directory, is a revamped Seniors Card website which will streamline searching for business discounts - it also gives Canberra businesses an opportunity to promote their discounted products and services offered to Seniors Card holders. A large number of new business have signed up with generous discounts for Seniors Card holders.

COTA ACT will initially be printing 30,000 directories and distributing these to Access Canberra shopfronts and ACT public libraries. They will also be available through our office and at the many events COTA ACT attends and hosts. It is a highly anticipated and well received publication.



Our People

Board members

Ewan Brown *President*
Rod Gardiner *Vice President*
Elizabeth Grant
Bruce Shaw
Fergus Thomson
Margaret Simmons
Sue Jordan
Rick Lord
Paul Feldman

Staff

Jenny Mobbs
Chief Executive Officer
Ingrid Pepper
Community Education
Raina Johnston
Seniors Card & Directory
Luke Coniston *(until March 17)*
Housing Options
Trish Low *(from April 17)*
Housing Options
Catherine Adcock *(from Aug 16)*
Communications and Events
Robyn Walter
Administration / Community Centre
Vicky Di Scipio *Finance*

Volunteers

Community Education

Anne McNamara
Janet Werner
Sandra Gray
Beverley Shannon
Richard Gray
Rick Causebrook
Ian Lambert
Rob Lynch
Diana Shogren

Admin Volunteers

Anne McNeilly
Cheryl Ovenell
Margaret Simmonds
Jan Yannopoulos
Maria Philpot
John Wightman
Noel Semple
Jonas Mackunas

Policy Committee Members

Paul Feldman *Chair*
Bruce Shaw
Sue Schreiner
Kevin Vassarotti
Adele Stevens
Deborah Evans
Rick Lord
Ewan Brown
Chander Khera
Trevor Smith



2016-2017





COTA

For older Australians



Council on the Ageing ACT

Hughes Community Centre

2 Wisdom Street

Hughes ACT 2605

www.cotaact.org.au