



Mr Andrew Barr MLA
Chief Minister
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Ms Emma Davidson MLA
Minister for Veterans and Seniors
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Dear Chief Minister Barr and Minister Davidson

We write with respect to the upcoming ACT Government 2023-2024 Budget. The Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing (MACA) has, over 20 months, developed a set of priorities outlined in this budget submission which reflect our extensive engagement across a range of communities and sectors. The 2023-2024 ACT Government Budget presents a significant opportunity to take stock of the needs of ACT's ageing population and put in place a series of initiatives to ensure older Canberrans are a core part of the ACT wellbeing budgets.

MACA has six priorities listed below and detailed in this submission.

- 1. Building an Age-Friendly City - Preparations for the next AFCP**
- 2. Ensuring affordable and appropriate housing for older Canberrans (including provision of funding for a Symposium on innovative housing models for older people)**
- 3. Creating an Arts Festival led by and for older Canberrans**
- 4. Doubling the Seniors Grants Program**
- 5. Enhancing intergenerational connection and workforce capability through Gold Soul**
- 6. Protecting the rights of retirement village residents through expanding the Official Visitors Scheme**

1. Building an Age-Friendly City - Preparations for the next AFCP

The ACT Government has runs on the board when it comes to fostering an age-friendly city. In 2011, Canberra was accepted as a member of the World Health Organisation's Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities. Strong and continuous engagement between the ACT Government and older Canberrans since then shaped the whole-of-government policy directions and led to development of the *Age-Friendly City Plan 2020-2024*, due to expire mid- next year.

Funding must therefore be allocated in the forthcoming 2023-24 budget for the next iteration of the *Age-Friendly City Plan*, both for its development *and* implementation. It is critical that funding is allocated to Directorates with responsibilities and actions under the Plan which is in addition to their existing operating budgets. Discrete and dedicated funding will ensure actions are above and beyond business-as-usual and thus empower a truly visionary *Plan*.

There is also the opportunity to develop a longer-term *Plan*, which is suitable and more sustainable in view of the ageing population. Absence of a *Plan* would leave an insurmountable policy vacuum which would be detrimental to Canberra's older population and would also make it very difficult for the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing (MACA) to support and advise the Government.



The development of the Plan presents an opportunity for the Plan to be informed through a dedicated citizen research project. Such an approach would dovetail with the concepts of Canberra as the Knowledge Capital and with a Deliberative Democracy approach favoured by the ACT Government.

Funding is requested for a Citizen Research pilot project aimed at developing a repository of data to underpin the development of the post-2024 Age Friendly City Plan.

Citizen Research is an increasingly acknowledged approach in which non-professional community participants contribute to data collection to advance research. The data collected from such research reflects a real and genuine engagement and provides a sound evidence base for development of strength-based policies. A growing body of evidence points to the utility and efficacy in the Citizen Research approach in policy formulation in relation to ageing and older people.¹

The benefits of this research method include: 1) the fairness of the procedure of public deliberation, 2) its educative power, 3) its community-generating capacity and 4) the epistemic quality of its outcomes (reveals the lived experience of the community - what people think, what they believe and how they apply new information). It informs political, social and ethical decision making. It also provides the opportunity to pilot a framework that is then transferable to other government projects.

Funding would be used to establish a Citizen Research Team to be attached to MACA, including sufficient funds to set up the process and the ethical framework and to remunerate researchers.

This could be achieved with between \$10 – 20, 000 for 2023-2024 in funding to provide a per diem for Citizen Researchers and cover project costs.

¹ See: Benjamin-Thomas, T. E., Corrado, A. M., McGrath, C., Rudman, D. L., & Hand, C. (2018). Working towards the promise of participatory action research: learning from ageing research exemplars. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1), 1609406918817953. And, Corrado, A. M., Benjamin-Thomas, T. E., McGrath, C., Hand, C., & Laliberte Rudman, D. (2020). Participatory action research with older adults: a critical interpretive synthesis. *The Gerontologist*, 60(5), e413-e427.



2. Ensuring affordable and appropriate housing for older Canberrans (including provision of funding for a Symposium on innovative housing models for older people)

It is indisputable that access to good quality, affordable housing is fundamental to people's physical, mental and social well-being and to their quality of life.¹ Poor living conditions lead to increased stress, social isolation, unhealthy and unsafe environments and increased risk of disease or injury.²

Older people in the private rental market are particularly vulnerable due to the likelihood of being on a fixed income (such as the pension),³ the increased risk of substandard accommodation which makes modifications difficult⁴ and the general instability of this tenure.⁵ Further, home ownership is positively associated with ageing in place, meaning older renters are more likely to enter residential aged care.⁶ Older people living in unsuitable housing face an even greater prospect of premature entry into residential aged care.⁷

Placing greater emphasis on building more social housing is critical. Australia has among the least amount of housing stock per adult in the developed world and is one of only a handful of developed countries where housing stock per capita has been stagnant over the past 20 years (Grattan Institute 2021). People are being squeezed out of the housing market into homelessness because social housing is not available to them.

We call on the ACT Government to provide sufficient safe and affordable housing for older Canberrans, facilitating capacity for ageing in place, proximity to facilities and transport, and integration with health and aged care services.

In doing so, we ask that the Government provides sufficient funding to:

- 2.1 Convene a symposium of housing experts, later in 2023 or early 2024, with the aim of piloting innovative housing models for older people and scaling up successful affordable housing pilots for older people. This meets the objectives of the Suburban Land Agency's *Housing Strategic Action Plan 2022* which includes several actions to further investigate innovative affordable housing models to meet the needs of older Canberrans.

¹ Insert (World Health Organization 1998a: 127).

² Insert (AHURI Positioning Paper No. 2. 2001; Gurran et al. 2021; Maclennan)

³ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. (2021) Ageing well in public housing, final report No. 369 https://www.ahuri.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021-11/AHURI-Final-Report-369-Ageing-well-in-public-housing_0.pdf

⁴ Power, E. (2018) Life as an older renter, and what it tells us about the urgent need for tenancy reform, *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/life-as-an-older-renter-and-what-it-tells-us-about-the-urgent-need-for-tenancy-reform-103842>

⁵ Power, E. (2020) 'Uprooting, no matter how small a plant you are, is a trauma': older women renters are struggling, *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/uprooting-no-matter-how-small-a-plant-you-are-is-a-trauma-older-women-renters-are-struggling-142907>

⁶ Kendig, H, Gong Hong C, Cannon, L and Browning, C. (2017) Preferences and Predictors of Ageing in Place: Longitudinal Evidence from Melbourne, Australia, *Journal of Housing for the Elderly*, 31(3), 259 – 271 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02763893.2017.1280582?journalCode=wjhe20#:~:text=ABSTR&text=This%20article%20reports%20older%20Australians,preference%20for%20aging%20in%20place.>

⁷ Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. (2021) A summary of the Final Report <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/final-report-executive-summary.pdf>



- 2.2 Deliver a mechanism for older social housing applicants to apply for social housing of their choice. Choice-based letting gives more control to the person who will live in the property leading to a more positive impact on outcomes for both the resident and the tenancy.
- 2.3 Ensure that all new housing and future renovations comply with Universal Design principles which allow for the wide spectrum of human abilities and aim to exceed minimum standards in meeting the needs of the greatest number of people. For example: access to services and public transport, disability access, modifications with barrier-free living solutions, inclusion of dementia design and aged care solutions, use of appropriate building products and assistive technologies including renewable energy.

3. Creating an Arts Festival led by and for older Canberrans

The ACT Government has the opportunity to be an Australian leader in initiating an Arts Festival shaped by, for and with older people. Such an Arts Festival would build on the ACT's track-record in delivering some of the biggest and boldest festivals in Australia. It would also enhance both the ACT Government's vision for Canberra as an inclusive, age-friendly city and its ambition for Canberra to be the Arts Capital of Australia. A festival dedicated to supporting the creative pursuits of older Canberrans has great potential to generate artistic production, stimulate cultural tourism, promote the arts as a mechanism for improved health and wellbeing and provide a platform for local creative businesses and organisations.

It is important to note that 55–64-year-olds living in the ACT have significantly higher participation in cultural activity than any other state and territory – 44.2% compared with the national average of 29.5%. In addition, our 65+ year olds also have high levels of cultural participation (37.7%), second only to Tasmania (39.1%), and nearly 10% higher than the national average (28.8%).⁸

Canberra is very well positioned to deliver an Arts Festival for older Canberrans. The ACT is home to many renowned established artists across a range of art forms. There are also a range of arts networks led by, for and with older people which provide stimulating and innovative learning and practising opportunities.

The arts greatly enhance the lives of older people on multiple fronts,⁹ and older people's participation in the arts is a major contributor and gift to the broader community.

This festival would focus on supporting the role of the arts for older people and fostering participation, agency, legacy and inspiration. Importantly, the festival would challenge discriminatory assumptions and enhance the visibility of older Canberrans, a cohort that is commonly and harmfully associated with "invisibility".¹⁰

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistic. (2019) Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues and Events, Australia <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/attendance-selected-cultural-venues-and-events-australia/latest-release>

⁹ Cohen, G. (2006). Research on creativity and aging: The positive impact of the arts on health and illness. *Generations*, 30(1), 7-15; Bellazzecca, E., Teasdale, S., Biosca, O., & Skelton, D. A. (2022). The health impacts of place-based creative programmes on older adults' health: A critical realist review. *Health & Place*, 76, 102839; Evans, S. C., Bray, J., & Garabedian, C. (2022). Supporting creative ageing through the arts: the impacts and implementation of a creative arts programme for older people. *Working with Older People*, 26(1), 22-30.

¹⁰ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2021) What's age got to do with it? A snapshot of ageism across the Australian lifespan.



In consideration of the above, this festival would underpin many of the ACT Wellbeing Indicators – access and connectivity; economy; education and lifelong learning; health; identity and belonging, safety, social connection and time. Importantly, the lead-in to the festival, including organisation, network and relationship building and formation of connections across discipline and sectors would have as much (if not more) impact as the festival itself, building connection, capacity and opportunity.

With funding of between \$150, 000 to \$200, 000 per annum over 2023-2024 and 2024-2025, the Arts Festival would be able to engage a director and project manager, establish a working group, offer seed funding for agreed projects/artists and commence a marketing strategy for its inaugural event.

It is envisaged that the first Festival would focus on existing activities already being undertaken in our arts communities and institutions. This would utilise a decentralised model located in key districts, thus improving accessibility and inclusivity, with a view to continuation and expansion in future years based on evaluation.

The Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing (MACA) is leading the community conversation for the Arts Festival, bringing to the fore their expertise in the local creative industries, visual and performing arts scenes. To this end, MACA is currently building a network of local creatives and research experts in arts and ageing to oversee the advocacy and planning for this Arts Festival.

4. Doubling the Seniors Grants Program

The Seniors Grants Program provides \$80, 000 annually to grassroots programs and projects of great benefit to older Canberrans. The program is consistently popular, over-subscribed and has not had an increase in funding for over 5 years.

MACA believes that the grant should be doubled at least.

Increasing the capacity of the Seniors Grants supports a host of capacity building, empowerment, inclusion and participation activities and programs for older Canberrans. The Grants provides a means for community members to lead on initiatives that make Canberra more age friendly. It also provides a valuable opportunity for the Government to enhance its capacity to communicate with a wide variety of communities at the grass-roots level.

MACA members serve annually on the assessment panel and are privy to the high number of impressive proposals which are unable to be funded, not due to lack of suitability, but due to constrained resource. Projects delivered through the program to date have been highly impactful and beneficial for many older Canberrans.

5. Enhancing intergenerational connection and workforce capability through Gold Soul

The Intergenerational live-in program, also known as the Gold Soul Companionship program (Gold Soul), innovated by the University of Sydney pairs allied health students in a residential (*not clinical*) placement at a local residential aged care facility.

Gold Soul has been found to support the development of close-knit onsite intergenerational communication, create opportunities for residents to explore a broader range of activities and facilitate cultural exchange between residents and students. Importantly the program boosts the



capability and confidence of allied health students in working with older people. This is particularly critical in view of aged care workforce shortages.

The University of Canberra can deliver a one-year pilot of the program for \$40, 000. The University of Canberra has developed a sound plan to implement this program. The Gold Soul project will sit within the UC Faculty of Health. Executive Dean Michelle Lincoln is supportive of the program and was involved in its development during her time at the University of Sydney.

An academic staff member will manage the program implementation and first cohort during the first year. The UC Ageing Research Group will evaluate the program. Ageing Research Group leaders Distinguished Professor Diane Gibson, Assistant Professor Nathan D’Cunha, Associate Professor Stephen Isbel, and Associate Professor Kasia Bail will design the evaluation and be responsible for its completion. This initiative will also provide the opportunity for an Honours or Masters student project.

6. Protecting the rights of retirement village residents and aged care residents through expanding the Official Visitors Scheme

The ACT Official Visitor Scheme (OVS) provides independent oversight of services for people in government institutions and community facilities who are dependent on service providers or accommodation managers for support. The OVS protects the human rights of vulnerable people by facilitating their access to an independent complaints process and providing improved oversight of the accommodation and services they are dependent on. The OVS is accessible to [entitled persons](#) at [visitable places](#) across corrections, mental health, disability, children and young people (C&YP) and homelessness sectors.

The OVS currently supports seniors through their engagement in services related to corrections, mental health, disability, C&YP and homelessness. However, there is no specific function to support seniors as a cohort, who are living in retirement villages and in receipt of aged care and receiving ACT government services in one form or another.

MACA recommends the extension of the Official Visitor Scheme to supplement existing programs in providing independent oversight of services for older residents who are who are dependent on service providers in various personal care settings including residential care, retirement villages, home and community care and flexible care. This recommendation has been made in light of the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety which found extensive examples of substandard care occurring in both “routine areas of care, like food, medication management and skin care, as well as in complex care, such as the management of chronic conditions, dementia or palliation”. The Report stated that “substandard care can also take the form of deliberate acts of harm and forms of abuse—including physical and sexual abuse and abuse from inappropriate restrictive practices”.



Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing

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In conclusion, we believe the 2023-2024 ACT Government Budget is a timely budget for significant and dedicated initiatives to advance the wellbeing of older Canberrans. We commend the above proposals for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Prue Power".

Sincerely,

Prue Power AM, Chair
Dr Cathy Hope, Deputy Chair
Louise Bannister
Jo Cochrane
Christine Leopardi
Jenny Mobbs

Philip Piggin
Wendy Prowse
Charlie Sage
Thi Nha Train
Jane Timbrell
Juliette Spurrett

Members of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing