

Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing



MACA - 2024 Budget Submission

18 March 2024

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

As members of the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing (MACA), we are writing in the context of the forthcoming ACT Government 2024-2025 Budget to submit a set of priorities which reflect a deep understanding of our constituency. If accepted by the ACT Government, these initiatives would create a more interconnected society, harness the economic value of the older cohort for Canberrans, address social isolation and nutritional challenges among older adults and improve the overall wellbeing of both older Canberrans and the broader ACT community. We note that endorsement of this budget submission by the ACT Youth Advisory Council is acknowledgement of this wider impact.

These priorities will also:

- position Canberra as a global leader in the World Health Organisation's [Decade of Healthy Ageing](#) (2021-2030);
- enhance the Government's [Age-Friendly City Plan](#), underpinning its aim "to be a place where everyone has equal opportunities, is supported, and connected to the community and our natural environment..... a place where growing older is celebrated and supported";
- support the [ACT Wellbeing Framework](#) with its overall goal of ensuring personal growth and community cohesion; and
- respond to the [ACT Government's Economic Development Priorities](#) (2022-25) to "partner in sharing and shaping the future of Canberra and fulfilling its ambitions" via their cross-industry and cross-sector partnerships.

Other relevant ACT legislation which has guided MACA's Budget priorities include:

- [Re-envisioning Older Persons Mental Health and Wellbeing in the ACT Strategy](#)
- [ACT Health Workforce Strategy](#)
- [ACT Preventative Health Plan](#)
- [Third Action Plan of the Women's Plan](#)

The priorities are listed below and detailed in the following pages:

1. Food as a Healthy Social Connection - listening, cooking and eating
2. Creativity between the Generations – an intergenerational mentoring program
3. Age Friendly Cities and Communities Australian and New Zealand Network
4. MACA Community Forum (x 2 per year)

5. A Symposium to formulate effective strategies to provide innovative, affordable and appropriate housing for older Canberrans
6. Seniors Grants Program – increased resources
7. Office for Seniors and Veterans Secretariat – increased resources

As members of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, we commend all these programs to you.



Prue Power AM, Chair

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Priorities

1. Food as a Healthy Social Connection – sharing, cooking, and eating

Proposal

To establish a three-year cross-sector program to use food as a tool to improve health and bring positive social and environmental change in Canberra by bringing people together to learn, cook and eat together.

Objectives

1. To contribute to the reduction of loneliness and social isolation currently under examination by the Inquiry into Social Isolation and Loneliness in the ACT and improve social connectedness through our program;
2. To promote Healthier Choices Canberra and contribute to 3 of the 5 priority areas in The Healthy Canberra: ACT Preventative Health Plan 2020 – 2025:
 - supporting children and families;
 - increasing healthy eating;
 - promoting healthy ageing;
3. To support a more climate resilient environment and community through promotion of the circular economy, food security and reducing food waste;
4. To design and deliver this program via a cross-sector partnership involving Government, the university sector, NGOs and the Canberra community.

Reference: ACT Wellbeing Framework Domains

Personal Wellbeing	Living Standards	Economy
Health	Social Connection	
Identity and Belonging	Environment and climate	

Background

Objective 1

The World Health Organisation identifies loneliness and social isolation as a significant and growing global health risk, with young people, older adults and ethnic minorities more likely to experience these challenges. The reasons for social isolation are many and varied including inequality and deprivation as well as personal circumstances. The local impact of this health risk led the ACT Government to initiate an Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation in late 2023 to examine the prevalence of these health risks and to consider opportunities for programs to reduce social loneliness and social isolation.

Food sharing and food offering brings people closer, facilitates and strengthens social bonds, and fosters intergenerational and cross-cultural exchange.ⁱ Those who eat socially more often feel happier and are more satisfied with life, are more trusting of others, are more engaged with their local communities, and have more friends they can depend on for support.ⁱⁱ Food can bring people together, revealing commonalities, encouraging shared knowledge and wisdom, fostering cultural understanding and social connection while promoting healthy nutrition. Cooking together is also a powerful way to connect by developing relationship skills and roles—practising communication and collectively fostering other’s skills and actions. A 2023 study demonstrated the importance of cooking skills to improve social relationships and social capital.ⁱⁱⁱ

Objective 2

Good nutrition is essential to keeping current and future generations healthy across the lifespan. In 2021, 62.2 per cent of adult Canberrans reported being either overweight (35.5%) or obese (26.7%).^{iv} Children and adults who eat a healthy diet live longer and have a lower risk of obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers. Management of chronic disease through modification of behavioural risk factors, such as diet, affords an opportunity to improve disease outcomes in lieu of a medicine regime.^v The *Food as Healthy Social Connection* program would teach a healthy approach to food and cooking, building knowledge of nutrition and a healthy diet and promoting [Healthier Choices Canberra](#).

At the same time, food insecurity – or insufficient access to affordable and nutritious food – has increased in Australian households to 36 per cent in 2023, with affordability of balanced food/meals affected by the cost-of-living crisis.^{vi} The Australian Bureau of Statistics has reported that the price of meat and seafood has risen by 8 per cent over the past year, while the cost of dairy products has risen by 15 per cent. A survey of 1,054 people in January by Finder found 71 per cent of Australians have cut back on takeaway meals, meat and seafood due to rising prices. Welfare recipients say they are skipping meals and relying on donated produce. *Food as Healthy Social Connection* can make healthy, balanced meals regularly available to participants and their families.

Objective 3

Approximately 10 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions come from food produced and wasted.^{vii} In the ACT, around 26,000 tonnes of household food waste goes to landfill every year.^{viii} Food waste education programs can lead to positive behaviour change and food waste reduction.^{ix} *Food as Healthy Social Connection* can incorporate the ACT Government's [Less Food Waste: A Recipe for Good](#) to promote the reduction of food waste as a key program outcome.

Objective 4

The ACT Government mission is to support and encourage stronger cross-sector relationships for inclusive innovation.^x *Food as Healthy Social Connection* would draw on government and community sector expertise and programs, and higher education knowledge, research and evaluation capability to co-design, deliver and evaluate a quality pilot program with the potential for transferability and scalability. It is envisaged that the NGOs with existing food-related programs would be consulted with a view to integrating their activities into the program.

In this context, Canberra City Care, through its manager Randolph Albrecht, has given in principle agreement to partner “on this exciting and impactful program”. Canberra City Care has an established community centre in Charnwood, receiving over 500 visits per week from its diverse community demographic and community partner network that reaches across the ACT Region supporting over 1000 households facing a range of challenges including isolation and disadvantage. There is considerable capacity available for the program to utilise the community garden, food pantry and charity kitchen to support sharing, cooking and eating to enhance community connectivity and support. Other MACA community sector partners have also shown interest in participating in this program.

Estimated Cost: \$172,000 per year | \$516,000 over three years to establish a pilot program, including project manager and kitchen staff costs (part time), cost recovery, evaluation and education.

2. Creativity between the Generations – a pilot intergenerational mentoring program

Proposal

To establish a pilot program with the purpose of connecting older people as mentors with the younger generation (mentees) with the aim of sharing valuable knowledge and skills while strengthening social cohesion.

Reference: ACT Wellbeing Framework Domains

Personal Wellbeing	Living Standards	Education and life-long learning
Health	Social Connection	
Identity and Belonging	Economy	

Older Canberrans are among the most educated and civic-minded demographics in Australia and are a valuable community asset. Studies suggest that older Canberrans have better mental health on average than other members of the ACT community, which is an important capability in a period characterised by deteriorating mental health among younger generations.

Older Canberrans also live in a city with a government commitment to personal wellbeing, and which, research tells us, is bolstered by a rich ecosystem of personal and professional networks that contribute to wellbeing and pathways. At the same time, concerns about the rise of loneliness and social isolation are significant enough in the ACT to lead to the establishment of an [Inquiry into Social Isolation and Loneliness](#).

This timely proposal aims to utilise older Canberrans as a significant resource that can contribute to improved wellbeing by establishing a mentorship framework connecting older Canberrans with other members of the ACT community, as well as migrants to the ACT to retain talent.

Studies indicate significant success in programs where older adults are supporting younger people. The settings range from schools, community youth centres or other community settings. For example, schools are using older volunteers to help with gardening, cookery and environmental projects. Topics for mentoring also include maths, reading practice, art and music, sciences, health or cultural heritage. Other activities involve more hands-on mentoring such as mechanics (cars/motor bikes). The program can be used to help new migrants to the ACT better ‘make sense’ of, and settle, into Canberra.

All mentoring activities have the potential to provide a route into employment for the mentee.

Mentors report benefiting from their relationships with the mentee in several important ways including improvements in their physical health and quality of life. They note feeling better about themselves, gaining confidence, being more engaged in the community and having a sense of ‘giving something back’. Young people are often also an inspiration for the older mentor.

Even though we propose that this mentoring activity is undertaken by volunteers, effective outcomes for participants require adequate resources for program co-ordination, recruiting and inducting participants, safety measures and for meeting the costs incurred by all participants.

Estimated Cost: \$250,000 per year to establish a pilot program, including office and staff costs (for one staff plus remuneration).

3. Age Friendly Cities and Communities Australian & New Zealand Network

Proposal

To lead, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Government, the establishment of an Australian and New Zealand Age Friendly Cities and Communities Network with the aim of:

- promoting regional collaboration and knowledge-sharing, and
- creating an opportunity to impart this information on the world stage via the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Reference: ACT Wellbeing Framework Domains

Personal Wellbeing	Living Standards	Governance and Institutions
Health	Social Connection	Economy
Identity and Belonging	Environment and climate	

Background

The WHO Global Network for Age Friendly Cities and Communities was formed in 2010 as a response to global population ageing and rapid urbanisation. Canberra is one of 34 Australian and seven New Zealand cities and/or regions which have since joined this network.

The aim of age-friendly cities is to support healthy ageing and encourage full participation of older people in community life ([WHO Aged Friendly World Network website](#)). The Global Age Friendly Cities Guide proposes eight interconnected areas that identify and address potential barriers to the well-being and participation of older people. They are: 1) outdoor spaces and buildings; 2) transportation; 3) housing; 4) social participation; 5) respect and social inclusion; 6) civic participation and employment; 7) communication and information; and 8) community support and health services.

The Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities seeks to create more age-friendly cities by:

- inspiring change by showing what can be done and how it can be done;
- connecting cities and communities worldwide to facilitate the exchange of information, knowledge and experience; and
- supporting cities and communities to find appropriate innovative and evidence-based solutions.

In 2024 Canberra will deliver its second, and decadal, Age Friendly City Plan. It will do so in the context of its pioneering whole-of-jurisdiction Wellbeing Framework. As Australia's knowledge capital, Canberra is also home to inclusive, evidence-based healthy ageing hubs such as the [Centre for Ageing Research and Translation](#). We are, therefore, well positioned to establish the World Health Organisation's first Australian and New Zealand Age Friendly Cities and Communities Network to facilitate knowledge exchange and translation for better healthy ageing outcomes in the southern hemisphere. This would place Canberra on the global stage as an international leader in knowledge-led, age-friendly policy and programs.

Estimated Cost:

\$200,000 per year to establish a pilot program, including office and staff costs (for one person).

4. MACA Community Forum (x2 per year)

Proposal

To establish a MACA Community Forum to convene twice-yearly for the purpose of conveying relevant information to Canberra's citizens and key stakeholders on issues related to Government services, community-based facilities and university-based research pertaining to older Canberrans. The Forum would give a voice to older people and ensure their views are valued and taken into account in the decisions that ultimately affect them.

Reference: ACT Wellbeing Framework Domains

Governance and Institutions	Living Standards
Health	Social Connection
Identity and Belonging	Time

Background

The Age Friendly City Plan requires the ACT Government to listen to the diverse voices of the older population in developing its policies, programs and services. MACA is required to consult with stakeholders and community and disseminate information about MACA and relevant stakeholder work with community groups and individuals.

This Forum will facilitate an engaging, democratic, strengths-based and capacity building approach to this consultation and support an open, inclusive and dynamic dialogue with the community.

The topic and speakers for each Forum would be decided by MACA in collaboration with the Minister.

Issues for consultation and discussion would include:

- research projects and outcomes,
- the second Age Friendly City Plan and the MACA work plan,
- relevant Government legislation and inquiries,
- comparable initiatives in other jurisdictions or countries.

It is envisaged that the Forum would be promoted widely and be accessible both face-to-face and online as well as being videoed for future reference.

Estimated Cost:

\$16,000 per annum (\$8,000 per forum) for hire of facilities, promotion and coordination, secretariat services, catering etc.

5. A Symposium to formulate effective strategies to provide innovative, affordable and appropriate housing for older Canberrans

Proposal

To convene a Symposium of housing experts, later in 2024 or early 2025. The Symposium would formulate effective strategies to provide innovative, affordable and appropriate housing for older Canberrans, with a focus on proximity to facilities (eg shops and transport) and accessibility to health and aged care services, in order to facilitate greater capacity for ageing in place. 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.

Reference: ACT Wellbeing Framework Domains

Personal Wellbeing	Living Standards	Governance and Institutions
Health	Social Connection	Housing and home
Identity and Belonging	Environment and climate	Access and connectivity
Economy		

Background

It is indisputable that good quality, affordable housing is fundamental to physical, mental and social well-being, while poor living conditions increase stress, social isolation and increased risk of disease or injury.^{xi} However, there is a need for different housing options for people who do not yet require the higher level of care offered in a residential facility and wish to age in place, but are unable to afford essential modifications or to find appropriate alternative accommodation.

When ageing in place works, it is economically advantageous to governments and brings a decent quality of life to individuals, giving older people the support they need to live safely, independently, and comfortably, in the place they want, for as long as possible. In its 2019 report “What’s needed to make ageing in place work for older Australians”,^{xii} the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute found that between 78 and 81 percent of older Australians aged over 55 want to live in their own home as they age.

Ageing in place does require a home that is secure, affordable, and appropriate for an older, possibly frail, person. With Australia facing a housing affordability crisis, that is getting harder and harder to find. 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.^{xiii}

Those retired Australians who sold their home and moved to apartment living to downsize in preparation for ageing in place now face the very real burden of rising strata management fees. Being on a fixed income/pension means they cannot afford these escalating and ongoing costs which have in some cases doubled since the apartments were bought in the last 5 years. These residents are in a bind because there is nowhere cheaper that they can move to within the ACT.

The overall problem is exacerbated with a sizeable and growing minority of older Australians not owning their own home. While home ownership is positively associated with ageing in place, older renters or those living in unsuitable housing are more likely to experience premature entry into residential aged care.^{xiv} The Grattan Institute predicts that just two-thirds of retirees will own their homes by 2056, down from nearly 80 percent in 2020. Those in the private rental market are particularly vulnerable due to the likelihood of being on a fixed income (such as the pension),^{xv} the

increased risk of substandard accommodation which makes modifications difficult^{xvi} and the general instability of tenure.^{xvii}

Therefore, the MACA requests funding to convene a Symposium of housing experts, later in 2024 or early 2025. The Symposium would formulate effective strategies to provide innovative, affordable and appropriate housing for older Canberrans, with a focus on proximity to facilities (eg shops and transport) and accessibility to health and aged care services, in order to facilitate greater capacity for ageing in place.

Considerations should include:

- Scaling up successful affordable housing pilots and piloting innovative housing models for older people. Options such as housing cooperatives, expanded rental options in retirement villages, and co-housing models. These will involve government investment and intervention to pilot or expand existing options and to create a positive policy environment in which to innovate.
- Increasing investment in social and affordable housing on the basis that the private market does not provide an adequate supply of affordable and appropriate housing for older Australians.
- Mandating an annual external audit of strata finances including Strata Levies to ensure that strata levies are both adequate but not excessive and to create transparency around the actual strata manager fees.
- Assisting landlords to make appropriate modifications, including to implement energy efficient standards, and encourage compliance by establishing energy efficiency audits and retrofits for low-income rental households.
- Ensuring that all new housing and renovations comply with Universal Design principles, including energy efficiency standards, 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.

Estimated Cost: \$8,000, for hire of facilities, promotion and coordination, secretariat services, catering etc.

6. Seniors Grants Program – increased resources

Reference: ACT Wellbeing Framework Domains

Governance and Institutions	Living Standards	Time
Health	Social Connection	Economy
Identity and Belonging	Environment and climate	Personal Wellbeing

Proposal

To increase the funding to the Seniors Grant Program, on the basis that this program provides exciting opportunities to engage diverse communities at the grassroots through their innovative proposals which are of great benefit to older Canberrans.

Background

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 provide 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 because of limited resources.

The program is consistently popular, over-subscribed and has not had an increase in funding for over 5 years. Projects delivered through the program to date have been highly impactful and beneficial for many older Canberrans.

Estimated Cost:

\$160,000 per annum (up from \$80,000 per annum)

7. Office for Seniors and Veterans Secretariat – increased resources

Proposal

To fund an extra full-time staff member in the Office for Seniors and Veterans, Community Services Directorate in order to provide the necessary resources for the growing number of programs focused on the older Canberra population, including the second Age Friendly City Plan 2024+.

Reference: ACT Wellbeing Framework Domains

- Governance and Institutions

Background

According to the 2021 census data, almost 14 per cent of the ACT's population is aged 65+. As with all other jurisdictions, this cohort is growing, and governments are required to ensure policies and programs are appropriately focused to support safe and active ageing in the community.

The Office for Seniors and Veterans is promoted, on the ACT Government's website, as the pivotal resource for the ACT Government's programs for older citizens. This Office is responsible for ensuring the majority of the ACT Government's programs for the older cohort are coordinated and/or implemented. These programs are based on policies and activities designed to ensure Canberra's older communities can live free from abuse, stay mobile and socially connected, and can easily access services. A critical vehicle governing this activity is the Age Friendly City Plan.

The Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, also highlighted on the Government's website, is essential in providing grass-roots advice to the Government on policies and initiatives which support better outcomes for older Canberrans as well as specifically advising on the AFCP and its progress. The Council is highly dependent on the Office for providing its secretarial support.

The current Council (2021-24) developed a workplan as a strategic blueprint to guide its activities with an emphasis on developing policies which promote positive ageing across all settings in which older people live. It established working groups to underpin and progress its effort. This was organised under two main focus areas:

- 1) Older people are socially included and able to participate and be active in our communities and
- 2) Supports and services for older people to live well.

After three years, a very high level of productivity can be demonstrated in support of the ACT Government's priorities and goals for a cohesive and healthy community of older citizens.

Some examples of the wide range of initiatives which are supported by the Secretariat are:

Age Friendly City Plan

- Facilitating expert and community feedback to inform the progress of Canberra's AFCP, the development of the next Plan,
- Initiating a proposal for an Australian and New Zealand Network of Age Friendly Cities and Communities,
- Introducing standing MACA attendance at the six-monthly meetings of the AFCP Executive Sponsors and establishing a standing invitation for presentations from the Executive Sponsors.

Combating social isolation and creating a cohesive, dynamic community

- Securing ACT Government funding for
 - an ACT Seniors Arts Festival,

- an intergenerational live-in program to combat loneliness in ACT Residential Aged Care Facilities (Gold Soul),
- dementia friendly events, following support for a pilot (NFSA),
- Supporting Community Hubs, with a focus on utilising ACT Library resources,
- Initiating a project to combat isolation among the older Canberra community based on food - sharing, cooking, eating and growing.

Services and supports

- **Service gaps:** Initiating research into service gaps/unmet need among the older Canberra community,
- **Aged Care:** Providing representation on the Retirement Villages Working Group and advice on extending the Official Visitors Scheme to retirement villages and aged care facilities,
- **Housing:** Facilitating a joint position statement on housing from all Ministerial Advisory Councils and supporting a YWCA affordable housing project,
- **Health:** providing advice on accessibility of general health and mental health services for older people,
- **Seniors Card:** Providing advice to the review.

Information dissemination

- Initiating the concept of a MACA Community Forum as an opportunity to convey information about Government services, community-based facilities and/or relevant university-based research programs.

All twelve MACA members are volunteers, and most are not retired, so have busy lives. Therefore, this output, which is so valuable for the ACT Government, is not possible without the intelligent, expert and dedicated support and resources of the Office for Seniors and Veterans Secretariat. Currently, the resources are totally inadequate, creating the very real potential for the development of policies to be stalled, thus undermining the well-being of the older community.

MACA members unanimously agree that the Office for Seniors and Veterans needs significantly more resourcing but, as a first step, we seek another staff member to ensure that the important work of this Office, and of MACA, strengthens and grows.

Estimated Cost:

\$86K–\$94K per year plus oncosts (Senior Officer Grade C)

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- ^x Switched on Canberra: Mission 3 – Knowledge Based Economic Growth, Inclusive Innovation and Responsible Investment. <https://www.act.gov.au/cbr-switched-on/content/canberra-switched-on/mission-3-knowledge-based-economic-growth-inclusive-innovation-and-responsible-investment>
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