

COTA ACT Budget Submission

The Council on the Ageing (COTA) ACT welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the ACT Government's 2020-21 Budget Consultation process.

COTA ACT would like the ACT Government to consider the following recommendations for inclusion in the 2020-21 Territory Budget:

1. COTA ACT asks that the ACT Government give thought and support to the establishment of Seniors hubs in the southern suburbs of the ACT (Tuggeranong) and in a northern suburb of Canberra.
2. COTA ACT requests that as a result of the Age Friendly City planning that is currently taking place, that the contribution of older Canberrans to our community is recognised through a range of targeted supports and assistance points in across the city.
3. COTA ACT requests increased and ongoing funding from the ACT government for services that COTA ACT could add to their suite of services. In that way the access to information, services and supports for older Canberrans to engage in the community, to build resilience, to develop social connections and to remain largely independent and effectively support themselves to live a good and fulfilling life will increase.

We would be happy to meet at any time to discuss this submission further or to provide more detail on any of the issues below.

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Background

Canberra is a city built by many of our older Canberrans. In 1950, Canberra was home to fewer than 20,000 people, and now the city is preparing for a population of more than 500,000 by 2030.

According to 2016 Census data, 12.5% of Canberrans are aged 65 years and over. This is about 50,000 people – and this number will continue to grow.

We recognise the increasing number and proportion of Canberrans who are older as an asset to our city. At the same time we recognise the responsibility to ensure our city's services, healthcare, culture and infrastructure meet the needs of older people.



The Age-Friendly City Survey in 2018 from the ACT government – assisted in its distribution by COTA ACT and circulated at both the Chief Minister’s Concert and at the Seniors Expo with 768 responses. The survey asked older Canberrans to share their views and experiences on what was working well and what needed to improve. It also highlighted the active role older Canberrans play in the territory when they work, volunteer, assist family and friends and undertake advisory roles. Older Canberrans have the highest rates of volunteering and caring nationally and are the most educated in the country.

The results indicated we need to better value the experience and knowledge of older people. 29% of respondents said they had been subject to age-based discrimination, including being made to feel invisible or underestimated often when shopping or in the workplace.

Many respondents identified housing and transport as priority areas for older Canberrans. They indicated there is a need for more ground level, single storey, affordable housing options close to transport and amenities.

They also indicated the importance of readily available and accessible public transport and parking as well as safe walkways.

As the ACT Minister for Seniors and Veterans stated: We all have a role to play to grow Canberra as an inclusive city that values the contributions and involvement of older Canberrans.

Older Canberrans are recognised as valued members of our community and must be enabled to lead productive and active lives as they age. COTA ACT would like to step in to support this approach to life and build in resilience for older people in maintaining social connections and well-being.

How can COTA ACT contribute?

COTA ACT is the peak organisation for all issues relating to older Canberra citizens, seniors, those of mature age and their families. It is an independent organisation working to protect and promote the well-being, rights and interests of all older people in the ACT. We cover all aspects of the journey of growing older and support the ACT Government proposal to make Canberra an Age Friendly city.

Over the years COTA ACT has been active in identifying gaps in services and policies for older Canberrans and programs have then been developed in response to identified needs. Part of the response has been in ensuring that appropriate and effective structures are developed.

COTA ACT has been involved in the development of more than a dozen service groups and organisations in the ACT. These include Meals on Wheels, Home Help, Handy Help, Carers ACT, SHOUT, Community Options and The University of the Third Age (U3A).

COTA ACT uses surveys, forums and focus groups to assess gaps and develop information materials and policies. In recent years we have undertaken research and sought member feedback on a number of issues including election priorities, medical services, transport and road safety.

What COTA currently does to support an Age Friendly City

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

COTA ACT offers a range of programs, services, seminars, information sessions, events and research projects which advocates for, meets the needs of, and engages the interests of older Canberrans.

As a member of several ACT government standing committees COTA ACT has ongoing input into the work of government.

COTA ACT provides a range of direct services which are partly supported through membership contributions. These services include:

- Providing advice and referrals to individuals on a wide range of issues through the Seniors Information Line, which receives over 1,400 calls per month – that is over 50 calls each working day.

- Coordinating a range of events, including information sessions, workshops and ACT Seniors Week.
- Publishing and distributing a range of information resources.
- Assisting older people to access appropriate housing and aged care, through our Housing Options Advisory service.
- Administering the ACT Seniors Card Directory and the ACT Seniors Card scheme.
- Publishing advice for older drivers, through the Older Drivers' Handbook and A Guide to Getting around Canberra.
- Offering health and lifestyle information through our Community Education programs.
- Speaking to community groups and the public on a range of topics.

In addition to the resources above, COTA ACT also produces a number of publications, including the ACT Seniors Card Discount Directory, and a wide range of brochures on topics of interest to seniors such as social activities, fitness programs, home care support, transport and others.

Budget Proposal

COTA ACT currently has one office in the Hughes Community Centre which is in a southern suburb of Canberra.

We propose that COTA ACT – with ACT government support sets up several Seniors Hubs – or outreach services to assist older Canberrans to access information and support that is not currently available in their local area, beginning with one in Tuggeranong and another in the northern suburbs of Canberra.

The Seniors Hub is an initiative that would bring together local seniors and seniors-serving organizations to ensure that ACT communities are places where seniors can thrive. We are in negotiation with a few community organisations for a working space but need assistance with technology, furniture, storage and staffing.

The spaces managed by COTA ACT would provide a Seniors' **information 'hub'** that will enhance awareness of local programs and services as currently provided at the COTA ACT office in Hughes. It would also provide leadership in identifying gaps in service delivery and generate community support for seniors' issues. It would aim to connect older Canberrans with services, with each other, with those who could provide accurate information and assistance and in all, build independence and resilience in older people in Canberra.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics data estimates 3.3 million people in Australia are aged 65 years and over with approximately 200,000 older Australians live in retirement villages, while almost the same number live in nursing homes.

This indicates that 82 per cent of older Australians are living in private dwellings – living in their original family home, a downsized home or with family. COTA ACT knows that most

older Canberrans have that desire to stay in their own home and if not, at least to stay in the community that they know and have socialised in over many years.

The Seniors' information hubs would help meet growing demand for seniors with the Australian population aged over 65 expected to hit 5.8 million by 2031.

Interestingly somewhere between 3500 to 5000 people in Australia are over 100 years of age and 2050 there will be 20-30,000 Australians who will be over the age of 100. We are living longer and we are living better. Organisations like COTA ACT enable people to fully realise the opportunities and find enjoyment in life. COTA promotes the concept that we should not be limited by a mindset that if we are over 60 we're old – because we are not.

We are learning that Australia is not able to provide enough traditional retirement and aged care home arrangements and services to meet current demand, let alone contemplate future forecasts.

So, one of the key characteristics of a Seniors information hub would be to build upon existing community assets and networks. Through a coordinated network, participating seniors would have access to a wide range of vetted, trusted, discounted and affordable services such as household repairs, home care services and personal trainers. This information is supported by the work that has gone into developing the 2019-2021 ACT Seniors Discount Directory.

COTA ACT proposes working with local Men's Sheds and Volunteering ACT to set up more volunteer support networks which would offer personal support and services like transportation, gardening and friendly visitors. We envisage a buddy system so seniors can share information, do small tasks for each other and look out for each other.

COTA ACT relies on the untiring support of a reliable cohort of trained volunteers who assist with many tasks including meeting and talking with older Canberrans who want information and who may need help with systems – legal, advice about elder abuse, transport information, age care and other services.

Despite the ACT having the highest rate of volunteerism in the country, it is imperative that the region does not become complacent with this good fortune.

The ageing population, combined with an increasingly insecure workforce, will likely see a significant cohort of the ACT's volunteer population retire, without new talent to replace them.

We need to ensure that the current volunteers in Canberra are well trained and are available to assist in the work of COTA ACT.

Social connections and engagement through group and learning activities such as health and wellness programs, recreation and educational activities, tool lending library and group trips could also be progressed with the assistance of a sound group of volunteers, supported by COTA ACT staff members

It is simply all about ageing well in place, with all the benefits and comforts of home, and at an affordable cost, so Canberra truly becomes an Age Friendly city. COTA ACT would aim to build a more responsive and resilient community of seniors through collective action and support from the community sector and their own communities

COTA ACT acknowledges that it receives support, including funding, from the ACT Government. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with the ACT Government, our members, and other partners, to advance Age Friendly approaches to life and more access to community information in the Canberra Region. COTA ACT welcomes the opportunity to provide further information and evidence to support the recommendations in this submission.

What would be the Seniors Information hub Structure?

- **Partner Organizations**

Canberra has many community organisations which serve seniors well and which have an interest in collaborating with others to support seniors in their community.

COTA ACT would host a quarterly meeting to share information about resources and assets, identify emerging issues, and collaborate on building a range of integrated services for seniors. They could serve on committees to act on identified issues and represent the Seniors' Information Hub to the public and various constituencies. Partners could include public entities, non-profits, and faith-based organizations that provide services for seniors, much as currently happens on the Elder Abuse Prevention Working Group hosted by COTA ACT.

- **The Hub Facilitator**

The hub facilitator will coordinate activities of the partner organizations, and other ACT committees. The facilitator will provide administrative and communications support and ensure that activities of the various groups are coherent, communicated, and on track.

Benefits of a Seniors Information Hub

- Local people and neighbours, doing activities together, enjoying each other's company and giving and receiving help when we need it.
- Opportunities to explore intergenerational activities and support.
- Strengthening local communities by being active contributors to the wellbeing of ourselves and of the community.
- Stimulated by learning new skills, including through participating in organized activities
- Saving money when using services (eg trades people, transport)
- Convenience of easy access to help; local services and activities on the doorstep

Strategic Priorities

- A well-managed, sustainable, lean, accountable strategy that will work for a large part of the Canberra population
- Wide range of activities and services for locally older Canberrans
- Promotion and marketing– develop a strong reputation; website; feature articles in major and free newspapers.

A Seniors' Information Hub can:

- Prevent social isolation/ assist community development/strengthen social capital (community, solidarity, care and friendship networks) and build a civil society (an active participatory citizenry)
- Provide an effective means for gaining appropriate and accessible community services for disadvantaged people
- Counter some of the adverse effects of poverty and unemployment, the latter, for example, through the promotion of domestic and community economies and the building of people's knowledge, skills and employability
- Link locality based work with broader ideas and values, e.g. 'strategies reflecting the intersections between economic and social justice values – inclusion, co-operation, respect for difference, equality in relationships, sharing of resources, social isolation
- Founded on public health principles – health promotion, which emphasises participation and involvement and can be linked to saving the public purse through prevention of the chronic illnesses that beset older age
- Social enterprise

Summary

There is a tangible need in Canberra for the services a Seniors Information Hub would provide. A program of this nature would work best through a collaboration between community groups, with support from the ACT Government. COTA ACT is ideally placed to establish, coordinate and host this model of services. COTA ACT would draw on existing connections, resources, knowledge and expertise to ensure the prompt establishment of services and smooth running of the program.

COTA ACT would welcome further discussions of this proposal and any support the ACT Government can offer to develop this much needed solution in working towards an 'Age Friendly City' in Canberra.