ANNUAL REPORT 2017 - 18

COTA
For older Australians

ABOUT **COTA**

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

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WELCOME

The Annual Report provides an opportunity to highlight what has been important for me and for COTA ACT in the last year.

During the past year, COTA ACT delivered a suite of successful programs and events including the very successful ACT Seniors Week. The Seniors Week program has been progressively improved over recent years with 2018 being the best yet for COTA ACT. The launch of the 2017-19 Seniors Card Discount Directory and expanded promotion of the ACT Seniors Card program, including an updated website and regular email updates, has resulted in impressive growth of ACT Seniors Card applications.

This past financial year, COTA ACT included an enhanced role in policy formulation, a broader involvement in project areas and commenced preparations for change of emphasis in the organisation nationally. This has been achieved without diminishing the performance in delivering essential core local programs.

We had some changes to the COTA ACT Board with three long-serving directors, Elizabeth Grant, Sue Jordan and Fergus Thomson, who had all made significant contributions to the organisation over many years, retire prior to the last AGM. Rick Lord, Bruce Shaw, Paul Feldman and I continued or renewed our roles. New appointees to the Board at the last AGM were Jean Geise, Richard Cumpston, Ruth Martin, Kirsten Cross and Tony Chase. As the year progressed Bruce Shaw resigned due to an interstate move, Tony Chase and Rick Lord also resigned as directors so we continued the rest of the term with six directors who met at bi-monthly meetings. Fergus Thomson agreed to represent COTA ACT on the ACT Law Society Elder Law and Succession Law Committee.

COTA ACT has continued strong involvement in developing a new national focus for all state and territory COTAs to enhance COTA's role in meeting future needs and interests of older Australians. COTA ACT continued to contribute to the COTA Federation, including the definitions of a new 'purpose' for future modes of operation and was successful in fostering the establishment of the COTA Federation Council to progress future developments.

In the meantime we concentrate of local activities and the delivery of advice and services to the local community. The complete 'big picture' of national issues assists us to provide better services to our members and constituents and we will increasingly seek to share in the great work done by the other state and territory COTAs.

A more rounded understanding of national issues assists us to provide better services to our constituents and we will increasingly seek to share in the great work done by other COTAs.

We realise that a more broadly focused COTA ACT will be better placed to represent the growing population of senior Canberrans. We expect that seniors in the future will most likely be more motivated to exercise greater control over their lives.

To comply with this new "direction" COTA ACT will need to consider further changes to align with the directions to be adopted by COTAs nationally. COTA ACT will adopt a more entrepreneurial focus to assist in the growth of the organisation.

I wish to thank the Board members who retired at, and since the 2017 AGM, the ongoing directors and the new directors who all contributed to improving the performance and status of COTA ACT during the year. I express my appreciation of the efforts of CEO Jenny Mobbs and her staff who managed, through dedicated effort and enthusiasm, to surpass efforts of previous years. Thank you to all the volunteers whose valuable contributions and expertise enable COTA ACT to provide vital information on a large and growing range of often complex issues to Canberra seniors and older citizens.

It is a pleasure to be associated with an organisation that delivers a diverse and essential range of information and support services to the community.

Ewan Brown
President

FROM THE CEO

COTA ACT has worked hard over the years to create opportunities by engaging with older Canberrans to understand their aspirations and needs. By providing information and education we empower older Canberrans with information to stay in control, make good decisions and plan ahead.

COTA ACT has sought to influence decision makers with the involvement of our policy committee members and staff on key committees and by making submissions to Government. We prepared, and lodged, submissions in a number of areas including housing, transport, aged care and health.

Of course housing, health and retirement incomes continue to be high on the list of important issues in the ACT. Our policy priorities have guided our advocacy over the year and will continue to be important as we share the strong message of ageing well in the ACT. You will see later in this report the extensive range of community groups that COTA ACT participates in on a regular basis. It constantly surprises me when I see the wide range of issues we cover and advise on each month and throughout the year.

Like any community organisation, we at times focus on the financial stability and well-being of COTA ACT. We have followed a few courses of action to diversify our funding sources and to ensure that we have sufficient core capacity to be successful in attracting funds for key projects and priorities. Over the past year we have been successful in our applications for a number of grants to diversify our work. We received grants from Hands Across Canberra (to get COTA ACT out to shopping centres and connect with more older people), Adult Community Education (ACE) – Return to Work for Mature People in Canberra, and an ACT government Veterans and Seniors Grant to assist seniors to explore IT and polish up their computer skills.

We also thank the Canberra community and business organisations who sponsored the many events held during Seniors Week. It was a great week with so many successful events which are detailed in a separate section of the Annual Report.

My heartfelt thanks goes to the COTA ACT staff members who have become a wonderful creative group supporting each other to make services and life better for the ageing population. Our Seniors Card Scoop which goes out to ACT Seniors Card holders every three months provides card holders with a wide range of information on concessions that are available to them, along with up-to-date information on government services. It also updates the new business inclusions into the Seniors Discount Directory.

Our new Little Library has this year allowed many senior Canberrans to borrow a book or two and when finished to return it or another book in its place. This has brought people together and at times the foyer sounds like an informal book club as people discuss authors and plots of a story.

Our work is tough at times and it is made easier by the collective smiles, laughs and shared stories. These make a huge difference when we face tough situations and hear challenging lived experiences of some of our more vulnerable people who find their way to our door or take the time to call us about their concerns.

Grandparents play an important role in the lives of children and their families. Last year COTA ACT partnered with Playgroups ACT to celebrate ACT Grandparents Day. We shared a delightful morning at the Park and Play area opposite Franklin Early Childhood School and are hoping to build on this small beginning to extend the Day to a Week sharing International Children's Week.

Volunteers are COTA's greatest asset. You have so much to give and we really benefit from your wisdom and efforts. The work of our administrative volunteers and the policy committee and Board members is invaluable.

Thanks to all Board members for their service and support.

Jenny Mobbs
Chief Executive Officer

Calls taken on the Seniors Information Line
13,745

Increase in ACT Seniors Card holders
19%

Seniors Cards issued
10,860

Attendees at ACT Seniors Week events
6,000+

COTA ACT IN 2017-18

As the peak body for older people in Canberra, COTA ACT works with older people, their families and their carers to advocate for their rights and interests and improve well-being.

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

The ACT Budget, handed down in June 2018, had expectations of an investment for older Canberrans, but it proved to be modest, with only a few initiatives specifically aimed to improving support and services to older Canberrans.

The 2018 Federal Budget included a major budget package called More Choices for a Longer Life. The package is designed to support Australians to be prepared to live a healthy, independent and safe life, through a range of measures. However, more measures to assist with housing affordability and action addressing the oral/dental needs of older Australians would have also been welcomed.

The escalating costs of living, particularly rates and energy costs, remain major concerns for older Canberrans, particularly those on fixed incomes. Changes to public transport in the near future, suitable housing, and the health system, are issues that remain constant focus areas of our work.

POLICY, ADVOCACY AND ENGAGEMENT

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. We do research to gather the information we need to put the case for improvement.

The COTA ACT Policy Committee underwent changes in its membership in 2017-18. It welcomed three new members to replace members who had resigned or taken extended leave from the Committee. The Committee undertook a review of its Terms of Reference and identified its policy priorities for 2017 -2018.

COTA ACT and the Policy Committee have worked on a wide range of issues, including:

- Reviewing the outcomes of the ACT Active Ageing Framework 2015-18 and making suggestions that may apply to any future Framework
- Monitoring the implementation of the Light Rail Network, particularly safety concerns for older people using this service. The Policy Committee and COTA ACT have advocated for the inclusion of a stop at the Canberra Hospital in the planned route for Stage 2 of the Light Rail system.
- Participating in the extensive consultation process on the future on the ACT Health services
- Advocacy for specific improvements to palliative care in the ACT and contribution to the Inquiry into End of Life Choices in the ACT
- Contributing to consultations on housing choices in the ACT and updating the COTA ACT policy position on Housing
- Shaping an ACT office for Mental Health
- Impacts of National Mental Health Reforms and the NDIS on Mental Health Peaks
- Actsmart Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme stakeholder Forum

With input from the Policy Committee, COTA ACT has prepared submissions to the:

- ACT Legislative Assembly Select Committee Inquiry into End of Life Choices in the ACT. In May 2018, COTA ACT was invited to appear at the public hearing on this issue.
- ACT Government consultation on the Housing Choices Discussion Paper
- ACT Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services Inquiry into the future sustainability of health funding in the ACT
- ACT Inquiry into the Sustainability of Health Funding in the ACT
- ACT Stage Two Light Rail Route in the ACT – Planning Considerations
- ActewAGL Five Year Plan
- Age Friendly Suburbs in the ACT
- ACT Government on the Developing the National Plan on Elder Abuse Consultation Paper

COTA ACT has also provided input to COTA Australia on a number of national issues including the:

- Senate Inquiry into the Quality of Care in Residential Aged Care Facilities in Australia
- Senate Inquiry into financial and tax practices for-profit aged care providers
- Senate Inquiry into the need for regulation of mobility scooters
- Australian Energy Market Commission Rule Change request "Strengthening protections for Customers in Hardship".
- The Future of Work and Workers
- The Third Review of Disability Standards for Transport.

ENGAGEMENT WITH COTA AUSTRALIA AND OTHER STATE AND TERRITORY COTAS

COTA ACT continues to work with COTA Australia and other state and territory COTAs on issues of national importance. COTA ACT representatives attended COTA Australia National Policy Council meetings in November 2017 and June 2018.

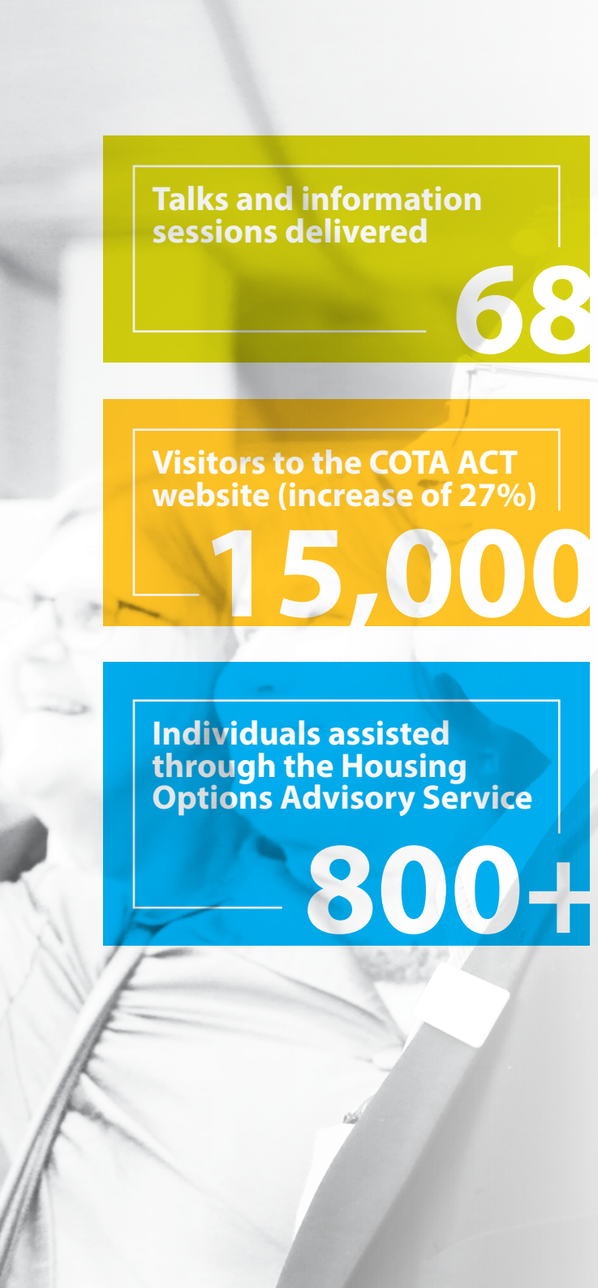
COTA ACT Policy Committee members and staff also participated in the 2018 National Policy Forum on ***Older Consumers: Choice, Challenges and Rights in Changing Markets*** in June 2018. COTA ACT was also represented on the planning working group and presented in two Forum sessions.

COTA ACT has two representatives participating in the COTA Energy Advocacy Project, which aims to train and support COTA volunteers and COTA staff to represent the views, experiences and needs of older consumers in formal consumer forums, including consumer reference groups for energy corporations. As part of this project, COTA ACT representatives participated in a National workshop in July 2017 and hosted two ACT workshops.

RELATIONSHIPS/STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

COTA ACT hosts bi-monthly meetings of the ACT Elder Abuse Prevention Network, to share information and support organisations dealing with elder abuse situations, elder abuse prevention and victim support. The Network comprises approximately 30 representatives of government and non-government organisations.

COTA ACT has registered as a ***Be Connected*** network partner. ***Be Connected*** is an Australian Government initiative aimed at increasing the confidence skills and online safety of older Australians in using digital technology. The ***Be Connected*** Network is a national network of community organisations who will support older Australians to thrive in a digital world.



Talks and information sessions delivered

68

Visitors to the COTA ACT website (increase of 27%)

15,000

Individuals assisted through the Housing Options Advisory Service

800+

COTA ACT IN THE COMMUNITY

COTA ACT SERVICE PROVISION

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

We were successful in obtaining a number of small grants which assisted us to deliver successful events and projects such as Seniors Week, COTA Pop-Ups, Mature Aged Workers program and computer skills classes.

SENIORS INFORMATION LINE

COTA ACT provides a telephone and face to face advisory service at our office in the Hughes Community Centre, as well as at a number of external locations we visit during the year. 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 and more.

In 2017-18 the Seniors Information Line provided 13,745 instances of assistance to older people and their families, which was a 7% increase on the previous year. 36% of these calls were directly related to Seniors/MyWay Cards.

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. In 2017-18 we developed a new database and design for our brochures, with completion scheduled for mid-2018.

In early 2017-18 we launched the latest ***ACT Seniors Card Discount Directory*** which details hundreds of discounts on goods and services from ACT businesses for Seniors Card holders. It is anticipated more than 25,000 of these directories will be distributed over the next 18 months.

COTA ACT LITTLE LIBRARY

Earlier this year COTA ACT started a ***little library*** book exchange out of the Hughes Community Centre.

Our Little Library has received donations of thousands of books over the year – with the shelves regularly stocked with hundreds of titles ranging from new releases, to cook books, biographies, historical books and more!

With hundreds of people passing through the Hughes Community Centre each day the library has been extremely popular, with staff regularly restocking the shelves and taking donations of new books.

NETWORKING AND COMMUNITY

COTA ACT continues to be actively involved in the community, attending a number of events including the Hearing Awareness Expo, World Cancer Day, Volunteering Expo, Mental Health Expo, Elder Abuse Day and at the opening of the University of Canberra Rehabilitation Hospital.

We were active in a number of awareness days including Neighbour Day, Grandparents Day, Scams Awareness Week, Elder Abuse Week, Safer Internet Day, National Diabetes Week, Dementia Awareness Month, National Carers Week and National Pain Week.

We continue to speak to a range of community groups about all issues relating to older people, including housing as we age, changes to aged care, home care packages, Seniors Cards, retirement villages, housing options and information on COTA ACT. During 2017-18 we spoke to 68 groups reaching in excess of 1,500 people.

COTA ACT was actively involved with Canberra Metro and Transport Canberra in promoting their Light Rail Safety in preparation for the completion of the light rail corridor in late 2018. We were

invited, and attended, a light rail bus tour, getting information on the building of the tracks, the vehicles and how the stops would operate. We also worked with Transport Canberra to ensure older people were represented in feedback on changes to public transport and on stage two of the light rail route.

COTA ACT participated in a number of networks, forums and consultations, including the Gender Equity Forum, Play Symposium, Tuggeranong Town Square stakeholders consultation, Transforming Communities Partnership (relocation of Housing ACT tenants), Northern Sector Networking, Cross Sector Networking (Southside), future of ACT Health services, impacts of National Mental Health Reforms and the NDIS on Mental Health Peaks, Accessibility and Design Consumer Reference Group (Health Care Consumers), Joint Pathways (ACT homelessness sector), Canberra and Region Aged Services Network, Elder Abuse Prevention Network, LINCT: Linking Into New Communities Taskforce, Retirement Villages Act Review Advisory Group, Actsmart Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme, ACT Healthcare Consumers Health of Older People Reference Group, ACT Law Society – Elder Law and Succession Law Committee, Evo energy Consumer Representative Council, ACT Property Community facilities working group, Community Transport Working Group, ACT Road Safety Education Strategy 2018-2025, the Environment and Planning Forum, Streetwise project at the Woden shopping centre and the Active Transport Advisory Group.

In November 2017 we launched our Christmas appeal where we partnered with GIVIT to collect the gifts for under privileged children in Canberra. Our appeal was successful in providing gifts for more than 30 children who would otherwise go without at Christmas.

We built relationships with a number of new organisations including the Play Activation Network, LDK and Canberra Metro.

As well as continued working with organisations such as Health Care Consumers Association, St Andrews, Woden Seniors, My HeartBeats, ADACAS, North Belconnen Day Care, Beyond Bank, ActewAGL, Canberra City News, the Canberra Times, University of the Third Age, WIN News, Goodwin Aged Care, Northside Community Services, Canberra Seniors and the Flexible Bus Service.

WORKSHOPS AND INFORMATION SESSIONS

COTA ACT coordinates and presents a number of workshops and information sessions for older people. In 2017-18 these have included:

- Driving and Health Workshop
- Beyond Bank Retirement information session
- Care Financial workshop on finances in retirement

- Palliative Care info session (July 2017)
- Energy Affordability Workshop
- Managing Medicines – Health Care Consumers Association
- Advanced Care Planning – Respecting Patient Choices
- Tuesday Lunchtime forums (in conjunction with the University of the Third Age)

MEDIA

COTA ACT is a key spokesperson for the media on issues relating to older people in the community.

We spoke with local and national media on a number of occasions, including organising case studies and people in the community to speak. Topics we spoke on include

- Issues relating to buses, including routes, accessibility and timetable changes
- Age friendly communities
- View of older people in the community
- Cost of rates
- Cost of electricity and water
- The Alchemy Chorus (Dementia Choir)
- Seniors Cards
- Services provided by COTA ACT
- Seniors Week
- ACT Seniors Expo
- Positive Ageing Awards
- Chief Minister's Concert
- Retirement villages
- Quality of Aged Care
- Availability of home help for older people
- Intersection of NDIS and My Aged Care
- Footpaths

DROP IN INFORMATION SESSIONS

COTA ACT continues to provide free Sessions for Seniors with a range of organisations so older people can get advice from qualified professionals. These sessions included:

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

In 2016-18 we worked with the Royal Blind Society Canberra to set up drop in sessions for those who need assistance with visual changes and we are currently working with Better Hearing Australia (ACT) to implement a drop in session for people who are in various stages of hearing loss.

Our Housing Options Advisory Service continues to provide an advice service, both in person and over the phone, for older people and their families to get information on retirement and housing options, the aged care process, home modifications and help and navigating various government processes (such as Centrelink and the hospital system). More details on the Housing Options Advisory Service are provided later in this report.

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. The Centre often operates at capacity.

During the 2017-18 year COTA ACT has coordinated a number of upgrades to the centre including:

- Upgraded chairs in one of the meeting rooms
- A new refrigerator in the communal kitchen
- Painted walls in the hall

There are a number of exciting developments to the Centre and surrounds which are in the planning and approval process to service the surrounding community and bring more people in to the centre.

MEMBERSHIP

COTA membership services continued to manage individual memberships on behalf of all State and Territory COTA's during the 2017-18 year.

As at 30 June 2018, COTA ACT had 1,603 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.

Information sessions available 2

CALD sessions 2

Volunteer Peer Educators 7

Sessions presented 46

Participants 961

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

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

COTA ACT stays 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 a peer education program.

The main topics of interest are currently: transport; access to home care and residential care; Seniors Cards and concessions; and the services offered by COTA ACT.

The peer education program is structured around a wonderful group of volunteer presenters. COTA trains presenters aged over 50 who then volunteer their time to talk to older people in our community about healthy ageing issues. This talented 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 2017-18 the Community Education team (Community Education Manager and Peer Educators) presented a total of 46 sessions to 961 participants including 2 sessions to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups (45 CALD participants).

Road safety has been a particular focus this period. COTA ACT continued to offer the popular 'Street Smart Seniors' session with the support of both the ACT Government (Justice and Community Safety Directorate) and the NRMA Road Safety Trust.

COTA ACT developed this program to promote road safety for older road users - both drivers and pedestrians.

The Street Smart Seniors program was a Finalist in the 2017 3M – ACRS Diamond Road Safety Awards.

In October 2017 COTA hosted a very successful, high profile workshop on 'Driving and Health in Ageing'. This was a collaborative venture between COTA ACT, the Australian College for Road Safety; and the Centre for Research on Ageing, Health and Wellbeing, Australian National University.

In 2018 the Community Education program added a 'Wednesday afternoon information series'. Between May and June COTA ACT partnered with various organisations to present a series of sessions on various topics including: energy efficiency and cost saving (with Care Financial and ACTEWAGL), medication management (with Health Care Consumers Association), retirement and housing options (with Beyond Bank), and 2 sessions on Advanced Care Planning (with ACT Health) were offered. The majority of sessions were booked out and all were well received.

SENIORS WEEK

ACT Seniors Week encourages older Canberrans to *love later life*, with the 2018 program filled with activities to inspire, inform and educate people to participate in events being held around the capital.

COTA ACT delivered ACT Seniors Week with financial assistance from the ACT Government and sponsorship from a number of organisations and businesses.

The week was launched by ACT Chief Minister Andrew Barr at the Chief Minister's Concert. We saw a significant increase in the number of attendees to the Chief Minister's Concert due to putting on a second show. More than 720 people toe-tapped their way through a show by the Band of the Royal Military College Duntroon in the historic Albert Hall.

The ACT Seniors Week Expo saw sunny skies and a full pavilion of exhibitors ready to welcome more than 4,000 attendees. Entertainment on the Beyond Bank stage was provided by St John Ambulance, Music for Canberra and entertainer Phil Major. In 2018 we presented a series of workshops.

COTA ACT successfully worked with a number of ACT retirement village providers to deliver two bus tours of ACT retirement villages. The two tours took more than 60 people to seven retirement villages and explore their facilities and units, as well as get information about their cost structure and community.

Thank you to the villages who participated:

- Marian, Manuka
- Marigal Gardens
- Uniting Amala
- Uniting Mirinjani
- The Grove
- Villagio Sant Antonio
- RSL Coral Park

COTA ACT is fortunate to have the support of our elected representatives with Andrew Barr (ACT Chief Minister), Gordon Ramsay (Minister for Veterans and Seniors), Nicole Lawder (Shadow Minister for Seniors), Caroline Le Couter (Greens spokesperson for Seniors) and Alistair Coe (Leader of the Opposition) attending multiple events across the week.

Seniors Week would not be possible without the generous support of our many volunteers and sponsors. It takes many hands to deliver events across ACT Seniors Week and without our fabulous volunteers this would not be possible.

SPONSORS

Thanks to our sponsors for their support of ACT Seniors Week:

- ACT Government
- Beyond Bank
- Capital Chemist
- ActewAGL
- Flexible Bus Service
- Goodwin Aged Care

POSITIVE AGEING AWARDS

The Positive Ageing Awards were held on Friday 23 March at the Canberra Labor Club.

The standard of nominations was at an all time high with dozens of nominations highlighting the achievements and dedication of so many members of the Canberra community.

The Award winners were presented with custom made glass paperweights, created by Australian glass artist Mel Holt.

SENIOR ACHIEVER AWARD

Recognising the outstanding contribution made by an older person to the Canberra community.

WINNER: BEVERLEY FLINT

FINALISTS:

- Magdelena Bell
- Petrina Balmain
- Lee Hill
- Eleanor Whelan

INTERGENERATIONAL AWARD

Recognising a person or group who has worked to foster and improve relationships across generations

WINNER: DEBORAH EVANS

FINALISTS:

- ACT Office of Veterans and Seniors
- Peter Gray

AGE FRIENDLY COMMUNITY AWARD

Recognising a person or group who has worked to enhance opportunities for seniors to lead full and satisfying lives

WINNER: PHILIP PIGGIN

FINALISTS:

- Neredah Crane
- Staff at The Grange Deakin

SENIORS ADVOCATE AWARD

Recognises a person or group with outstanding commitment in advocating for seniors

WINNER: NORMA SUMNER

FINALISTS:

- Legal Aid ACT
- Noeleen Reid

TRANSPORT SERVICES AWARD

Recognises a person or group who has provided outstanding transport services to seniors

WINNER: LEGACY CANBERRA LEGACY TEAM

FINALISTS:

- Edward Kildea
- CS#1 Transport Team

HOUSING OPTIONS ADVISORY SERVICE

The past twelve months has seen a continued demand for information as the changing landscape of accommodation in Canberra presents more challenges for older residents. The relentless increases in the costs of living are resulting in greater numbers of older people in financial distress and sometimes at risk of homelessness. Government supports are diminishing with most benefits now limited solely to pension holders and much greater pressure being placed on the already stretched community sector to try to bridge the gaps.

Issues of note in the past twelve months (and still ongoing) have been around the changes to My Aged Care. The long waiting periods for Home Care and Support Packages and the difficulty in obtaining services once a package has been awarded has left many Canberra residents having to privately source and pay for services they require or go without. The complexity of dealing with Centrelink when entering residential aged care is another stress. The promised review to simplify paperwork and procedures should make this more streamlined in the future.

The dearth of affordable housing is becoming critical across the city placing many non-homeowners in a precarious position. Older residents on fixed incomes living in rental accommodation are finding few options if they have rental increases or are required to move. The majority of properties on the private rental market are beyond the reach of seniors on fixed incomes and the waiting lists for public and community housing are long.

Retirement villages are a popular option for those who have the means. A number of new villages have sprung up in Canberra over the last twelve months, with others still in the planning stages due to open in the next few years. Enquiry and interest in these facilities is strong in Canberra.

The Housing Options Advisory Service receives requests for assistance and information on a broad range of services including but not limited to: home care and support packages, residential care, respite services, retirement villages, transitioning to residential care from retirement villages, home modifications, downsizing, public and private housing options, elder abuse, de-cluttering, accessing financial and legal advice, support to complete applications for Centrelink, Housing ACT and residential aged care homes.

The Housing Options Advisor represents COTA ACT on housing related groups and committees including the Retirement Village Act (2012) Review Advisory Group, Canberra and Region Aged Services Network, Elder Abuse Prevention Network, Health Care Consumers and works with Housing ACT to assist with the relocation of older residents in the Housing Renewal Program.

The service supported over 800 people by meeting with them in our offices at Hughes, over the phone and by email. Home visits or hospital visits can be arranged where clients are prevented from attending our office by disability or mobility issues. Further outreach to the greater community is achieved by the events hosted by COTA ACT, presentations and information sessions and a range of information brochures available through COTA ACT.

SENIORS CARD AND DIRECTORY

ACT SENIORS CARD

2017-18 was a very busy year for ACT Seniors Card scheme. COTA ACT continues to administer and improve this expanding program which recognises the important contribution seniors have made and continue to make to our community.

On 1 July 2017 the eligibility age for ACT Seniors Card holders was raised to 61, a decision made in the 2016 ACT Budget. The eligibility age will rise every two years until it reaches age 65.

As at 30 June 2018, there were 69,905 active ACT Seniors Card holders on our database, a 19% increase on card holders from the previous year. The number of card holders aged over 70 increased by 38% in the 2017-18 year.

In 2017-18 staff at the COTA ACT office entered 10,860 cards, with 4,942 of these being new card holders.

Access Canberra Service Centre's issued the bulk of cards with 66% of cards issued across the five locations. Access Canberra Woden issued the most cards, with 19% of total cards, with Tuggeranong close behind on 18%. ACT public libraries issued 26% of cards, with COTA ACT 8%.

In October 2017 we introduced the Seniors Card Scoop quarterly newsletter that is sent out electronically to all ACT Seniors Card holders who have subscribed. The Scoop advises Seniors Card holders of Government concessions, new businesses signing on to the scheme and their discounts. It is also contains informative editorials on how to get the most out of your Seniors Card and has addressed issues such as bulky waste removal, transport and advises of events relevant to Seniors such as ACT seniors Week, seniors Expo and Chief Ministers Concert.

The ACT Seniors Information Line received 4936 calls into our office solely relating to ACT Seniors/ MyWay Cards. We provided advice on issues such as lost and expired cards, applying for a NSW Opal Card and using the card to access public transport in the ACT. The information line allows ACT Seniors Card holders to update their personal information on our database.

2017-2019 SENIORS CARD DISCOUNT DIRECTORY

2017-2019 ACT Seniors Card Discount Directory was launched on 30 August at the National Museum of Australia by Gordon Ramsay, Minister for Veterans and Seniors.

The updated ACT Seniors Card website was simultaneously launched. The website www.actseniorscard.org.au allows users to easily search and navigate the various discounts offered in the ACT to card holders and provides valuable information on travel both locally and interstate. The website has been built to be accessed on mobile phones, tablets and developed to be user friendly on all platforms.

COTA ACT have contacted and partnered with over 300 participating businesses to offer generous discounts to all ACT Seniors Card holders.

30,000 copies of the Directory have been printed and distributed to all Access Canberra Service Centres and ACT Public Libraries. The Directory can also be obtained at the COTA ACT office and at the many events we attend.

OUR PEOPLE

BOARD MEMBERS

Ewan Brown - President
Paul Feldman
Jean Geise
Kirsten Cross
Ruth Lee Martin
Richard Cumpston
Jenny Mobbs

STAFF

Jenny Mobbs	Chief Executive Officer
Ingrid Pepper	Community Education and Volunteer Manager
Raina Johnston	ACT Seniors Card & Discount Directory Coordinator
Trish Low	Housing Options Advisor
Anne Meuronen (since Nov 17)	Policy and Engagement Coordinator
Catherine Adcock	Communications and Events Manager
Robyn Walter	Office and Building Administrator
Vicky Di Scipio	Finance Officer
Sophie Reynolds	Administration Officer

VOLUNTEERS

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Anne McNamara
Beverley Shannon
Ian Lambert
Janet Werner
Richard Gray
Rick Causebrook
Sandra Gray

ADMIN VOLUNTEERS

Maria Philpot
Anne McNeilly
Cheryl Ovenell
John Wightman
Margaret Simmonds
Jan Yannopoulos
Hilary Ducksmith
Doris Andrews

POLICY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Paul Feldman (Chair)
Adele Stevens
Sue Schreiner
Chander Khera
Rick Lord
Deb Evans
Trevor Smith
Kevin Vassarotti
Cathy Walters
Michael Flynn
Jayanti Gupta
Jenny Mobbs (ex officio)
Ewan Brown (ex officio)

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