

COTA Over 50s, National Policy Office, Canberra , [www.cotaover50s.org.au](http://www.cotaover50s.org.au)

**Message from the Chair** April—June 2008 has been an extremely busy time for us in the lead up to the May Board and the National Policy Council meetings, a highly successful Housing Affordability Forum and the performance review of the National Office conducted under the terms of the Community Sector Support Scheme. The scheme allows the National Office to continue providing advice on issues affecting older Australians. In this newsletter, you will find summaries of the reports to the Board from the Executive Directors of our member organisations, albeit very brief due to lack of space, and a report on the Housing Forum. The CSSS performance review was very positive, warm and encouraging. We were advised that the Grant for 2008-9 had again been approved for COTA Over 50s. Preparation of Policy papers continues to be a high priority for the National Office and our Policy Officers have been working hard on papers relating to the Aged Care Workforce, Housing, Retirement Incomes, and, in partnership with Palliative Care Australia, *End of Life Matters*. The National Policy Office is also contributing to the Green Paper on Homelessness. Other activities of the National Office have included further development of our website and the trialing in the ACT of the Community Connectivity Project. (Please see our website). COTA Over 50s continues to be a voice for older Australians as we bring concerns raised with us to the attention of both sides of federal government.

Bettine Heathcote  
NPC Chair  
National Policy Council



**Report from the Executive Director, Dr. Geoffrey Bird**

**For COTA Over 50s** April—June 2008 has been time for consolidation, evaluation and for assuming a leadership role on national issues and also internationally. The national issues included the Age Pension, Housing Affordability and Aged Care. In facilitating change on these issues, and specifically the approach of the federal government to age pension, COTA Over 50s was pleased to see the government review its position. Housing affordability has also been given a high priority by the government, and COTA Over 50s is working closely with the Hon. Tanya Plibersek by providing policy and practical solutions to the housing problem. On the international front, COTA Vic and COTA Over 50s successfully tendered to host the Global Conference of the International Federation of Ageing to be held in Melbourne in 2010 – more than 3000 delegates from 120 countries are expected to attend.

**The National Forum on Housing Affordability** was held by COTA Over 50s in May in the National Press Club, Canberra. It revealed a number of positive and also disquieting tendencies on the Australian housing scene. The Forum was attended by approx. 130 government, business, church, charity and other community representatives from all over Australia. Please see the inside of this newsletter for more detail. COTA Over 50s' contributions to the issue of affordable housing for older Australians are many. For example, we have produced a Response to the Green Paper: *Which Way Home* and another to the National Rental Affordability Scheme Technical discussion paper.

**The National Policy Council** met during the week of the Forum. The meeting provided the Council and COTA Over 50s with strategies for improving self-governance, e.g.

enhancing the processes by which policy development and rapid-responses are facilitated, as well as finding better ways to share the knowledge of other peak bodies and expert stakeholders to inform national policies.

**Policy Research:** COTA Over 50s is also determined to take leadership in boosting policy research. We are pleased to report that COTA Over 50s distributed six scholarship awards to doctoral students from all over the country, participating in the University of Queensland Emerging Researchers in Ageing (ERA) Masterclass. For more, please see our website.

**The Aboriginal and Indigenous community** was also represented at the National Housing Affordability Forum. Gudhuga Employment & Training Aboriginal Corporation donated a painting by Mr. Dale Huddliston to the Hon. Jenny Macklin to thank the Minister for supporting adult literacy programs in the Moruya region. These are being developed with the assistance of COTA Over 50s, with a view to constructing a model that responds to the permanent employment strategies for Aboriginal Australians in aged care centres.



Dr Geoffrey Bird (COTA Over 50s), Ms. Beverly Moreton (Gudhuga), Ms. Noeline Brown (Ambassador for Ageing) and Mr Dale Huddliston (The artist)

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## Brief Updates from Members

### COTA Over 50s

**Our focus for 2008 / 2009** is to continue our work on the pension, housing and health as priorities, while at the same time COTA Over 50s is continuing the initiatives we have implemented and undertaken in the course of the current year. Representations and collaboration with like-minded bodies will grow. To this extent, the second Housing Affordability Forum held in July in the Old Parliament House was jointly sponsored by COTA Over 50s, The Brotherhood of St Lawrence and Aged & Community Services Australia. COTA Over 50s has also been invited to give presentations on its projects at Aged & Community Services Australia and Aged Care Association Australia conferences to be held early and late September.

**New initiative:** On our website we have created a public Policy Library, open to everyone. You can either submit or access links to relevant research papers, websites or primary source documents under appropriate headings. This is a unique service in Australia, if not in the world. This Policy Library is to function as a repository for easy access to large numbers of both national and international policy papers. In due course, this can be a wonderful tool for policy-makers, researchers and the public in general. Refer to [www.cotaover50s.org.au](http://www.cotaover50s.org.au)

### ARPA Over 50s Assoc.

**Current Policy Work:** Apart from the work done at the state level and for the NPC meeting, our national issues activities are centred on financial products and mature age employment and relevant regulations e.g. Equity Release; Superannuation Investment Regulatory Bodies; Re-training for mature aged employment, and other.

**Recently** we have started work on a policy under the title of "Incentive for older drivers to surrender their licence when they become a danger to themselves and the community". This links into public transport availability and is a huge problem in rural communities. We welcome co-operation on this development.

**We have also made a submission** to the Federal Minister for Employment Services, the Hon. Brendan O'Connor on behalf of Working Connections, as part of the Minister's review of services. There we addressed the lack of Centrelink / JobNetwork re-training support for mature aged employment seekers who have convertible assets.

### COTA QLD

The key focus for the QPC is on Housing and Urban Design, community Care and Aged Care, Health and Wellness, Transport, Mature Aged Employment and Retirement Incomes. Some more recent examples of our work in these areas are:

**Housing and Urban Design Symposium** - COTA Queensland's 2008 symposium Housing and Urban Design: *Through an Intergenerational Lens* will compare and contrast issues from the viewpoint of seniors and youth. The symposium will build on and connect to COTA Over 50s *Affordable Housing for Older Australians* Forum.

**HACC Consumer Consultation** - We are working with Carers Queensland and Queensland Aged and Disability Advocacy to facilitate HACC consumer input into the planning of HACC services throughout Queensland. Last year over 20 forums were held in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas. In 2008 consultations will include Indigenous clients in the Western Cape areas of Far North Queensland.



Painted by Mr Dale Huddliston

### COTA ACT

**Affordable housing** – We are focusing on supply and access issues to increase options.

**Retirement Villages** – We are seeking a review of the 'Retirement Village Code of Conduct'

**Transport** – Significant reorganisation and renewal of public transport is currently being undertaken. We have been involved in this process for the last eighteen months and will continue as programs are implemented.

**Gold Card for Seniors** – All ACT residents over 75 years will receive free public transport. This initiative is aimed at addressing both road safety concerns and social isolation.

**Health services** – In the ACT Budget a significant capital sum has been allocated for health infrastructure.

**Dental health** – Services for immobile older people within the community as well as those in aged care facilities is our top priority.

### COTA TAS

**Policy** - UTAS through its Graduate Program in Ageing and Social Planning will provide 1 possibly 2 research students in 2<sup>nd</sup> semester to assist with the development of a designated policy area as part of their research project course work. The designated area is Elder Abuse with a sub-question as to how well is the interface working between law, policy and practice from staff's perspectives.

**Projects** The Third Age Learning Network of Tasmania (TALENT) is a positive ageing interest group of COTA(Tas). Its aim is to promote the opening of under-utilised schools to the wider community as community learning centres. Further, we received HACC funding for an 18 month pilot program – Still Gardening – to encourage and assist older gardeners to continue this activity; Garden Mates are matched with an older person and work WITH, and not FOR the client. We continue to collaborate with, and support, others in work on common issues.

## COTA NT

A new three year Peak Body funding agreement was signed by COTA (NT) with the Northern Territory Government. This funding ensures the status of COTA (NT) as the Peak Body for senior Territorians until at least February 2011.

We have continued to gather information on behalf of Indigenous senior Territorians and recently approached the NT Government regarding formation of a Council of Indigenous Elders, similar to that which operates in South Australia. The initial response was positive and we will pursue this matter during 2008

Following an approach by COTA (NT), the Minister for Senior Territorians has indicated he proposes to establish regular gatherings to enable Darwin's seniors to make suggestions and provide input regarding issues of concern to them. Meetings are expected to be held at Parliament House and COTA (NT).

Darwin Seniors Computer Club, in conjunction with COTA(NT) and Darwin Senior Citizens, will establish a computer hub at "Spillett House" (our current office location). When fully established the Hub will provide facilities to enable seniors and other community members to learn basic computer skills, as well as to interact with other computer users and thereby enhance skill levels.

## COTA NSW

In April, we convened a forum on grandparenting issues. 209 participants were registered, all states and territories being represented other than NT. There was an excellent representation of Indigenous persons, but, despite all efforts, CALD communities were not well represented.

### COTA (NSW) forwarded submissions:

- To the Special Commission of Inquiry on Acute Care Services in Hospitals in NSW.
- On changes to the rules of Older Drivers
- To the Australia 2020 Summit with recommendations derived from the working groups held by COTA (NSW).

### Recently released documents

- Carers Action Plan - Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care
- Third Dementia Plan (NSW) - Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

## COTA VIC

'A Fair Go for Pensioners': This involves both practical and policy work and involves a coalition of many organisations with COTA as the lead. This has both State and Federal implications. Within the State the issues being raised are motor vehicle registration, utility concessions and some free public transport.

'Active Services model': This work is both on a state and federal level. Within the state, there are pilot projects and COTA is working in conjunction with other organisations such as the MAV (Municipal Association of Victoria) in developing policy and monitoring implementation.

'Older Men's Health': Following the development of a background paper, work is now being done on developing a strategic framework for progressing the important issue of men's health.

'SRV (Senior Rights Victoria)': this is a new service, to address the issues of abuse of older persons, that COTA Vic in partnership with a PILCH (Public Interest Legal Clearing House) and a number of Community Legal Services, successfully tendered for.

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## COTA Seniors Voice SA

**Housing:** Frequent presentations to planning and urban development forums promoting consumer choice and planning early to age in place

**Health:** Promoting consumer focused health system reform in industry and government forums. Current focus includes proposed SA Country Health Plan, and development of a statewide framework for Older People's Health

**Care and support:** Undertook consumer consultations on community care and support. Information provided for the HACC Triennial Plan – report to be released jointly with Office for the Ageing. COTA Home Maintenance Service developed as an benefit for COTA members.

**Transport:** Input to options being considered by Minister for the Ageing.

**End of life:** Ongoing role as expert body in Government review of Advance Planning. Consultation with service providers. Member forum later this year

**Energy:** Consumer representative in government energy forums working to address anticipated cost increases that will impact on older people

**Grandparents:** Continuing input to research, policy development, information and advocacy in the sector.

## **COTA WA—Update**

### **Living Longer, Living Stronger:**

This program is already being offered in 75 Centres in WA and continues to grow.

### **WA Seniors' Week Funding**

**Grant Applications:** We are again coordinating the community grants.

**'Living Wills':** This was a very successful forum and attracted over one hundred people.

### **Reverse Mortgage Information**

**Sessions** were held by us in conjunction with the Dept. of Consumer and Employment Protection, to inform our members and other Seniors in the community about Equity Release / Reverse Mortgages. Attendance has averaged over 30 people at each meeting.

**Computer Training:** Our office is offering one-to-one computer training for COTA Members, with the assistance of volunteers.

**Policy:** Submissions have been made to the Government with respect to Workers' Compensation cover for persons of 65 years of age and over; subsidies for Energy costs and also Crime and Safety for Seniors.

**Grants:** Applications are in progress for Telstra's Connected Seniors program and the Office of Crime Prevention for research to help allay Seniors' fear of crime and on personal security.

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## **Housing Affordability Forum Brief National Press Club, May 2008**

### **LOOMING HOUSING CRUNCH FOR OLDER AUSTRALIANS**

The COTA Over 50s' Affordable Housing Forum was opened by the Minister for Ageing, the Hon. Justine Elliot, and her colleague, Housing Minister, the Hon. Tanya Plibersek, gave the closing address. Newly appointed Ambassador for Ageing, Noeline Brown, spoke during lunch, along with NSW South Coast Indigenous leader, Iris White.

The keynote address to the forum was given by Professor Hal Kendig. He revealed a few disturbing statistics. Amongst 65 year-olds and older, the number of people actually buying houses or getting government housing is declining. But the numbers in private rental housing are increasing, and if you are an older Australian renting privately, your housing costs are around 33% your income, which is nearly five times the proportion spent on housing costs by the average older Australian household.

Although Professor Kendig knows that the challenges of providing affordable housing are big, he thinks we can meet them. He is pleased with the recent initiatives of the Rudd government. "We have a precious opportunity, a narrow window of national and state leadership in housing. We need to plan constructively but there is no demographic doomsday ahead", Professor Kendig told his audience. Chair of the NSW Working Group on Housing, Debra Kuhn, is at the front line of affordable housing. Debra knows the value of working closely with local councils to plan for the orderly development of affordable housing for seniors and other low income groups. "Collaboration is the key" she told the Forum, as she described the impacts of affordable housing initiatives in the Clarence Valley. From Victoria, the director of Common Equity Housing Limited, John McInerney, explained how community housing associations can be a powerful vehicle for building a solid asset base of affordable housing stock. In turn, Bruce McKenzie, who has worked in senior housing and aged care roles for a long time, believes that "There is a massive crisis coming for our elderly who can't afford their accommodation as they continue to age." That was his message to the forum .

COTA Over 50s is concerned that older Australians might be overlooked in the focus on delivering affordable housing to working families and to first home owners. "Older Australians are becoming a larger section of the population. It's vital that they can stay living in their own communities, in housing that is accessible", said Dr Geoffrey Bird. "Older Australians in rental accommodation are particularly vulnerable. If you're on a pension and the rent goes up even a few dollars, it can mean ending up on the streets. If that happens, it's a downward spiral for the person, and an expensive strain on the services that have to step in and help. It makes sound economic sense to enable people to retain their accommodation and be better able to look after themselves."

The outlook for renters is especially bleak. Within 20 years more than 400,000 older Australians will be in the rental market. COTA Over 50s believes that there will not be enough rental housing, and even if the rents were 20% below market rates, most of these older renters will still not be able to afford them. As well, more and more Australians are entering retirement with substantial mortgages hanging around their necks. Many will want to downsize, and there will be nowhere for them to go. "The fundamental requirement for people to age well is to have secure accommodation," said COTA Over 50s' Executive Director, Dr Geoffrey Bird. "Every health initiative, every effort at social inclusion, every family that wants to support their elders, must work from the basic premise that people have suitable housing."



The Hon. Tanya Plibersek (Minister for Housing) and Dr Geoffrey Bird (COTA Over 50s)