

ACT Office for Ageing

**Report on the 2009 Consultations on
a Strategic Plan for Positive Ageing
2010-2014**

November 2009



A Strategic Plan for Positive Ageing 2010-2014

In *The Canberra Plan: Towards Our Second Century*, in the context of the demographic shift to an older population, the ACT Government committed to:

‘... give attention to specific actions that will benefit older people. Building on the *2007-2009 Policy Framework for Ageing*, we will formulate a comprehensive strategy to support healthy and meaningful ageing, decrease social isolation and help people adapt to retirement. We will also increase our efforts to reduce elder abuse’. (Chapter on ‘A Fair and Safe Community’, *New and Future Directions - Healthy and Meaningful Ageing*)

In response to this commitment, the ACT Government through the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, and in partnership with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, initiated community consultation in March/April 2009 to determine the ACT community’s key issues regarding positive ageing; and later in August/September 2009 to gain feedback on a Draft Strategic Plan for Positive Ageing.

The first consultation ran from 6 March to 17 April 2009. A Discussion Paper was prepared and three community forums were held. These were facilitated by the Ministerial Advisory Council for Ageing and they each attracted approximately 80 people. The consultation was advertised through:

- two Press Releases from the Minister for Ageing, John Hargreaves MLA,
- notices in the Canberra Times, The Chronicle, The Senior News, the ‘Our City, Our Community’ newsletter,
- flyers at libraries and community organisations,
- the Internet pages of the ACT Office for Ageing and Community Engagement Unit,
- the Office for Multicultural Affairs email Newsletter and an ACT Community Development Network (CDnet) email notice,
- emails to key community organisations, and
- two ACT Government ‘Whole-of-Government’ email notices.

The Discussion Paper was based on the principles of:

- Social inclusion, participation and self-fulfillment.
- Respect and valuing.
- Support, independence and dignity.
- Partnerships.
- Consultation.

The Paper arranged ideas under the following five key Strategic Themes:

1. Health and wellbeing of older Canberrans, including the impacts of disability.
2. Housing and accommodation.
3. Support services for older people.
4. Transport.
5. Work and retirement, including ongoing employment opportunities and planning for retirement.

Following the consultation, a Draft Strategic Plan was developed and the key Strategic Themes were changed to the following seven Strategic Priorities and Goals:

1. Information & Communication - People in the ACT can easily access information about healthy living, retirement planning, support services and products, entitlements, and community groups and clubs.
2. Health and Wellbeing - People in the ACT maintain their health and wellbeing across their lifespan, to allow them to age positively and actively participate in their community as they get older.
3. Respect, Valuing and Safety - Seniors feel respected and valued and experience the ACT as a safe place to live and visit.
4. Housing and Accommodation - ACT seniors can access appropriate and affordable housing.
5. Support Services - Seniors use appropriate and accessible support services to assist them to maintain active and relatively independent lives.
6. Transport and Mobility - Seniors can easily move around in their community, through personal, community and public transport and walkways.
7. Work and Retirement - People plan for their retirement and, following retirement, continue to actively participate in their community through paid and unpaid work, and educational and recreational activities.

The Draft Plan was promoted through:

- a community forum held on 19 August 2009, facilitated by the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing and attended by approximately 50 people,
- additional briefing meetings with Government agencies and community organisations,
- a Press Release from the Minister for Ageing, John Hargreaves MLA,
- notices in The Canberra Times and The Chronicle,
- copies at libraries and community organisations,
- the Internet pages of the ACT Office for Ageing and Community Engagement Unit,
- the Multicultural email Newsletter and a CDnet email notice,
- an ACT Government's 'Whole of Government' email notice, and
- emails and letters to key community organisations and all participants of the March/April 2009 consultation who had provided contact details.

The Draft Plan was generally supported, and an additional suggestion was made that Canberra should strive to be a more age-friendly city by using the checklist of essential features developed through the World Health Organisation Global Age-Friendly Cities Project.

Summary of feedback

The main issues raised during both consultations included:

- improving access to information about such areas as support services and volunteering opportunities,
- supporting people to maintain health and fitness,
- promoting respect for older people through intergenerational activities,
- increasing accessible housing to allow people to continue to live relatively independently in their homes,
- a range of transport issues, and
- supporting flexible work arrangements for older employees and volunteering opportunities.

Priorities

The overarching strategy of the Plan is to work towards becoming a more age-friendly city, the essential features of which have been agreed through the United Nations 'Global Age-Friendly Cities Project'¹ which involved 35 cities in 22 countries, including the Australian cities of Melbourne in Victoria and Melville in Western Australia (a Local Government Area south of Perth).

Under the seven Strategic Priorities and Goals, the Implementation Plan provides Government with a number of strategic approaches. Specific actions have been identified for the first reporting period, to June 2011.

The actions listed in the Implementation Plan reflect issues raised in community consultation and are consistent with issues listed in the World Health Organisation's Checklist of the essential features of an age-friendly city.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1. Information & Communication

- People in the ACT can easily access information about healthy living, retirement planning, support services and products, entitlements and community groups and clubs.

The issue of access to information was recognised as the main issue from the consultations and has therefore been made the first Strategic Priority.

The main comments provided by the community were that information is often difficult to access, it needs to be available through a broader range of media, and should be better targeted at specific seniors age groups.

The requirement to work more closely with Australian Government organisations was stressed, especially the Department of Health and Ageing, and to promote their information services rather than try to duplicate them.

It was also suggested that more computer training should be facilitated, that a central telephone information service is created, and seniors information desks are provided at ACT Government Shopfronts and/or libraries. Increased funding for interpreter services for seniors was also suggested.

Current situation

A number of the suggestions relate to services that already exist for example an ACT Government Seniors Information Line operates through Canberra Connect and ACT Government Shopfronts already have a concierge service which provides face-to-face assistance to seniors.

Future action²

The Office for Ageing will work with key ACT seniors information providers (including Commonwealth Government and community organisations) over the coming year to ensure that

¹ http://www.who.int/ageing/age_friendly_cities/en/index.html

² The 'Future action' details provided in this report identify some key actions. Full details are provided in the Strategic Plan for Positive Ageing 2010-2014.

the various seniors information services are better informed about each other's roles and a more consistent and responsive service is provided to ACT seniors. It is also planned to actively promote information services to seniors, for example, through the online Seniors Information Portal and at key seniors events.

2. Health and Wellbeing

- People in the ACT maintain their health and wellbeing across their lifespan, to allow them to age positively and actively participate in their community as they get older.

The main comments provided by the community were that:

- access to GPs was becoming increasingly difficult;
- public dental services were inadequate and private dental services were too expensive for many seniors;
- the Government should develop visiting GP and dental services to seniors with mobility difficulties;
- waiting lists for elective surgery were too long;
- programs to encourage health and fitness should be better funded, targeted and tailored to motivate participation, and should include home-based programs; and
- the issue of social isolation is a continuing problem and there is a need to engage with seniors at risk.

Current situation

In the 2008-2009 ACT Government Budget \$4.2 million over four years was allocated to improve services to seniors, including an increase in the number of allied health staff, additional targeted services such as an Older Person's Dietitian to combat malnutrition in the elderly, and expanded home services to prevent avoidable admission to hospitals. In September 2009, the GP Taskforce Report identified possible strategies to improve access to GPs.

Same-day emergency dental care is available to eligible seniors. Domiciliary care is also available in the form of regular visits to nursing homes by a senior dental officer, and home visits to the house-bound on application (for routine screening and the provision of dental prosthetic replacements).

Both the Health Promotion (ACT Health) and Sports and Recreation (Territory and Municipal Services) fund community programs that support health and fitness programs aimed at seniors.

Other relatively recent initiatives include the Community Bus Services that commenced in 2008 as a response to people experiencing social isolation due to limited transport options, especially seniors. These services increase people's ability to access community facilities, services and social groups.

Future action

Actions in the Strategic Plan include a focus on improved promotion of the extensive range of current health services, the promotion of physical activities for seniors, and developing a more active and coordinated cross-agency response to seniors identified as experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, social isolation.

ACT Health plans to investigate the options around purchasing a fully portable dental unit to enable full dental services to be offered in nursing homes and to the housebound.

3. Respect, Valuing and Safety

– Seniors feel respected and valued and experience the ACT as a safe place to live and visit.

Comments provided by the community included the idea that Canberra should strive to become a World Health Organisation recognised ‘Age-Friendly City’. Seniors also stated that they currently do not feel adequately respected or valued, which often results in their feeling at risk of personal assault or abuse. More intergeneration activity (for example, seniors mentoring in the schools or youth volunteering home maintenance services) was suggested as a way of fostering better mutual understanding and respect between age groups. Continued consultation with seniors was stressed, as was the need to continue services which support people at risk of elder abuse and to improve seniors’ safety awareness.

Current situation

A number of the issues raised are already being addressed to a large extent by existing ACT Government programs, for example, seniors volunteering in school and libraries, the Elder Abuse Prevention Program, and the Home Safety Program.

Future action

In implementing the Strategic Plan intends the ACT Government will use the World Health Organisation Checklist of Essential Features of Age-friendly Cities to assist in assessing progress. The government also aims to promote more intergenerational activity and to launch an improved Elder Abuse Prevention Program in 2010.

4. Housing and Accommodation

- ACT seniors can access appropriate and affordable housing.

The main comments provided by the community were that seniors should be assisted to access housing that was affordable, accessible, and socially connected. Seniors in the private rental market were reported to be experiencing increasing housing stress. Another comment was that downsizing in older established suburbs, with familiar services and social networks, was often not financially possible. The importance of respecting, and facilitating as much as possible, people’s wish to age in place was also mentioned. The Government was encouraged to develop new models of housing and to promote universal and sustainable design for new housing.

Current situation

The Report on Phase II of the ACT Government’s Affordable Housing Strategy contains many relevant recommended actions which are currently being examined, for example, regulating for more universal design. The ACT Planning and Land Authority has recently reviewed the Access and Mobility General Code of the Territory Plan for use in assessing development applications for accessibility.

Future action

The Plan addresses a number of the issues identified during consultation through the inclusion of some of the recommendations of the above mentioned Affordable Housing Strategy, and through such actions as the better promotion of home maintenance and modification services.

5. Support Services

– Seniors use appropriate and accessible support services to assist them to maintain active and relatively independent lives.

While people generally recognise that there are numerous support services already in place to assist seniors, many people cited waiting lists. Comments included:

- the importance of funding for home maintenance and modification services,
- the importance of considering the needs of carers to the elderly, and of elderly carers,
- the idea of promoting more neighbourly communities to increase social inclusion and to reduce dependence on formal services, and
- support for the idea of trialing a ‘virtual village’ – a community services cooperative model.

Current situation

In September 2009 a \$2.3 million funding boost to the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program was jointly announced by the Federal and ACT Ministers for Ageing. More than \$1.5 million was for new projects and included \$1 million for Home Help Services ACT Inc, which is celebrating 60 years of service to older Canberrans.

Future action

Specific actions in the Implementation Plan include a planned trial of the ‘virtual village’ service cooperative model and the better promotion of the role of the Health Services Commissioner in maintaining the standard of services to older people.

The call for more funding for interpreter services is acknowledged, and ACT Government agencies would welcome feedback on specific incidents where services have failed to provide interpreter services, or culturally competent services generally, so that the possible need for additional resources or staff training can be established.

6. Transport and Mobility

– Seniors can easily move around in their community, through personal, community and public transport and walkways.

Transport was repeatedly mentioned as a key enabler of community inclusion and participation. The main comments provided by the community on the public transport provider ACTION were that the bus network should be more extensive, that bus services should be more frequent, that feeder mini-buses should be introduced, and that more bus stop shelters and seats should be installed.

Regarding community transport, it was suggested that both the Community Bus Services and HACC Transport Services be expanded and better promoted, with clearer information about eligibility for example making it clear that HACC eligible people do not need to be accessing other HACC services to access the transport service.

Other issues were the need for more disabled parking, more 15 minute ‘drop-off’ parking close to hospital entrances, larger taxi subsidies, improved pathway maintenance, the regulation of electric mobility scooters and the need for education campaigns on the safe use of shared bicycle/pedestrian community pathways.

Current situation

In August 2009, the Chief Minister announced a comprehensive review of taxi services, including wheelchair accessible taxis; a new complaints line for wheelchair accessible taxi users; and an increase this year in the wheelchair lift fee incentive to taxi drivers, whereby a \$25 'night time fee' can now also be claimed by drivers who service wheelchair users on significant family holidays such as Good Friday, Easter Sunday, ANZAC Day, Mother's and Father's Days and over the Christmas period.

While public transport planning tries to be as considerate of older people as possible, services must in the last analysis serve the whole community as effectively and efficiently as possible within budget.

The call for more seats and shelters is acknowledged and ACTION welcomes input from the public on priority community need when implementing its program of new installations.

Regarding walkway networks and maintenance, the expansive low density nature of Canberra limits the extent of the footpath network, and the extent to which pathways can be routinely checked and repaired. Territory and Municipal Services has rolling program of pathway maintenance, in addition to a response service to reported hazards.

The sharing of pathways and trails with cyclists is a Territory policy to maximise the whole community's mobility options. The issue of cyclists being inconsiderate of older pedestrians will continue to be raised with Territory and Municipal Services, which currently lacks the resources to undertake a substantial public education campaign.

Future action

The Community Bus Services will be reviewed in 2010 to improve the effectiveness of its client service.

The Disabled Parking Permit scheme and regulation for electric mobility scooters will be examined in 2010 as part of Commonwealth Government initiatives.

The ACTION bus service will continue to increase its fleet of accessible buses. Also, the introduction of an ACTION bus Smartcard will provide, for the first time, data on bus usage by seniors to be collected and used in future network planning.

A public awareness campaign will be initiated about the vulnerability of seniors on pathways and roads.

7. Work and Retirement

- People plan for their retirement and, following retirement, continue to actively participate in their community through paid and unpaid work, and educational and recreational activities.

Comments provided by the community included reported age discrimination in employment and the need for more flexible workplace arrangements to assist people to gradually transition into retirement. The ACT Government's Mature Aged Employment Strategy was welcomed, as was the idea of re-launching the Silver Lining Project (information package to employers on the value of older workers).

Another key message from the community was the need for people to be better assisted to plan for the broad range of issues that they are likely to face in retirement, for example, managing on a reduced income, adjusting to being at home, and maintaining meaningful activity and social participation.

The importance of volunteering opportunities and the value of involvement in clubs and educational courses was also raised.

Current situation

Many of these issues are currently being addressed by the ACT Government, for example, the subsidizing of a Certificate IV Marketing course aimed at people aged over 40 years interested in developing a small business; and the work of the Human Rights Commissioner in addressing unlawful age discrimination.

Future action

The actions in the Implementation Plan seek to further promote retirement planning, opportunities for continued employment and volunteering, and recreational and educational courses of interest to seniors.

How we intend to measure success

The ACT Government plans to measure progress against the World Health Organisation Checklist of Essential Features of Age-Friendly Cities, which will be done through community surveys and focus groups. To facilitate this, a benchmark survey will be undertaken as soon as possible in 2010 in partnership with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing.

In the second half of 2011, the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing plans to provide a report to the Minister for Ageing on the Plan for the period to June 2011.

The ACT Office for Ageing will also report progress on the Plan in the Annual Reports of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.

Submissions

Community Forums:

- Kippax Uniting Community Centre - 6 March 2009 (80 attendees)
- Vikings Club (Tuggeranong Town Centre) - 10 March 2009 (80 attendees)
- Ainslie Football and Social Club - 12 March 2009 (80 attendees)
- Woden Southern Cross Club - 19 August 2009 (50 attendees)

Targeted Meetings (August and September 2009):

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services
- Aged and Community Care Policy Unit, ACT Health
- Burrinyu Aboriginal Corporation
- Citizens Advice Bureau ACT
- Office of Multicultural, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services
- Joint meeting of ACT Seniors Clubs
- Tuggeranong Learning Circle

Written submissions:

- Able Community Care (UK)
- Health Services Commissioner
- Calvary Health Care ACT
- Canberra Multicultural Community Forum
- Carers ACT September
- David Kelly, ICT Training Consultant
- National Disability Services (ACT)
- Open Door Coaching Group
- South Eastern UnitingCare Ageing
- Superannuated Commonwealth Officers' Association (ACT)
- Respecting Patient Choice Program, ACT Health
- Vision Australia
- Sixteen private citizens

Telephone submissions:

- Aged and Community Care Policy Unit, ACT Health
- Council on the Aged (ACT)
- Office of Multicultural, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services
- Five private citizens