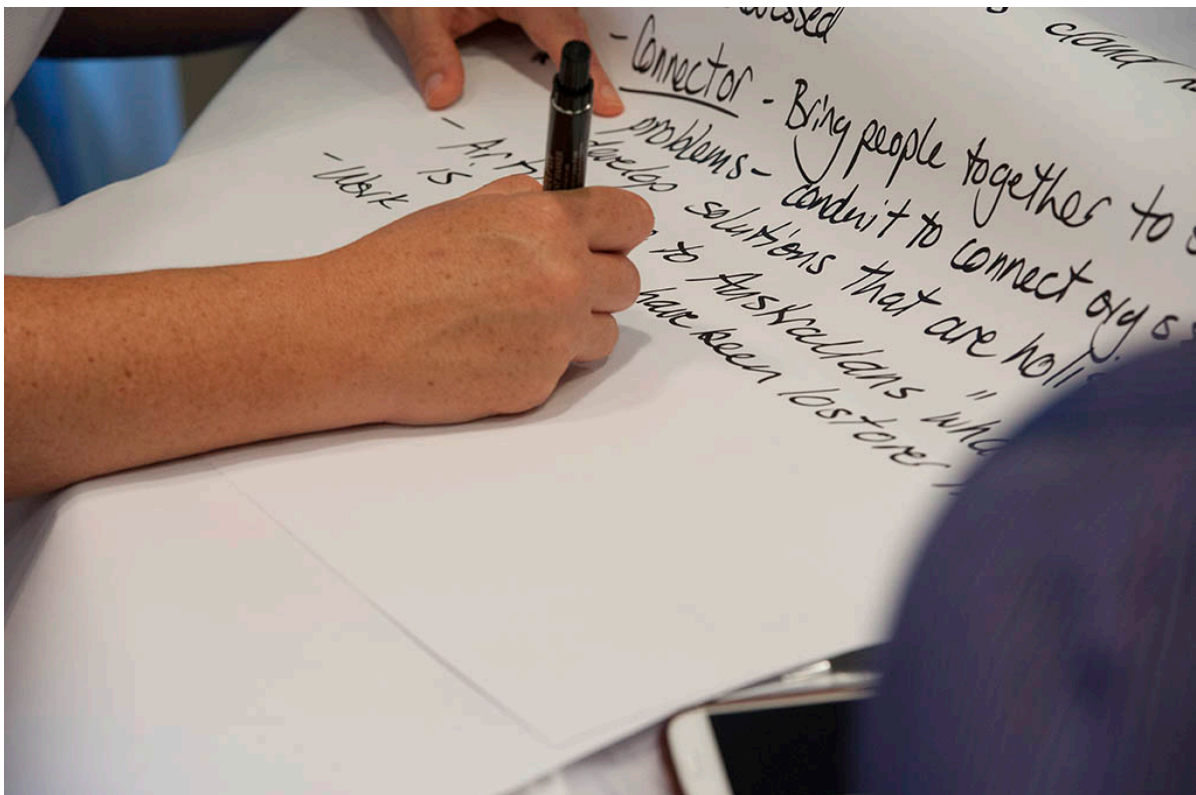




COTA Queensland

Seniors Stakeholder workshop report

Brisbane March 2014





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# 1 Executive summary

The Council on the Ageing, Queensland (COTA), as the new peak body representing organisations and seniors in Queensland, engaged Nous Group (Nous) to facilitate a three hour workshop on Tuesday 18 March 2014 to begin ongoing dialogue with the sector. Outcomes from the workshop provided insight into the sector's expectation of COTA, as well as the most pressing issues faced by Queensland's senior citizens.

The sector's expectations clearly demonstrate their desire for COTA to be an active and well-informed communicator and assist with the advancement of improved service delivery and policy for older people. The following key themes were communicated:

**1. COTA is seen as a connector between the sector and the Government, and must:**

- build and maintain intra-sectoral relationships
- continually gather, synthesise and provide easy access to current information and prioritised issues.

**2. To be the strong and active voice of the sector, COTA should:**

- maximise the use of their own and sector resources through innovative communication
- inform the Government of emergent issues and advance the interests of service providers (and therefore consumers) in the development of policy.

**3. COTA can support the sector to more effectively tackle issues faced by Queensland's seniors:**

- *Health*: a lack of awareness of issues, availability of assistance and entitlements
- *Housing*: 'Ageing in Place' and the disconnect between housing developers and end-users
- *Transport*: affordability, availability, reliability and lack of coordination between transport service providers
- *Cost of living*: the sensitivity of income streams to external pressure and lack of impartial financial advice
- *Mature-aged employment*: the challenge of using policy to align employee and employer interests.

COTA is committed to meeting these expectations and communicating across the sector. COTA will continue to engage regularly with the sector and visit regional areas to understand the diverse issues throughout Queensland.

## 2 COTA is the new sector peak and will advise the Queensland Government

COTA is proud to be the Seniors Peak Service for the next three years. This responsibility requires COTA to be the connection between sector stakeholders and the government. To launch this process COTA convened service providers, older persons' organisations and government representatives to discuss

COTA's new role and communicate their expectations of COTA as a communicator on behalf of the sector.

The workshop was vibrant with many good ideas put forward by participants. COTA Queensland's Chair, Peter Howells, and CEO Mark Tucker-Evans, workshop sponsors, provided participants the context within which to discuss and engage in the two facilitated sessions. The focus of the first session was to draw out stakeholder's expectations of COTA, particularly around communication pathway requirements between all levels of the sector. The second session aimed to prioritise and articulate the main issues faced by senior Queenslanders.

Objectives for the day were to:

- introduce participants to COTA as the Seniors Peak Service
- understand the sector's expectations of COTA's role and the communication pathways required
- confirm and prioritise issues for senior Queenslanders.

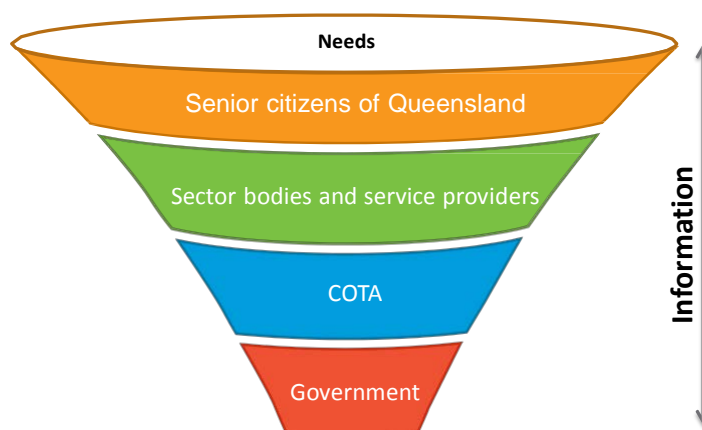


### 3 The sector expects COTA to centralise and manage communication

COTA's role as sector peak is an important link in the communication chain between the Queensland Government and service providers within the sector. The sector expects COTA to be a connector, via sector bodies, between end-users and the government. Figure 1: COTA is a connector indicates how COTA fits within this flow of information. To be successful COTA must:

- provide insights to the government on actions and services performed by sector bodies
- inform the sector of actions and changes that occur within government
- provide insights to the government (through information gathered by service providers and other agents) on what is occurring in the community.

Figure 1: COTA is a connector



As a connector, COTA has several responsibilities to both the sector and to the government. COTA should use its position to promote inter-sectoral relationships as well as direct relationships between the sector and the government. These relationships will be easier to build on a base of transparent and accessible information and therefore COTA should collect, distil, compile and act as a distribution point for information. COTA should:

- understand the information to include in communications (e.g. identify trends, prioritise issues, provide quick links to additional sources)
- notify the sector of policy and legislation changes
- provide accurate and accessible data to inform policy
- provide accurate and accessible data and advice to inform service design and solution implementation within the sector
- provide, or inform of, training and capacity building courses for service providers.

The above actions are central to link the sector with the Queensland Government. Many participants, however, expect COTA to also be the direct voice of Queensland's senior citizens. This expectation would require COTA to engage with and inform seniors directly and provide a means or platform for community input. However, the sector bodies themselves are the front-line link to Queensland's seniors and should be aware of their responsibility to collect information and community input and then provide this to COTA as an indirect means to inform the government (as per Figure 1). The resolution of this tension will require active consideration as COTA moves deeper into its role as sector peak.

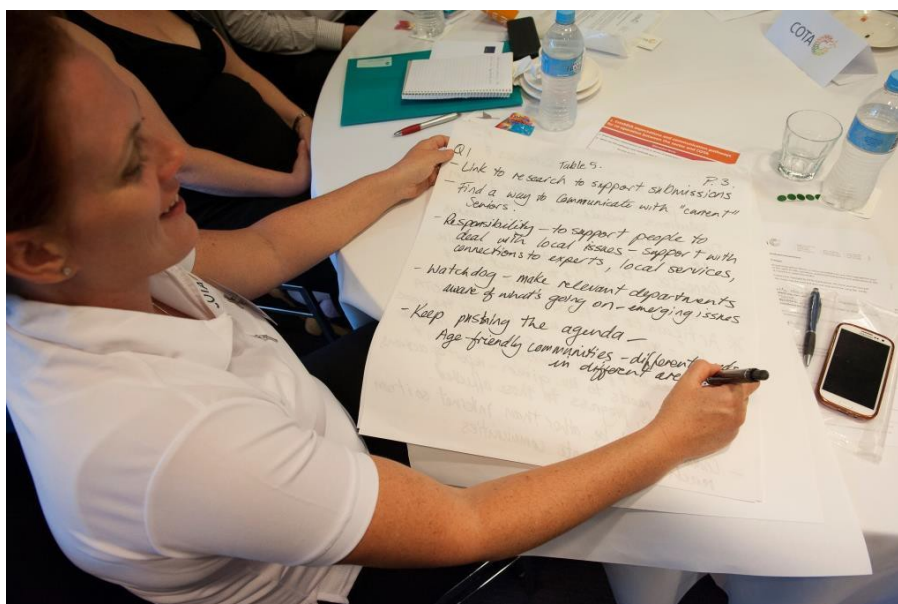
### 3.1 Communication methods should be regular, accessible and non-discriminatory

COTA represents a diverse sector. All communications should be well considered and ensure sensitivity and appropriateness for the individuals they (indirectly) represent. Regularity and accessibility of communications was a common theme in the workshop, with non-discriminatory (age, culture, language sensitive) use of mechanisms being raised as a major issue. This section covers an idea for how COTA can perform its role as connector, and outlines suggestions for the channels and mechanisms through which communications are expected.

As a central connector, it was suggested that COTA be the central message point and manager of (electronic) two-way communications. This might involve the creation of a central mailbox for sector bodies to email their ideas or issues, or an online platform where participants can input their ideas, issues and the activities they are currently undertaking. COTA should review these inputs and provide appropriate linkages (with an aim to minimise duplication of effort) between government departments and/or sector bodies performing complementary services and initiatives.

Some additional thoughts for how COTA could communicate with the sector and government are outlined below:

- Regular forums and networking events. These should be targeted and, where applicable, map to identified trends and priority issues within the sector
- Regular emails which highlight sector news and provide links to further information
- Multiple channels (CALD, ATSI and age sensitive) at face-to-face events, as well as in broad scale mass communications, should be used
- COTA should ensure the accessibility, transparency, accuracy and usability of its website as this is the central communication platform.



### 3.2 Innovative adaption of tools and forums already in place will be cost effective

There was consensus that it would be more cost effective to use existing communication processes wherever possible, rather than reinventing the communication process. Government representatives stated that many communication forums are already in place, and identified two of these as *government advisory groups* and *government working groups* established to cover specific topics. COTA would be well placed to promote sector attendance at these working groups, where relevant, and to suggest priority topics to organisers for upcoming forums.

COTA is not only expected to build relationships between the sector and government, but also to build relationships within the sector. Intra-sector relationships can be strengthened through improved communication which include, but are not limited to:

- Increased accessibility and transparency of electronic information
- A regular electronic newsletter (enewsletter) to inform of, for example, major events, policy changes, tender requests, innovative service models and topical research
- Improved use of social media to promote sector bodies and services, as well as communicate COTA's role within the sector
- 'Electronic personal relationships' – this involves the transparent and regular acknowledgement of contributors and sources of information
- 'Peer Champions' who are easily contactable and can take the role of educators in the sector.

## 4 The sector wants an active peak body to ensure continual engagement with government

Sector bodies encouraged COTA to be the '*fearless*' voice of the sector on the important issues. Through its access to sectoral and government information, COTA should develop, prioritise and communicate a list of main issues for the government and sector bodies to work towards. This will require COTA to:

- inform the government of emerging issues and trends from within the sector
- lobby and support appropriate service delivery methods and frameworks to tackle these issues
- advance the interests of providers of services to older people (including housing, transport and health) in the development of policy
- maintain momentum of its central agenda (to promote age-friendly) communities
- advocate a culturally appropriate, inclusive and sensitive approach to services and policy development for older people.

## 5 Sector agencies reflected the varied and complex issues faced by seniors

Agencies in the sector provide services to a large (and expanding) group of culturally, linguistically and demographically diverse people. The second workshop session requested participants to discuss and prioritise what they believe are the top three issues faced by Queensland's senior population. Participants were divided into five areas for discussion; health, housing, transport, cost of living and mature aged employment. A summary of the main issues raised under each topic is listed directly below, with further detail covered in sections 5.1 to 5.5.

- *Health*: Lack of awareness of health issues, availability of assistance and entitlements
- *Housing*: 'Ageing in Place' and the disconnect between housing developers and end-users



- *Transport:* Affordability, availability, reliability and lack of coordination between transport service providers
- *Cost of living:* Sensitivity of income streams to external pressure and lack of impartial financial advice
- *Mature-aged employment:* The challenge of using mature-aged workforce policy to align employee and employer interests.



## 5.1 Health

Health care in the sector is not a “one-size-fits-all” approach. COTA should assist the sector through ensuring that government oversight and policy reach is broad enough to encompass all community needs. This will occur if the government, through input to COTA from the sector, is made aware of all end-user’s needs. The highest priority issue is not, according to participants, the quality of healthcare, but rather a lack of understanding regarding needs, entitlements and access:

1. Many individuals do not understand the risks and potential ailments to be aware of as we age, and should be provided with targeted education on basic conditions and symptoms of illness. COTA should work with government, sector bodies and other sectors of the economy to improve this understanding and embed health awareness early (before people become old).
2. There is concern around the lack of understanding on how and where to access services and advice, and what entitlements people have as they age. This lack of understanding extends to availability and access of post-treatment services. COTA would assist the sector by using its position as a communication hub to synthesise and improve access to such information.
3. The final issue raised considers an individual’s knowledge and awareness of their own health. The sector is concerned with patient’s inconsistent knowledge their own history, particularly as people age. As such, the sector believes COTA should assist the government to promote integration of eHealth records in an effort to ensure the transfer of patient history information between GPs, hospitals, in-home and in-facility care is smooth and accurate.

## 5.2 Housing

'Ageing in Place' was the most common theme in housing discussions. To achieve this successfully the sector raised two major considerations:

1. Access to impartial information *before it is a necessity*.

Up-front, impartial and understandable information for end-users and service providers needs to be provided to improve alignment between service delivery and policy. This would be most useful in the form of simple 'Fact Sheets' and should provide a sense of security through information on access to services, advice on common housing pitfalls and traps, and possible options for adjusted living arrangements as people age.

2. The disconnect between developers and their clients.

To promote 'Ageing in Place', COTA should advocate flexible design of housing and assistive devices. This can be achieved through links between developers and sector professionals (who understand the requirements), and the open communication of summarised research and information. Additionally, when communicating with government, COTA must voice the importance of flexible housing design in the campaign to increase 'Ageing in Place' and reduce the burden on the formal care for older people sector into the future.

## 5.3 Transport

The issue of transport was raised as more than an issue of transport and includes health, cost of living and housing. Affordability, availability and reliability of transport were the most commonly raised issues, in particular the cost of public transport in urban areas and access to services in outer suburbs and regional areas. The cost of direct hospital transport (especially air transport from regional areas) was also raised as a major pressure for individuals living outside of formal care and/or in remote regions.

Workshop participants then actively raised potential solutions rather than simply repeating the known difficulties faced in the public transport sector. These include:

- Better coordination of travel assistance (especially to and from remote and regional areas). It was theorised that COTA could perhaps coordinate a "ride-share" style arrangement
- COTA could promote door-to-door services for older people and coordinate relevant service providers to work collaboratively, rather than competitively, to cover a larger area
- COTA could advocate, to the government, for a more adequate volunteer model. For example, promote the use of subsidies and rebates to increase volunteer driver numbers.

## 5.4 Cost of living

The sector was primarily concerned for the vulnerability and sensitivity of seniors' revenue streams to external events and system or rule changes. The discussion was predominantly focused around three areas:

1. As the cost of living in Australia increases there is major concern for seniors on a fixed payment system.

Pension payments and superannuation often may not appreciate at the same rate as inflation. As such, vulnerable individuals already in sub-standard living conditions face further pressure from external impacts.

2. Superannuation is also particularly sensitive to external impacts and rule changes.

COTA can assist sector agents to provide quality advice to end-users by improving their access to usable information and impartial advice. This could occur through the promotion of, for example, a senior's phone line, webpage or the use of the government one-stop-shop (when fully functional).

3. The final major concern is for the impartiality of advice and information from financial advisors.

The sector needs to be made aware of the risks and the incentives under which financial advice is often provided so as to transfer accurate information to seniors on how to obtain and use financial advice. COTA is well placed to centralise the provision of this information and ensure relevant sector agents are able to suitably engage with seniors on this topic

## 5.5 Mature aged employment

The topic of mature aged employment can be divided into issues for employees, issues for employers, and difficulty in creation and integration of appropriate policy.

1. Potential employees face motivation issues and a lack of understanding on how to find and transfer to a new role.

As people age and move away from fulltime employment it is not uncommon for individuals to face a 'loss of purpose'. To counter this, the sector could encourage individuals to stay in work or seek part-time work. This would require the sector to assist individuals on how and where to search for new jobs as well as inform potential employers of the value mature aged workers bring.

2. Employers may often only consider the challenges of employing a mature aged individual.

Although older people have a wealth of knowledge and experience they can occasionally be unwilling to adapt and continue to learn. This can prove a particular challenge at the start of a new job when mature aged employees often require more support than a younger employee. However, when a new mature aged employee is settled they often bring above average diligence, reliability and trust worthiness.

3. A lack of deep understanding within government may hinder development of appropriate policy.

There is no agreed definition of 'mature aged' and, as such, it is difficult to align policy with both employer and employee needs. COTA therefore needs to inform government of both the value and challenges of employing a mature aged individual. This will assist in the development of appropriate policy to incentivise both employers and employees.

## Conclusion and next steps

This event has provided valuable information to inform COTA's role as the Peak Seniors Service. Many of our ongoing approaches and activities were affirmed while good new ideas and actions were tabled that can improve COTA's effectiveness.

COTA is progressing much of what has been covered in this workshop including as follows.

### **Communications with Government**

- Twice yearly reports on current and emerging issues and trends to the Office of Seniors– the first in July this year will include input from this forum, a similar forum held in Townsville in June and extensive engagement activity with the sector and consumers.
- Twice yearly reports to the governments Home and Community Care Program to identify trends and issues and suggest improvements.
- Provision of advice and directions for potential policy and program reforms through the year at the request of government.
- COTA's existing cycle of input into government reviews of policy and legislation.
- Meetings and representation to government – recently COTA along with other organisations wrote to the Queensland Government in support of maintaining concession levels for seniors in the face of withdrawal of federal funding. This outcome was achieved.

### **Communications and engagement with the sector**

- Regional forums like this one will take place across the state over the next three years
- COTAGENDA - COTA's bimonthly newsletter to stakeholders was launched at this forum. Forum attendees have been registered to receive this.
- COTA *life* - COTA's newsletter for consumers and interested parties has 1300 registrants and growing.
- COTA's consumer reference group has 450 members and growing.
- Seniors Week in August will expand on last year when COTA partnered with 208 Organisations to deliver over 330 events to an estimated 50,000 participants across Queensland.
- COTA will continue to host a roundtable of HACC/ Community Care Statewide Information Education and Training providers.
- COTA will participate in many committees, networks and working groups to stay across issues and promote sector collaboration.