

Council on the Ageing Queensland

Listening Post

2023



Council on the Ageing Queensland

Council on the Ageing Queensland is a for-purpose statewide charitable organisation.

We are the state's Seniors Peak and Seniors Social Isolation Prevention Peak and work with and for older adults, advancing the rights, needs, interests, and futures of people as we age. For more than 60 years, we have worked to influence positive social outcomes for older Queenslanders.

We connect directly with older Queenslanders, their families, carers, and organisations, service providers, consumer advocates, special interest groups, and our federal, state and local governments. We engage with all of these groups to understand needs, aspirations, and priorities for older people in Queensland, and partner to achieve the best outcomes for people as we age.

Our work includes policy analysis, community education, representation, evaluation and research, community engagement, and cross sector collaborations to achieve systemic change. We deliver funded programs directly to older people in need and provide sector support to those organisations who offer aged care and other services to older people.

We seek to eliminate ageism and support healthy ageing and growth of age-friendly communities. There are many areas of policy development needed to achieve this – elder abuse, energy, social isolation and loneliness prevention, climate resilience and disaster preparedness, digital inclusion, health, housing, and transport are just a few.

Our vision is that ageing is a time of possibility, opportunity, and influence.

With the number of older people expected to double by 2050, ensuring their voices are heard has never been more important.

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Acknowledgement

*Council on the Ageing Queensland
acknowledges Australia's First Nations Peoples
as the original custodians of this land.*



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Introduction

The Listening Post initiative, conducted by COTA Queensland, was designed to capture and amplify the voices of older Queenslanders. By engaging directly with people across metropolitan, regional, rural, and remote communities, this project explored their lived experiences, with a focus on identifying both the strengths and challenges of local services, infrastructure, and support networks. The initiative aimed to provide valuable qualitative insights that complement existing data, ensuring policies and services are aligned with the real-world needs of older adults across Queensland.

Engagement occurred over eight weeks between October and early December 2022, encompassing 46 Listening Post events across 10 regions, with a total of 389 participants aged between 50 and 97 years. Conversations varied in length and depth, providing a rich tapestry of stories, concerns, and ideas for change.

This report consolidates statewide themes, provides detailed regional insights, and presents opportunities to address identified gaps while building on existing community strengths.

Statewide Key Insights

1. Health and Aged Care Access

Access to timely, affordable, and appropriate health and aged care services emerged as a central concern.

- **Long Wait Times:** Participants reported delays of 4 to 12 weeks to see GPs and specialists, with regional and remote areas experiencing even longer waits. Emergency department waits could stretch beyond 8 hours, particularly in smaller towns with limited facilities.
- **Aged Care Navigation Challenges:** The complexity of accessing My Aged Care services and understanding aged care packages was a widespread issue. Many participants expressed frustration with bureaucratic red tape and a lack of clear, face-to-face support.
- **Healthcare Workforce Shortages:** In-home care services were inconsistent, often due to staff shortages. In some remote communities, only one or two support workers were available, leaving many without assistance.
- **Elder Abuse:** Instances of financial, emotional, and physical abuse—often hidden—were raised, particularly in the context of family caregiving and complex financial arrangements.



- **Palliative and End-of-Life Care:** Concerns were expressed about inadequate pain management, limited access to quality palliative care, and confusion surrounding the recently introduced Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) legislation.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- Streamline aged care navigation through locally based advisors.
- Expand bulk-billing options and reduce administrative hurdles for care access.
- Increase community awareness of elder abuse prevention and support services.
- Provide transport subsidies for medical appointments, especially in remote areas.
- Improve continuity of care with stable healthcare staffing solutions.

2. Housing Stability and Affordability

Housing insecurity significantly affects mental health, physical wellbeing, and community connection for older adults.

- **Affordability Concerns:** Rising rents, utilities, and council rates are placing financial strain on older Queenslanders. Participants reported sacrificing essentials like heating or medication to afford housing.
- **Lack of Appropriate Housing:** There is a shortage of accessible, affordable homes that meet the mobility needs of older adults. Long waitlists for public housing further exacerbate the issue.
- **Multigenerational Living:** Economic pressures have led to more families living together, often causing stress for older adults who find themselves primary caregivers for grandchildren or adult children.
- **Desire to Age in Place:** Many participants expressed a strong preference to remain in their homes but cited barriers like high costs for necessary home modifications and difficulties accessing maintenance services.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- Expand public and community housing options tailored to older adults.
- Offer grants for home modifications that promote safe ageing in place.
- Provide financial literacy workshops to help manage housing-related costs.
- Support multigenerational households with tailored community services.



3. Transport and Mobility

Reliable transport is essential for independence but remains a significant barrier, especially in rural and remote areas.

- **Public Transport Limitations:** Rural participants often face limited or non-existent public transport. Where services do exist, they are infrequent, poorly connected, and unsuitable for people with mobility challenges.
- **High Transport Costs:** Taxi fares are prohibitively expensive in many areas, and community transport options are either unavailable or heavily booked.
- **Safety Concerns:** Poorly maintained footpaths, inadequate pedestrian crossings, and unregulated scooter usage contribute to safety risks.
- **Loss of Driving Independence:** The emotional impact of giving up a driver's license was strongly expressed, with participants highlighting how it can lead to isolation.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- Expand community transport services with subsidised rates for older adults.
- Improve pedestrian infrastructure and implement road safety initiatives.
- Develop supportive programs for individuals transitioning from driving.
- Introduce regional travel vouchers for essential trips.

4. Social Isolation and Community Connection

Social connection was repeatedly emphasised as vital for physical and emotional health, yet many face increasing isolation.

- **Loneliness Epidemic:** Especially prevalent among those living alone, recently retired, or bereaved. Evening hours were described as particularly lonely.
- **Closure of Community Groups:** COVID-19 led to the disbanding of many social clubs, with some struggling to restart due to funding cuts or volunteer shortages.
- **Importance of Informal Networks:** Participants highlighted the role of casual community interactions, such as chats at local shops or community centres, in maintaining mental health.
- **Decline in Volunteerism:** While volunteering is crucial for social connection, the ageing volunteer base and lack of younger replacements raise sustainability concerns.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- Invest in community programs that promote intergenerational engagement.
- Provide transport to and from community events to reduce barriers.
- Establish neighbourhood check-in programs to combat isolation.
- Support local clubs with funding to re-establish post-pandemic activities.



5. Information Access and Digital Literacy

Access to information is essential, but many older adults face barriers in the digital world.

- **Digital Divide:** While some participants embraced technology, many struggled with devices and online systems, particularly government portals like MyGov.
- **Overreliance on Online Services:** Participants voiced frustration with services that have transitioned to digital-only access, leaving those without internet or digital literacy behind.
- **Need for Hardcopy Resources:** Communities expressed a preference for printed materials available in accessible locations such as libraries, community centres, and local shops.
- **Family as a Resource:** Adult children often assist with digital tasks, but not everyone has family support, leaving some completely disconnected.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- Maintain non-digital service options to ensure accessibility.
- Expand free digital literacy programs tailored to individual learning speeds.
- Increase distribution of hardcopy community directories and service information.
- Position community centres as key information hubs with face-to-face support.



Regional Perspectives

The Listening Post revealed unique local contexts, demonstrating that a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient. Below are key themes from each region.

Gold Coast:

- **Challenges:** Navigating retirement, digital exclusion, and loneliness, particularly among recent retirees.
- **Strengths:** Accessibility to community information via Seniors Expos and local events.

Brisbane:

- **Challenges:** High living costs, elder abuse, and frustrations with urban infrastructure projects.
- **Strengths:** Well-utilised public transport networks and access to community facilities.

Gympie:

- **Challenges:** Rising rental costs, healthcare wait times, and limited bulk-billing services.
- **Strengths:** A resilient community with a strong sense of local identity and active social clubs.

Ipswich:

- **Challenges:** Crime rates, housing affordability, and healthcare accessibility.
- **Strengths:** Community centres act as vital hubs for connection and support.

Logan:

- **Challenges:** Population growth outpacing infrastructure and limited affordable housing.
- **Strengths:** High volunteerism rates and strong community-driven initiatives.



Maranoa:

- **Challenges:** Long travel distances for essential services and a declining local workforce.
- **Strengths:** Cohesive community networks and commitment to local heritage.

Moreton Bay:

- **Challenges:** Rapid development without matching service expansion.
- **Strengths:** Active local organisations and long-term residents fostering community cohesion.

Mount Isa:

- **Challenges:** FIFO workforce impacts local housing and community stability.
- **Strengths:** Creative solutions like telehealth and informal support networks.

Scenic Rim:

- **Challenges:** Food insecurity, housing instability, and natural disaster impacts.
- **Strengths:** Strong volunteer culture and informal community care systems.

Townsville:

- **Challenges:** Limited health facilities, transport issues, and rising living costs.
- **Strengths:** Community-led programs, intergenerational projects, and local champions supporting vulnerable groups.



Looking Ahead: Opportunities for Change

1. Strengthen Community Connections

- Support local initiatives that encourage social participation.
- Facilitate town halls and informal community discussions.
- Develop peer-to-peer networks for older adults to share experiences and resources.

2. Improve Access to Health and Aged Care

- Incentivise healthcare professionals to work in underserved areas.
- Simplify My Aged Care processes through local navigators.
- Increase the number of mobile health services in rural and remote areas.

3. Enhance Housing Stability

- Expand social housing and rental assistance programs.
- Provide grants for home modifications to support independent living.
- Create policies that protect long-term renters, especially in volatile housing markets.

4. Expand Transport Options

- Fund more community transport options with flexible scheduling.
- Prioritise pedestrian safety upgrades in regional towns.
- Introduce transport vouchers for medical and social appointments.

5. Bridge the Digital Divide

- Continue to offer non-digital communication avenues.
- Expand digital skills training with patient, step-by-step support.
- Ensure local hubs (libraries, community centres) offer technology assistance.



Conclusion

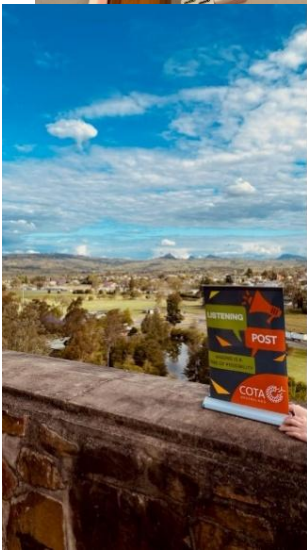
Older Queenslanders seek independence, meaningful connections, and accessible services to support their wellbeing.

The Listening Post project has illuminated the multifaceted challenges they face—from health access and housing insecurity to transport barriers and social isolation. Yet, the project also revealed deep community resilience, a strong volunteer ethos, and innovative local solutions.

To truly support Queensland's ageing population, stakeholders must address these challenges with nuanced, locally-informed policies and strategies that value lived experience.

By strengthening community connections, improving service accessibility, and investing in targeted regional initiatives, we can create an **age-friendly Queensland** where all older adults are connected, cared for, and empowered to live with dignity.







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