

Outcomes of the State-wide Conversation with Older South Australians



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Background

The State-wide Conversation with Older South Australians project engaged with older people across the state about what ageing well into the future means for them. Better Together: A practical guide to engagement with older people was developed and tested as part of the project as a tool to support the engagement with older people in shaping policies and decisions that affect them.

On 25 October 2016, the Hon Zoe Bettison MP, Minister for Ageing, launched the State-wide Conversation with Older South Australians and Better Together: A practical guide to engagement with older people at a sold-out Open State event. Following on from this event, between late October and early December 2016, over 425 people joined in more than 50 separate community conversations across 109 South Australian postcodes. Conversations took place in a diverse range of settings, including the State Library's Basil Hetzel Theatre, local government libraries, the Country Women's Association, a caravan park, a 4WD club, on a Yorke Peninsula road trip, at culturally and linguistically diverse agencies, and in private homes.

Equally diverse were the conversation participants. Of the participants who completed the demographic survey, 70 per cent were in the 51 - 74 age group, with 24 per cent in the 75 - 84 age group and 7 per cent over the age of 85. Women had a significantly higher representation in the conversations than men (4:1), whilst 36% of respondents were born outside of Australia and 4% of respondents identified as LGBTIQ.

The community conversations were designed by Moira Deslandes Consulting (MDC) and facilitated by older South Australians who were recruited and trained by MDC specifically for this purpose (subsequently known as 'Community Conversationalists'). Twenty-two (22) Community Conversationalists were recruited, including through OFTA's Feedback Network, Health Consumers Alliance, COTA SA, Hutt Street Centre and the City of Unley. As momentum grew, further community conversations were facilitated through OFTA's Age Friendly Partner Councils, as well as with a number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, engaged in the CALD Age Friendly South Australia project.

State-wide Conversation participants expressed their views across four themes:

1. The future is not what it used to be
2. Time, talent, and energy
3. Love, intimacy and family
4. Place, space and purpose.

A video for each theme was created with renowned expert in ageing, Dr Alexandre Kalache. These videos were made accessible via online platforms (You Tube channel, YourSAy site and embedded in social media posts).

An online YourSAy platform, was developed to strengthen the reach of the conversation and provide an alternative option for those not able or who did not choose to participate in a group setting. A closed Facebook group was also established to share the conversations.



Outcomes of the Conversations

A number of recurring issues and themes were raised throughout the community conversations, which have been distilled down to nine areas:

Transport

Transport was the issue mentioned with the most frequency in all conversations, regardless of theme or location. Participants said affordable, accessible and constant public transport was an essential element for active ageing. Transport considerations included walking and using a mix of private and public modalities to serve a range of purposes such as health and wellbeing (getting to medical appointments) and lifestyle (recreation, access to natural environment, holidays, community connections). Car parking spaces, proximity, size and number were raised across all themes. Participants also mentioned the additional limits on transport for older people in regional and rural areas. There was an interconnection between transport and most of the other policy areas noted e.g. affordability regarding car ownership and safety and security on roads and on public transport.

“Walk ways and community spaces that are well lit, safe, connected and encourage health, fitness and connectedness; Take into account future modes of transport that may not be commercialised or designed as yet today.”

YourSAy

Affordability

Economic security was a consistent theme and a key concern for many participants. It was seen as central to ongoing independence, impacting on both quality of life and the ability to maximise choices. Measures to maximise workforce retention of older people and opportunities

to re-enter the workforce or upskill were raised. Concessions for public services such as transport, community activities and utilities were regularly mentioned. There were a wide range of possibilities that older people identified as useful for assisting with affordability such as reducing the size of the family home to a high end ‘tiny’ house, developing independent power supplies and enhancing the use of volunteers in service delivery.

“Affordability and accessibility are important factors to achieve connectedness & support communities such as the cost of essential services (power supply).”

Community Conversation participant

Technology

The pace of change in technological developments, particularly for communication between people, organisations, services and companies was universally felt to be faster than participants could keep up with. Participants suggested that older people continue to be supported to increase their digital literacy and proposed that non-tech options i.e. for paying bills, need to remain. Conversations highlighted that the digital divide may continue to be a significant inhibitor to active ageing. Participants indicated they would be willing to be involved in trialling and testing new technologies to support their peers. It was acknowledged that technology is also an enabler of communication, social participation and personal safety and security and could be used to greater effect i.e. in remote area health care.

“Remote health care analysis over distance, not just measurements, but a virtual reality communication between patient to health provider.” **Community Conversation participant**



State Wide Conversation with Older South Australians - Hands Up

Making a Contribution

Participants expressed that they want to be respected and included in the community. Older South Australians identified making a contribution as: having a voice, being heard, being seen and being included in decisions that affect them, their families, friends, communities and future generations. Generating ongoing opportunities for older people to meet, learn and contribute was a key theme that ran through the consultation findings. Many participants noted the desire to share their lived experiences through mentoring, teaching and / or up-skilling younger people.

"There needs to be more input from older community members about what is needed in communities – consultation is very important."

Community Conversation participant

"...older people providing child minding, budgeting and giving lessons in cooking to younger people..."

Community Conversation participant

Comments also expressed the desire to end ageism and discrimination, and to change the perception of older people being 'past their use-by date'.

"...we need to improve the perception of older people as contributors rather than a burden"

Community Conversation participant

Capitalising on the transition from being in the workforce full time to retirement was reflected in comments such as:

"Phase into retirement through volunteering"
Community Conversation participant

"...we need to re-evaluate all the time - am I working too hard - could I drop a day off and what would I do with that day?" **Vox Pops, Open State**

Social Mix

Mixed land use was cited by many as crucial to ensuring strong and vibrant neighbourhoods that actively promote a range of activities and opportunities for social interaction. Many participants commented on the importance of social mix in urban planning and housing decisions. Suggestions included housing younger people (e.g. university students on low incomes) with older people on a low rent / skills exchange basis.

The importance of locating nursing homes and retirement facilities alongside facilities for diverse age groups in the community (e.g. employment hubs, kindergartens, schools) was also noted.

"Rent a grandparent, designing nursing homes to include child care facilities etc." **Your SAY**

Design and Accessibility

The issue of affordable and accessible accommodation, which is close to reliable transport, town centres and services that include meeting places, such as coffee shops, libraries and



Community Conversation, Magill



Community Conversation, Magill

places where older people will 'bump into' friends and neighbours, was raised. These opportunities for interaction were seen as ways to build community and reduce isolation and loneliness, especially for people who are living alone or who have families not living in close proximity. Inclusiveness of diversity was also highlighted.

"...Well positioned infrastructure - transport, medical facilities, shopping, community areas, libraries, safe areas."

Community Conversation participant

"...ability for gay couples to be accommodated in the same manner as other members of a community."

Community Conversation participant

Participants noted the value of active travel opportunities and the benefits of the natural environment, such as parks and walkways. This included comments on the cooling benefits that may result from incorporating green spaces (e.g. gardens, lawns and trees) into a planned built environment.

"Encourage walking, cycling and exercise through design of footpaths and community spaces. Pets! Green spaces."

Community Conversation participant

Participants also noted accessibility and mobility as key elements of good design and ability to stay engaged with society.

"We need lifts in buildings. Escalators are too fast for older people, especially in wheelchairs."

Community Conversation participant

Housing and Services

Housing security, being able to stay in their homes for as long as possible, having options for receiving in-home support services, and only moving into permanent residential care if necessary, were expressed as top priorities for older people. Participants also indicated a desire for more consistent standards, training (and pay) for staff providing these services. A significant theme of the engagement was a high level of concern surrounding residential care, including associated costs. Emphasis was placed on building homes for an enhanced level of social interaction, with access to the outdoors and pets. Participants wanted their friends and family members who are in residential care to be included in neighbourhood and social opportunities as a way of staying connected and maintaining dignity.

"...to be able to stay in your own home for as long as possible."

Community Conversation participant

"More community interaction with nursing homes."

Community Conversation participant

Wellbeing and Choice

Actively preparing for ageing was perceived by many to be underpinned with a sense of resilience, self-reliance and openness to new ideas. Keeping actively connected through activities and purpose was identified as playing a role in building and maintaining resilience. Participants highlighted future planning; financially, physically and emotionally, as being key factors. Staying physically well for as long as possible was a frequently made point in the Community Conversations. Wellbeing also extended to the realms of discrimination and living in an inclusive society. The negative impact of isolation on wellbeing was widely understood and commented on.

"Isolation is not for age. They don't go well together. And the different degrees of how we maintain that contact is something that really needs to be looked at." **Vox Pops, Open State**



Inter-generational connections were raised as a way of supporting wellbeing, choice and incidental care and assistance. Where this was not possible, community groups where there are shared interests, such as Men's Sheds, Reading Groups, Food banks, seed banks, etc. were seen as viable alternatives.

"People need to come together to talk, eat, listen to music, read, exercise etc. We need to have community spaces that encourage and foster this. And transport to get there."

Community Conversation participant

Personal responsibility and choice relating to dating, sexual health (including safe sex practices) and dying with dignity, were also mentioned as important for older people.

"Golden sites for dating for the aged (which are monitored)."

Community Conversation participant

"...euthanasia should be available (for all) - we should have the 'right to die' with dignity."

Community Conversation participant



Community Conversation Active Ageing Alliance City of Unley

Safety and Security

Many participants expressed concern about their personal safety and security. Safety in both public spaces and in digital spaces was raised. Perceptions of safety were linked with the desire to increase face-to-face interactions, both for personal safety reasons and to assist in working through 'red tape'. Personal contact was seen as increasing trust and reducing not feeling safe. Elder abuse and vulnerability were mentioned as occurring via phone and email scams.

"Older people need a call centre not a computer."

Community Conversation participant

"Need a better way of authenticating information received via internet and telephone."

Community Conversation participant

Design features that support passive surveillance, such as lighting and bus stops in central hub locations, were suggested to feel safe in public places. Losing independence through loss of licence as a result of no longer being a safe driver was also raised. Participants referred to concerns about age, racial and sexual vilification, and how this destroys trust and creates an atmosphere that promotes feelings of being unsafe. Suggestions to ameliorate this included:

"An apology to the gay community for past ill treatment and inaction of authorities."

Community Conversation participant

"Removal of convictions issued based on one's sexuality (e.g. for homosexuality)."

Community Conversation participant

Contribution to The Age Friendly SA Strategy

The themes and outcomes of the State-wide Conversation with Older South Australians were used to shape the development of the Age Friendly SA Strategy, aligned to the all-ages-friendly communities priority of Prosperity Through Longevity: South Australia's Ageing Plan, Our Vision 2014-2019.

From the community conversations, five priorities were identified as key enablers to ageing well in South Australia:

1. **Home, Community & Environment:** Creating spaces that are inviting and accessible to all ages; encouraging a sense of community, as well as safety, security and independence. Enjoying nature and taking care of the environment for the future.
2. **Making a Contribution:** Supporting opportunities for the positive contribution, lifelong learning and active participation of older people. Ensuring the voices of older people are sought out and heard.
3. **Making it Easier to Get Around:** Well-maintained paths for walking and cycling. Reliable and affordable transport, convenient parking, and being able to travel safely around

our city and neighbourhoods, are all part of maintaining connection to community and independence.

4. **Intergenerational Connectedness:** Creating environments and communities that bring together people of all ages and stages of life; promoting strong community connections; building trust; challenging ageism; and creating opportunities for shared activities.
5. **Age Friendly Services:** Ensuring services are designed and delivered in ways that are inclusive of and respectful to the needs and wants of older people.

These priorities form the backbone of the Age Friendly SA Strategy and will become the drivers of the state government's age friendly work.

The Age Friendly SA Strategy sets the direction for building South Australia's capacity as an age friendly state; one that recognises and values older people as contributors and members of society, and brings together community, state government, local councils, and community organisations to work collectively towards making South Australia a great place to spend a lifetime.

Engagement of Community Conversationalists

The State-wide Conversation with Older South Australians project sought to improve the capacity of OFTA and partner agencies to engage the community in informing state government processes and delivering public policy outcomes.

An evaluation of the 'community conversationalist' model for facilitating the community conversations was undertaken in December 2016, to reflect on the State-wide Conversation experience and to inform the process for future engagements. It was identified that the use of community conversationalists added value and credibility to the engagement process, leading to better policy outcomes.

Having indicated an interest in contributing to future engagement processes, a number of the trained community conversationalists were

called upon in early 2017 to facilitate discussions between older Housing SA tenants and housing industry professionals as part of OFTA's Innovation in Social Housing Co-design Forum. The value that the community conversationalists added to this process was recognised by other state government agencies, who are now considering opportunities to use this model in their own future engagement processes.

Office for the Ageing extends special thanks to considerable work and expert support of MDC and to the community conversationalists for their contribution to the State-wide Conversation with Older South Australians project; for conducting themselves with "grit, gratitude, get up and go" and for exemplifying what it means to be living in an age friendly South Australia.

For more information

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