

turns COTA 50

COUNCIL ON THE AGEING



In August 1957 a public meeting was held in Adelaide to gather support for starting the Older People's Welfare Council in South Australia. Similar bodies had already been launched in Victoria and NSW. The Older People's Welfare Council became officially incorporated in October 1957. In 1969 it became the SA Council on the Ageing (SACOTA) and then Council on the Ageing (South Australia) in 1992, commonly known as (COTA SA).

From August 2007 COTA SA has been marking its 50th year by both celebrating its past and preparing for the future. At the 'Beyond 50' Gala Dinner on 1 May 2008 past and current Board members and volunteers are being honoured and major new developments announced.

COTA's story is rich and diverse, with many enduring threads running through it. This brief memento gives only a flavour of the concerns, people and achievements of COTA over five decades.

Developing the sector

One enduring thread is that throughout its history COTA has "given birth" to many organizations that today make up the ageing sector in SA, as well as others that have come, served a purpose, and gone.



Aged & Community Services
SA & NT Inc

One of the oldest of the "COTA children" is today's Aged & Community Services SA & NT. Originally the Standing Committee - Homes for the Aged Organisations of COTA it became an independent organisation in 1972 as the Residential Aged Care Association of SA, and later the Voluntary Care Association of South Australia. Today ACS SA&NT is the peak industry body representing over 95% of the not-for-profit aged sector in SA and increasing numbers in the NT. It is the SA member of Aged and Community Services Australia. COTA works closely with both the state and national bodies.

COTA was "midwife" to a number of other organisations which had national bodies or interstate counterparts. COTA hosted and supported their formation in SA. These include the SA Division of the Australian Association of Gerontology; the University of the Third Age (U3A); the Continence Foundation SA Branch; the SA Association of the Abbeyfield Society; and the Carers Association (now Carers SA).

Some home-grown "births" were the Over 60's Education Association, the Associated Senior Citizens

Clubs of SA, the Over 60s Radio; Recreation for Older Adults (now Active Ageing SA); Women Going It Alone and the Seniors Education Network.

The Consultative Council of Pensioner and Retired Persons Associations was established in the early 1980s as a consumer groups umbrella within COTA. Through several name changes the Council of Pensioners and Retired Persons (COPARP) was COTA's consumer organizations forum for over 20 years before merging back into COTA in 2005.



COTA created the Seniors Information Service (SIS) in 1995 with State and Commonwealth Government support to bring together separate COTA, OFTA and Commonwealth services into a one-stop shop. SIS provides free access to information about services and facilities available to seniors.



The Aged Rights Advocacy Service (ARAS) was established in 1990 as a joint initiative of COTA and COPARP and is a subsidiary of COTA SA. ARAS provides advocacy assistance to support older people uphold their rights. Initially concerned with residents of nursing homes and hostels, ARAS now offers services to older people who receive HACC services; live in aged care facilities; receive community aged care packages; or who are, or at risk of, experiencing abuse.



The SA Retirement Villages Residents Association (SARVRA) was initiated by COTA in 1989 after a major review of the retirement village sector. Ever since it has been supported by and operated from COTA. SARVRA aims to advance the interests of the residents of retirement villages.



Finally we are proud to record our strong association with the Council of Aboriginal Elders of South Australia (CAESA), borne out of the efforts of Aboriginal elders and the Office for the Ageing during the UN International Year of Older Persons. COTA provided the auspice and support base for CAESA during its formative years. Since CAESA became an independent entity COTA maintains a close relationship, seeking advice and representation from CAESA on our Policy Council, ARAS and other activities.

This is an impressive list. Even though it is not comprehensive it is obvious the ageing sector would not be what it is today without the contribution that COTA has made to its development through these and other organisations.

National leadership

COTA has played important roles in the formation and leadership of the national COTA bodies in their various incarnations. Both the Rev Vernon Harrison AO and Jim Giles AM have been national presidents. COTA SA chaired the strategic review that led to the COTA Movement Strategy in the early 1990s. We also initiated COTA Insurance and then COTA Membership Services and funded many of its developments.

COTA SA initiated a national COTA News magazine, funded and hosted the inaugural COTA National Congress in 1999 and provided leadership to the COTA National Seniors Partnership, precursor to the COTA National Seniors merger. Although the merger was undermined and ultimately failed at leadership levels, members and many staff of both organizations still recognize its logic and sense.

Today COTA SA manages three national peer education programs which are run through other COTAs and provides financial and operational support to other parts of the COTA network.

COTA Programs

Another thread is COTA's role with seniors clubs. Establishing these was a key role in its early years, usually in partnership with Local Government. The first four clubs were set up in 1959. Today there are over 200 clubs and other local seniors' organizations in COTA membership providing a vital network across the state. Since 1991 COTA has had various club development programs, including the Networking Clubs program, supported by HACC.



COTA's longest standing community program commenced as a morning tea to celebrate senior citizens. Over the decades it became Senior Citizens Week, Seniors Week, then Celebrate Seniors and finally Every Generation. Today the Every Generation Festival each October features not only an Official State Launch, a Country Launch and the annual Awards Dinner but more than 500 local community events put on by around 140 Partners

around the state. The Awards program recognizes achievements of seniors and actions that bridge generations and promote positive images of ageing.

After a series of pilots in quality use of medicines, talking with health professionals, and the Speaking Up - Speaking Out self-advocacy project, the last decade has seen the development of the Peer Education Resource Centre and a wide range of peer education programs such as Seniors Quality Use of Medicines, Falls Prevention, Winter Warmth, Sweet Dreams, Beyond Maturity Blues and Safety for Seniors.



Over the years there have been a wide range of COTA programs and services covering areas as diverse as real estate, housing advice, recreational camps for seniors, legal advice, COTA Day Trips, Understanding Your Finances, financial advice, Tax Help, the COTA Choir and many more.

Our Strength for Life program, Give it a Go and many aspects of our Clubs work emphasize active ageing and involve many thousands of senior South Australians.

COTA People

COTA staff numbers have grown from a part-time Executive Director in the early 1960s to around 80 staff now in COTA and its satellites. Yet volunteers have always outnumbered staff and today over 100 active volunteers cover every aspect of COTA's work from clerical to library to Tax Help to a growing range of peer education programs - plus those who serve on the Board, Policy Council and as representatives on numerous government bodies.

One of the standout threads of COTA history has been that so many volunteers and staff have been long serving. The trend was set early by Professor Sir Stanton Hicks who led the Council for 19 years from 1957 to his death in 1976.



Barbara Garrett MBE

However two people represent the ultimate in longevity in COTA. One is Barbara Garrett MBE who served on COTA Boards and Policy Councils for three different periods over about 30 years. The last was from 1989 until her death in 2007, most of that time as a Deputy President and/or Policy Chair.



Dorothy Pash OAM

The other is Dorothy Pash OAM and COTA Honorary Life Member, who was also on the Board for 30 years and President for 10 years until 1994. Dorothy stuck with COTA through hard times including near bankruptcy, political criticism and major staff problems. Dorothy stepped down from the Board in 2000 with COTA in good shape.



David Chalk

In addition to these stand-outs the list of COTA volunteers with long careers is extensive and includes current Honorary Life Members Margaret Scharer, Betty Hockley, Shirley Maywald, Neil Mason (former President) and Pauline Mason, Harry Cresswell, Valda Megson, Les Riley and Margaret Gleeson. A remarkable number of COTA volunteers have reached over 1,000 hours and / or 10 years of service, including Janet Chambers, Joyce Frost, Queenie Inshaw, Jim Giles AM, Anne Megaw, Rita Northcott and others acknowledged in our Annual Reports. In recent years we have had to add a Platinum Level to our Volunteer Awards for service over 4,000 hours - awarded so far to David Chalk and Les Riley.

Many who made iconic contributions to COTA are no longer with us. They include the late Rev. Vernon Harrison AO (President at both SA and national levels), Wilf Mader OAM (16 years of COTA Choir and Schools Music Treats), Arthur Cys OAM (Seniors Clubs), and Murray Haines AM (Board member and honorary Executive Director). We must also mention Laurie Fioravanti who was Treasurer, then Treasurer and President, for 10 years until his untimely death in 2005 while still in office.

On the staff side of the ledger there is a similar record of longevity. Les Clutterbuck was Executive Officer from 1963 to 1974. His successor Neil Gibson served 'only' six years until 1980. Our current Chief Executive, Ian Yates AM, has been in that role (and other COTA roles in addition) for 19 years.

COTA SA has a remarkable record in the community sector for the number of its staff who have qualified for long service leave - basically one a year over the last two decades. Former Deputy Director, Joan Watkinson and Margaret King (both 12 years) are Honorary Life Members. Among current staff members Germaine Rowberry, Janice Yates and Dorina Fanning have each clocked up over 15 years.

Marilyn Crabtree, Chief Executive of ARAS has been with us since 1990. The ARAS Board's long serving members include the late Mary Miller, Chair of ARAS for a decade and of COPARP for longer. She was succeeded in both roles since 2000 by Joan Stone, who has also been SARVRA President since then. Stuart Hart ISO has been on the ARAS Board for a decade and the COTA Board from 2000-2007.

The COTA insurance arm (now Insurance and Membership Services Ltd) has also had major contributors. Lois Whittall was Executive Director for a decade and Mick Daniels Insurance Manager for most of that often turbulent time.

Many more volunteers and staff than we can mention here have made contributions, large and small, lengthy or brief, but all significant over the last 50 years, and the last 20 in particular. Apologies to the hundreds not mentioned by name. You have all made COTA what it is today.

Tackling Ageing issues over 50 years

Looking back through COTA SA Annual Reports one is always struck by how many of the issues and concerns recur over the years. From the early 1960s one can read of The Older People's Welfare Council efforts to raise awareness and initiate action on issues such as:

- Social isolation and self esteem
- Contributions of older people to society
- Continuing employment for "the elderly"
- Information and advisory services on ageing and aged services
- Meals service for older people to address both nutrition and isolation
- Levels of care provided for aged citizens in some Rest Homes
- Developing educational opportunities for seniors
- Development of community and domiciliary care services as an alternative to the "huge cost of maintaining hospital beds" and to "lessen demand on already strained

- hospital resources" - back in 1963 and 1964!
 - Better retirement planning and preparation
 - Action on ageing by Local Government, as the body close to many of "the elderly"
 - Implications of an ageing population
- Over the decades issues of health, housing, income, transport, employment, education, isolation and care services appear in many different forms.

COTA has made major contributions over the years to State Government ageing policy. These include the development of Domiciliary Care services, the Seniors Card, the Retirement Villages Act, the Older Persons Health Plan, the ground-breaking Ageing - A Ten Year Plan, the Moving Ahead Plan, the Population Policy for SA, the South Australia Works policy, the development and funding of the HACC Program, the Generational Health Review and its implementation, and the current 'Improving with Age' policy.



COTA's commitment to advocacy on behalf of seniors' well being is also reflected by our representation on over 60 advisory bodies, community organizations and Boards; and also in our regular meetings with Ministers and Parliamentarians - at both State and Federal levels, Departmental CEs and senior officials.

Similarly COTA's constant presence in print, radio and television media from the community level in Adelaide and across the state, to statewide and national media, is testament to our acknowledged leadership and expertise in ageing issues across the board.



'Looking Forward' in the Advertiser

"Independence" and "dignity" are themes that go way back in COTA's history. The way they are articulated though, and by whom, have changed. In early decades leadership of COTA was largely from the medical and other professions, the churches, and aged care service providers. Older people were the subject of COTA's attentions but they were largely not involved in its work. Independence and dignity were things the elderly should strive for in old age, but ageing was in general seen as a progression to dependency.

Today COTA is at the forefront of action by older people, whether in our programs with Clubs, in our many and varied peer education projects, or in policy development and advocacy. Today we understand independence and dignity as matters of rights, ageing as development across the whole of life, and citizenship as a lifelong entitlement, not a season ticket.

Moving On

Today Council on the Ageing (South Australia) becomes COTA Seniors Voice. Contemporary forms of organisation combine with new services to members and a strengthened commitment to a fair go for all seniors into the 21st century.



Seniors Voice
Speaking out to governments and community for a fair go for all Seniors



Seniors Choice
Access great value services, products and savings with exclusive benefits for our members



Seniors Connect
Supporting over 50s and communities to lead active and healthy lifestyles



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