

COTA (ACT)

The voice of older Australians

Fourth
09
NEWSLETTER

President's Welcome

Our upcoming meeting will be the AGM and this will include the election of your Board. However, before outlining these local events I will discuss developments at the National level.



I believe that we have successfully turned around the situation at the national level. Systems are now in place to improve communication and effectiveness at the Board, Chief Executive and Policy Officer levels. As part of this the National Policy Manager, for COTA National, is now located in the Hughes Community Centre.

Last week the Presidents and Chief Executives of the State and Territory COTAs met in Sydney to work on a Cooperation Agreement, a Projects and Programs memorandum and COTA branding.

Previously the COTAs have not had a commitment to work together in this way. It includes a commitment to the values and common initiatives such as policy development processes. Regarding programs and projects, previously some States developed activities that other areas have also delivered. We now have the benefit of an organisation that specifically develops joint initiatives which we participate in.

Finally, over the last five years the marketing and images of the COTAs have become more diverse. We are now working on common branding of all COTAs.

These initiatives both draw the COTAs together and strengthen the organisations. Building capacity at the federal level and also within the smaller COTAs is part of this process. We have a three-year plan to build at the national level and it is working well.

Our Annual General Meeting, on 13 October, will have three elements. They are, reporting on COTA (ACT) activity, election of office bearers and a special guest.

Firstly, a high level of activity and positive outcomes are features of the last year. The Treasurer and I will share our positive reports.

This year's election of office bearers is particularly important. This is because the elected term is two years and, due to historical and other factors, all but one position will be vacant. This gives you the opportunity to nominate both new and previous Board members. Please contact the Executive Director for nomination forms.

Finally, this year, our general meetings have examined health issues which may include both personal and policy responses. Our guest AGM speaker is Graham Downie. You may have read Consumer Voice which Graham contributes to the Canberra times. You can now discuss issues with Graham at the COTA meeting.

Can I encourage you to participate in COTA activities to strengthen our organisation and ensure we represent the broadest range of mature people within our community.

Elizabeth Grant AM

COTA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

13 October 2009 at 2pm

Hughes Community Centre

[Graham Downie](#)
[Consumer Voice](#)

Graham Downie

was born at Wellington, NSW, in 1948 and moved to a farm at Oberne Creek, about 100 km from Wagga Wagga.



There was no telephone, electricity or running water. Here, with loving and practical parents, Graham Downie began to learn to live without sight.

His first job was in a factory at Chatswood, followed by work as a telephonist with The Canberra Times.

In 1972 he moved to Melbourne, where he worked as a public relations officer. Since 1973, he has been a journalist with The Canberra Times.

Graham has been involved with several community organisations, especially Scouting. In recognition of his community service he received the 1985 ANZAC of the Year Award and was the 1990 Canberra Citizen of the Year. He received Scouting's Silver Kangaroo Award and an AM in 2005.



ActewAGL

COTA (ACT) is proudly supported by

Working with Vulnerable People

The Minister for Community Services, Katy Gallagher recently released a discussion paper titled **“A Working with Vulnerable People Checking System for the ACT”**.

This seeks to implement screening mechanisms to ensure that people employed to deliver goods or services do not abuse, misuse, or take advantage of vulnerable people. Vulnerable include:

- Children at school, childcare, youth and children’s groups, sporting activities
- Adults with disabilities, in hospital or in receipt of welfare or community assistance
- Seniors in aged care, hospital or receiving assistance at home.

COTA supports additional protection for people. You may download a copy of the discussion paper from www.dhcs.act.gov.au. Alternatively, a hard copy is available from the COTA office. However, vulnerability is not merely reflected in interactions with strangers or people in paid employment. Rather, there is growing evidence that elder abuse is increasing and much of this is at the hands of trusted friends and relatives.

The growing incidence of financial abuse illustrates the point. Measures to address abuse of “Powers of Attorney” are being introduced to protect people. COTA (ACT) is on the ACT Law Society Elder Law Committee. It is currently looking at these issues on a local and a national basis. If you have an interest or experience in these areas please contact Cliff Carey, Policy Officer, in the office.

Balance Study - Volunteers wanted:

Researchers at the University of Canberra are looking for volunteers to participate in a balance study that involves a home exercise program. If you are **over 60**, have had a fall in the past year and are interested please call 6201 5843.

Executive Notes



Spring has started with some beautiful days. However, this made me reflect on recent weather. August was almost ‘summer in winter’, especially if you were in northern NSW or Queensland. Our winter was warmer and cloudier than average but it was actually drier.

This all seems very confusing but in some ways is similar to the policy environment in which we operate. Despite the Budget initiatives on the Age Pension, many are struggling and this extends to people who have been good savers and previously astute investors.

Despite the economic downturn and significant housing initiatives, affordable and appropriate accommodation often appears to be even more difficult to obtain. Similarly, the current burst of illnesses is making it more difficult for many to obtain substantial health improvements. This is despite actions to increase health service capacity.

In the COTA office we have faced similar challenges. The complexity of cases which we deal with appears to be increasing. At the same time the staff has been confronted with many personal health issues. In addition, as ‘baby boomers’ many have also had to assist parents or children who are requiring increased care and assistance.

The policy requests from both the ACT and Federal governments are increasing. They also appear to be less coordinated. Currently we have requests for input on disability parking, mobility scooters, ACT cemeteries and retirement villages. Our Newsletters include short articles on current issues. This is to both inform members and provide an opportunity for members to comment. Please provide comments on any issues which concern you. In addition, I encourage you to make your views known to our Policy Council members, Government and also local politicians.

Did You Know?

Transport schemes are available to assist your mobility and help improve participation in the community.

Mobility Parking Scheme: Phone ACT Parking Operations 6207 7200 Road User Services 6207 7117 Email parking.operations@act.gov.au Web www.rego.act.gov. (Alternatively, you can ask your Doctor who may complete a form which you take to Canberra Connect which issues the voucher).

Taxis: Cabxpress Phone 62606011; **Elite Taxis** Phone 133 300; **Silver Service** Phone 133 100.

Wheelchair Accessible Taxis Phone 6126 1596.

Buses: Action 131 710 (The Action Gold Card provides free bus travel to residents over the age of 75 years and is available from Canberra Connect shopfronts.); **Deanes Buslines** 6299 3722.

NRMA Wheelchair Service: 131 111 Repair of tyres and batteries free of charge if stranded.

Narrabundah Special Care Transport: (Southside community Service HACC program) 6126 4780.

Regional Community Bus Services: Monday to Friday for residents with no transport options (Belconnen Community Service 6251 2100, Northside Community Service 62475757, Gungahlin Community Service 6228 9200, Southside Community Service 61264723, Communities@Work 6288 4744, Woden Community Service 6260 5400).

Greyhound: 1300 473 946 **Web:** www.greyhound.com.au **Murrays:** 132 251 **Web:** www.murrays.com.au

Countrylink: 132 232 **Web:** www.countrylink.info

Interstate patient travel assistance scheme: 6205 3299 **Web:** www.health.act.gov.au

Parking at Westfield Tuggeranong and Woden: receive an extra hour parking free by presenting your Seniors Card at the Information service, Belconnen already has three hours free parking.

In the Frame

Jan Petrie

Jan Petrie was born in Sydney and moved to Umina when she was five. She attended Woy Woy School. After school Jan worked in an office until she married Colin in 1963. They had two boys and Jan stayed at home while they were young. They lived at Davistown for 36 years.



Jan trained as a youth worker and worked for 12 years in a State Ward Home in Kariang. This was an emotionally draining but rewarding experience. From there Jan transferred to a Local Council early Childhood Centre where she worked for ten years. This inspired her to open her own child care centre (Wyong Cottage Kindergarten) which catered for 55 children. Jan operated this centre for five years until she eventually sold it and retired.

Since retiring Jan has been very busy. She looks after grandchildren for 20 hours per week plus all school holidays. She is vice president of Greenway Probus, loves bushwalking and volunteers as a COTA (ACT) Peer Educator.

Recently Jan and Rusty Woodward volunteered to undertake the balance study run by the University of Canberra. This is a 12 month study which requires them to perform six minutes of strengthening exercises every second day, using simple and inexpensive equipment. Every second month they attend University of Canberra to assess if their strength is improving.

Jan and Rusty undertook the study to determine what simple exercises can be done in the home and will incorporate the findings into their Peer Education Falls talks. They encourage everyone to participate in this very easy, home based program.

Jan plans to stay in Canberra, finding it the easiest place to live in the world, with so much to see and do in close proximity. She plans to continue her bushwalking, which incidentally she only commenced in her late 40s with a walk of the Milford Track. She will also travel more and continue to care for her (very lucky) grandchildren.



The Hughes Festival of Music is an evening mini music festival taking place at the Hughes shops. It will consist of six classical/ jazz concerts held within individual shops bringing some of Canberra's finest young performers to the suburb of Hughes for an innovative program of music. Given the size of the venues, most concerts will be limited to 15 to 20 people. This is a magical chance to get up close and personal with artists such as cellist David Pereira, violinist Barbara Jane Gilby, trumpeter Miroslav Bukovsky and soprano Louise Page.

COTA is participating in the festival which will end with a Gala Concert in the Hughes Community Centre at 7.30pm on 19 September. The micro nature of the festival and the venues encourages a dynamic and experimental approach to the presentation of fine music. Further, the Festival confirms the rich sense of community in the Hughes region. 2009 marks the 50th anniversary of the planning of Hughes by the NCDC. The Festival celebrates the fruition of this planning. Tickets are available at participating shops.

THINGS TO DO:

1. Volunteer for the Balance Study
2. Attend a lunchtime forum
3. Have your eyes checked
4. Go to the free Seniors Rotary Concert
5. Attend the Hughes Festival of Music

A New Age of Philanthropy

Canberra now has its own community foundation, the Capital Region Community Foundation, **GreaterGood**. The concept of GreaterGood is to preserve capital and produce a permanent income to support charitable causes. Through the foundation, donors can place capital to produce income for regular distribution to their recommended charities. The donor is entitled to an immediate tax deduction (provided the charities are deductible gift recipients) or can spread the tax deduction over up to five years. These accounts also enjoy no establishment costs, low fees, a respected board, centralised auditing and the advantage of investment through the Public Trustee's sector diversified common funds.

A named philanthropic family trust can be established with as little as \$20,000, progress is followed and recognition for the donor is given. Further contribution can be made by legacy under will and the family trust continued on by successive generations. For example, COTA is a Public Benevolent Institution and donations to benefit it are tax deductible. A person on the top scale could establish a \$20,000 named fund within GreaterGood to benefit COTA on an ongoing basis for an after tax outlay of only \$10,700.

COTA has brochures or for more information contact the Public Trustee for the ACT, 221 London Circuit, Civic, telephone 62079800 or visit www.gretergood.org.au.

Peer Education Talks

Over the last four years NPS (National Prescribing Service) and COTA have been training seniors in each state and territory to become Peer Educators. The Peer Educators then go out and talk about medicines to their peers, that is, other seniors. To date, COTA Peer Educators have given free talks about wise use of medicines and generic medicines to over 3,000 groups across Australia.

However, medicines are not always the only or best way to improve our health and well-being.

The 'More than medicines – living well' talk focuses on the role that lifestyle factors can play in preventing and better controlling chronic conditions. In chronic conditions such as Type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure, lifestyle changes can complement or even replace treatment with medicines.

Many more seniors are using the internet to search for information about health, medicines and other treatments. The 'More than medicines – living well' talk shows seniors how to critically judge health information found on the internet and how to determine whether a website has been endorsed as containing accurate information.

The session lasts about an hour and is free. It can be held at a time and place that suits your group. The speaker can cover the effect of lifestyle factors on health in general, or they can focus on the effects of lifestyle factors on Type 2 diabetes, chronic pain or hypertension depending on your group's needs.

If you would like a Peer Educator to come and give this talk to your group, or would like information on other topics, please contact Christine Spicer, 6282 3777, e-mail cspicer@cota-act.org.au or see www.cota-act.org.au

Please note that it is a pre-request that the group has already received a talk on Quality Use of Medicines from our Peer Educators.

Know the signs of stroke and act **FAST**

Would you know what to do if the side of your face drooped or you were unable to move your arm?

According to the National Stroke Foundation you could be experiencing a stroke. Strokes are Australia's second biggest killer and a leading cause of disability, with one occurring every 10 minutes.

Stroke symptoms occur in a variety of ways. There may be just one warning sign or a combination. **FAST** is an easy way to recognise the signs of stroke and take immediate action.

The **FAST** test involves asking three simple questions:

- **Face** – Check their face. Has their mouth drooped?
- **Arms** – Can they lift both arms?
- **Speech** – Is their speech slurred? Do they understand you?
- **Time** – Time is critical. If you see any of these signs, **call 000 now!**

Calling 000 immediately at the first signs of stroke can mean the difference between death or severe disability and making a good recovery from stroke.

Strokes are preventable and treatable. The National Stroke Foundation says that controlling these risk factors can help you to reduce your risk of stroke.

- Keep blood pressure and cholesterol low
- Limit alcohol consumption
- Exercise and enjoy a healthy balanced diet
- Do not smoke

This week is National Stroke Week. For information and advice on stroke prevention, treatment or recovery call **StrokeLine 1800 787 653** or see www.strokefoundation.com.au

COTA participated in the ACT Philanthropy Round Table last week.

Often we think of philanthropy as large dedicated funds and bundles of money. We can fail to recognise all donations in their various forms. There is a well established ethic of philanthropic support in the ACT community across all socio economic sectors. The ACT is the most generous when measured as the proportion of donors to tax payers.

As well as making significant financial donations, ACT residents have a strong volunteering culture. Similarly businesses in the ACT donate a high level of goods and services. The group is looking to:

- 1 Better ensure that philanthropic giving does not relieve Government of its responsibilities.
- 2 Demonstrate more clearly the achievements of the giving.
- 3 Acknowledge philanthropic activity more widely, and
- 4 Encourage a culture of philanthropy within the community.

One of the more recent developments is the community philanthropic foundation called 'Greater Good' (see below for more details). It is worth considering both personally and whether COTA, as an organisation, is able to participate. The benefit is that this establishes an ongoing source for philanthropic funding of community support.

How the COTA Board Works...

Can any member nominate someone for the Board? Do we have an election this year? Who is allowed on the Board? These are some of the questions which have been asked recently. The detailed answers are contained in the Council on the Ageing (ACT) Constitution, available in hard copy or electronically.

Vision - The Council's Vision embraces the shaping of a more just, equitable and humane community in which older people are enabled to contribute and grow to their fullest capacity, and have access, with dignity, to appropriate care and support.

Board - The Board is responsible for the control and management of the affairs of the Council and has the power to do this. The Board shall ensure that the affairs of the Council are managed at all times honestly and with due diligence.

To be eligible to serve on the Board a person must be a financial member of the Council. Thus, all COTA members can, with the support of two other members, nominate for the Board.

Board Composition - The Board consists of up to eleven people. Up to eight Board members are elected at a General Meeting (normally the Annual General Meeting). In addition, up to three people may be co-opted by the Board. This gives the Board the ability to fill any perceived gaps in expertise.

Term - The term for all positions on the Board is two years. All members are eligible for re-election or re-appointment.

Board Positions - The Board elects the President, Vice President and Treasurer from among its members.

Meetings - The Board generally meets on a monthly basis for around one to two hours per time. The timing of meetings is agreed within the Board.

If you have any more questions please ask the President or Executive Director. Or you may wish to make a nomination for the COTA Board.

Carers

Senator Garry Humphries is holding a discussion on **"How do we address the needs of our ageing population and provide real recognition and help for our carers."**

Your views are welcome and morning tea will be provided at The Griffin Centre on Tuesday, 22 September at 9.30 am.

Please RSVP by 19/9/09 to 62476444 or email to danielle.hyndes@aph.gov.au

Free Seniors Rotary Concert

Featuring **COLIN SLATER AND FRIENDS** and **THE SING AUSTRALIA CHOIR**

Sunday, 1 November 2009, 2pm to 4pm (Seating by 1.45pm) at the Albert Hall, Commonwealth Avenue, Yarralumla.

Afternoon tea is provided.

Free transport can be arranged if required. Book at COTA on 6282 3777 no later than 23 October 2009.

Let's not take our eyes for granted

Half of all Australians have at least one eye problem. As people get older, this rises to almost 90 per cent of those aged over 45.

Vision disorders cost the Australian economy \$9.85 billion each year – well above conditions such as diabetes, asthma and depression.

As Australia's population ages, vision impairment will soon emerge as the most prevalent health condition among older people. But while getting older increases the risk of developing an eye problem, poor eye health is not inevitable. Up to 80 per cent of blindness and vision impairment can be prevented by early detection and treatment.

Some eye diseases have no symptoms in the initial stages so having an eye test is the only way to diagnose the condition early. Those most at risk include people who have diabetes, a family history of eye disease and anyone aged over 40.

More information on eye health - including refractive errors, age related macular degeneration, glaucoma, cataracts and diabetic retinopathy – and a who's who when it comes to the different types of eye health care services, can be found at the National Eye Health Awareness Campaign website www.australia.gov.au/eyehealth

Lunchtime Forums 2009 - Hughes Community Centre

Tuesdays 12:15-1:45pm. Cost \$1. Free tea and coffee provided. Bring your own cup.

22 Sep "Where will tomorrow's volunteers come from?" Speakers: Chris Wain, Volunteering ACT, Venetia Graham, volunteer and Margo Hodge, 2008 ACT Volunteer of the Year, Advocate for people with disabilities.

29 Sep "You have been assessed as needing support -- what happens now?" Speakers: Robyn Rutherford, Woden Community Services, Carmel Gibbons, Group Manager, Uniting Aged Care.

6 Oct "Malaysia in the 21st Century" Speakers: Dr John Funston, ANU, Mr Gregore Lopez, ANU, Ms Gaik Chen Khoo, ANU.

13 Oct "Dementia" Speakers: Michelle McGrath, Director Alzheimers ACT, Dr Mary-Ann Ryall, Geriatrician.

20 Oct "Bending the truth with statistics" Speakers: Representative of the ABS; John Coochey; Professor Terry Hull, Australian Demographic and Social Research Institute (ADSRI) and Adjunct Professor of the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health (NCEPH).

27 Oct "Australia, where are we now?" Speakers: Tracey Chester, Michelle Ducat, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

If you have a topic or would like to actively participate in arranging a forum please contact Paul Flint at COTA (ACT).

Are you looking for help to make ends meet?

As the global financial crisis bites, many seniors need to cut back on necessities. However, organizing your expenses more effectively can help a lot towards making ends meet. If you are like most people, you probably don't enjoy paying your yearly car insurance premium as one lump sum but car insurance is one of those necessities you just have to pay to protect yourself, your passengers and your car against the unexpected.

Paul Flint, Executive Director of COTA (ACT) says, "We realise there is never a convenient time to have your annual insurance premium fall due and many seniors can find it a real burden." Fortunately there is an easier way and COTA has made it more affordable and easier to pay for the cover through a monthly insurance payment option.

It will smooth out your car insurance payments and help ease the burden an annual premium can bring. Annual insurance payments can be spread across twelve easy-to-manage monthly payments. Automatic monthly payment can be organised by credit card or through direct debit from your bank, building society or credit union. Paul Flint also commented that "Best of all, unlike many other companies, no additional policy fee applies if you chose to pay your insurance monthly."

Simply contact COTA on 1300 1300 50 for information about this very helpful service for our members.



Volunteers Ethel and Noel with Jeff Harmer at the unveiling of the Age Pension Centenary

Age Pension Centenary

One hundred years ago, landmark legislation was introduced into a young Australian Parliament that placed Australia at the forefront of social policy reform. With the passing of the *Invalid and Old-Age Pensions Act 1908* Australia's social support system was established.

Initially paid at a modest ten shillings a week it represented 18.1 per cent of the 1913 male average weekly earnings. It was paid in cash to people deemed 'of good character' and racial restrictions applied. Over the next 60 years the discriminatory provisions relating to race, residency and de facto relationships were gradually removed.

In May 2009 the Government introduced major reforms making the pension more equitable. The pension now represents 27.7 per cent of male average weekly earnings and is paid to over 2 million people. The qualifying age for the pension, in light of increasing longevity, is also being raised. In addition, the new Work Bonus allows pensioners to keep more money earned through part time work.

The President, Executive Director and a number of volunteers represented COTA at the unveiling of the Commemorative Plaque in the Parliamentary zone by the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

If you are wandering around the lake it is worth detouring to view the plaque. The memorial is at the corner of the Treasury buildings closest to the National Library and Commonwealth Avenue. The sandstone relief is interesting and well worth a look. Unfortunately, it is hardly visible from the road.