



NSW Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing (MACA)

AGEING SYMPOSIUM 3 March 2025 REPORT

PURPOSE OF SYMPOSIUM

The aim of the symposium was to consider the Future of Ageing in NSW and to highlight the opportunities and barriers to innovation and inclusivity, for older adults to live their best lives, to live well and to thrive now and into the next decade.

The NSW Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing (MACA) role and objectives are to:

- Influence the issues for older people through independent advice to the NSW Minister for Seniors by using current data, analysis and research.
- Engage with key influencers, relevant stakeholders and communities in the aged sectors.
- Work in partnership with other advisory government councils and ageing peak agencies.
- Identify key and emerging issues to be 'ahead of the game'.

The one-day symposium focused on future scenarios and innovative ideas and programs, to address some of the current challenges of our ageing population. The day also explored innovative strategies and ways to foster collaboration in bridging the gap between older adults and government, policy makers, the media and the wider community.

The broad focus of the panel sessions was on future proofing our ageing population, with ideas and models for improving social, emotional, physical and environmental wellbeing so that older people can live at home, in place and in community.

What follows is a summary prepared by MACA of key messages and actions from the symposium.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: SOCIAL DEMOGRAPHER, BERNARD SALT

Bernard provided a comprehensive demographic overview of what our ageing population will look in 10 years' time, and how that needs to shape our future ageing policies and programs.

Some highlights:

- As the 11th richest country in the world, Australia should be able to assure quality of life as we age.
- We need to set the standard for how future generations care for older people.
- People's choices about where they live (i.e. on the coast/sea/treechanges) have signalled Australians lifestyle preferences.
- The average life expectancy is now 84 years, so we are entering different "*Lifestyle stages of life*" (e.g. 65-75; 75-80; 80-90).
- Older people want to create, aspire and contribute. Older persons are looking for meaning later in life, so what opportunities does this create?



- The number of people over 85 years is growing by more than 60,000 per year.
- There is a need to look at digital solutions for how we care – if we can shop from home, work and learn, why not care from home and provide hospital in the home?
- Digitisation means more people can move out of boring jobs into aged care.
- Loneliness in older age especially for those in their late 70s early 80s is a concern and we must do better.

The data highlighted some key reflections and issues that need to be considered.

1. AGED CARE WORK FORCE

This is the fastest and largest employment growth job sector. But can it meet the needs of a significant, growing and more culturally diverse ageing population?

Are the current resources and funding ratios sufficient to meet future needs?

2. AGEISM VERSUS OPPORTUNITIES

With a diversified ageing profile many older people want opportunities – older people want to create, aspire and contribute. How and where do we provide these opportunities?

3. DIGITISATION

There is a need to look at digital solutions for how we care – if we can shop from home, work and learn, why not care from home and have more hospital in the home programs?

4. LONELINESS

With the number of people over 85 increasing, there is a corresponding increase in loneliness for people over 85, in part because of changing circumstances such as loss of a spouse, family, or home. So, we must do better. (Note: NSW Inquiry into Loneliness currently being undertaken).

PANEL 1 – FUTURE OF AGEING

The first panel followed on from the keynote speaker to consider in broad terms what the future of ageing means in terms of myths, challenges and opportunities.

Some highlights:

- Constant need for adaptation and new imagination-- Don't die before you are dead! Good example in Japan is the 'Restaurant of Mistaken Orders'.
- First Nations issues – ageing is circular, like time. It's important that First Nations people look after themselves, as the role of an Elder is important for the health of community.
- Longevity – innovation is urgently needed to effectively address the challenges and opportunities of a Longevity Economy. Longevity means financial, physical and mental health – it is about living not ageing.
- Close the gap between lifespan and health span.
- Ageing means opportunities. Age needs to be seen as an asset not a deficit.

- Aged care workforce feels devalued, disengaged and inferior compared to workers in other health sectors.
- Better funded options so consumers can have more choices in aged care services.
- A rights based approach to protect the needs of older people is needed.
- Agency – the voice of older persons is missing.
- Electoral power of older people is significant so how will it be exercised?
- Don't divide society by age.
- Media is important to tell our stories so how can conversations and stories be done differently?
- Tax and leave reforms.

The panel discussions highlighted some key reflections and issues that need to be considered.

1. A RIGHTS BASED APPROACH

A rights-based approach that requires enforceable legislative reform, as well as community engagement and support. Also, more focus on a multigenerational aged workforce.

2. COMBAT AGEISM / ROLE OF MEDIA

An ongoing agenda to combat ageism, sentiments expressed included:

- *Don't die before you are dead.*
- *Longevity not ageing.*
- *Life is circular.*
- *Age is an asset not a deficit.*

Telling the right stories and more media engagement and education is required.

PANEL 2 – AT HOME, IN PLACE AND IN COMMUNITY

The focus of the second panel was on planning, housing, design and mobility. Discussion included how to change our urban and regional areas so that people can more easily live in place and in community. The panel was wide ranging in its responses, and this highlighted the need for more time and a deeper dive into these key issues.

Some highlights:

- Myths – invisibility of ageing. It is not all about the body; "Older people are comets – need to see the tail of experience".
- Location of housing for older people. Grow old in place, in more village hubs with people around, transport, creativity, libraries, cafes and so on.
- Need to think about people isolated in the home because of poor design.
- Slowness, walkability, available services.
- Place-based is the key.
- Public transport and E-mobility options for older people e.g. autonomous vehicles.
- Citizens assembly to determine how they want to live.



- COTA's Liveable communities project key elements are – footpaths, wayfinding, toilets, seating and lighting.
- Don't talk about generational differences, don't divide on age.
- Local government – key sector.
- Universal Design – across all government policy and programs - *Can I get there, can I play, can I stay?*
- There's too much regulation and this can stifle innovation and responsiveness.

The panel discussions highlighted some key reflections and issues that need to be considered.

1. UNIVERSAL DESIGN

There is a need to adopt universal design standards and codes, across all government policy. The key questions in planning and design need to be – *Can I get there, can I play, can I stay?*

2. PLACE BASED / LIVEABLE COMMUNITIES

Living well in community means:

- Housing needs to be appropriate to where people live.
- Communities need to be consulted on how they want to live using consultative models such as Citizens Assemblies.
- Key elements need to include walkable footpaths, wayfinding, toilets, seating, shade and lighting.
- Better and more accessible and affordable public transport options and more innovative approaches e.g. E-mobility and autonomous vehicle options for older people.

PANEL 3 – SAFE, ACTIVE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

The focus of the third panel was on living well in communities that are safe, inclusive, active and engaging.

Some highlights:

- The complexity of federal, state/territory, and local government policies, programs and services and lack of coordination around the person.
- Older people not included in decisions about themselves, more need for co-design of options and solutions.
- First Nations health – from birthing to dreaming (cradle to grave). The need for culturally appropriate assessment.
- Loneliness has same effect on health as smoking.
- Financial decisions in retirement are compounded by lack of knowledge and assisted access to information from trusted sources.
- Need to help older persons navigate the financial and information highways.
- Local government funding challenges to deliver programs for older people.



- Individual older people and their communities know what they need. Place based ethnic specific organisations are important.
- Intervention and prevention need to be funded. There are many positive messages that can be used about ageing.
- Empower local government to foster local connections.

The panel discussions highlighted some key reflections and issues that need to be considered.

1. FINANCIAL LITERACY AND ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION

Lack of financial literacy and assisted access to information for people planning to retire and retirees are of concern, particularly with respect to accommodation, superannuation and pensions.

2. WHOLE / WRAP AROUND SERVICES

There is a need to rethink community and health services with more focus on:

- Person centred care.
- First Nations appropriate e.g. “birthing to dreaming”.
- Culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- Multidisciplinary - less focus on medicalised treatment and assessment and more on early prevention and social prescribing approaches.
- Important focus on physical health and fitness / exercise programs especially those that combine social support.

3. LOCAL GOVERNMENT

All three panels highlighted the importance of local government as a key sector in *place-based* approaches to ageing well in community. The lack of funding and resources was considered a key challenge. However, several innovative *locally based programs*, such as co-location of childcare and aged homes; village communities and aged care services were also acknowledged.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: PROFESSOR GANNA POGREBNA

Professor Pogrebna is an expert in artificial intelligence technologies particularly with respect to assisted technologies for our ageing population. A key reflection in her presentation was the importance of values and helping older persons live better and happy lives. Ganna (and Sam) also brought along a robot dog (Tiger) and a small robot humanoid.

Some highlights:

Robots can:

- **Enhance independence** to live at home.
- Prevent decline.
- **Be Companions** not paid care workers – motivate older persons to stay active and provide security and navigation.



- Robots could be **personal assistants**, but there is a need for ethical frameworks and security protections like passwords e.g. making appointments. Ethical frameworks must make sure the individual is at the centre.
- Improve **social inclusion** through bridging generations, social connections, intellectual stimulation and memory improvement.
- Ikigai – role of emerging technology in ageing well (what do you love, what can you be paid for, what are you good at, what does the world need).
- First Nations could use robots to inspect Country, provide maintenance.
- Future vision – work with technology to improve quality of life.

MACA Actions:

- MACA will consider the outcomes of the Ageing Symposium at our April meeting.
- MACA will submit the Ageing Symposium report to the Minister for Seniors to influence the NSW Ageing Well Strategy Action Plan.
- MACA will use the information from the Ageing Symposium to influence MACA's current and future position papers and submissions. See:
<https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/community-inclusion/advisory-councils/nsw-ministerial-advisory-council-on-ageing/maca-overview.html>
- MACA will be seeking further input on key issues and innovative models and ideas from stakeholders and influencers to challenge and promote NSW as a leader in supporting older people.

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