

## National Policy Forum 2015 – Gender and Ageing

### Forum Communiqué

A capacity audience turned out to discuss ‘Gender and Ageing’ at COTA Australia’s annual National Policy Forum, held at the National Press Club in Canberra on 2 July 2015. An impressive group of speakers and the Forum delegates shared research, analysis, on-the-ground experience, viewpoints and ideas for policy change to improve both gender equity and the quality of life for all in later years.

The Forum placed the gender lens onto the following key policy areas as they affect older Australians: workforce participation; income security and wealth distribution; housing and homelessness; care giving and receiving; and health and wellbeing (see the Forum Program at the end of this Communiqué).

Each session generated principles, policy directions and specific ideas for change to address the needs of older Australians, from a gender perspective. The outcomes from the Forum sessions will be analysed in greater detail by COTA Australia and will help inform our strategy and priorities.

COTA also filmed the Forum and will create summary products in due course that will be available to participants and a broader audience. The Forum used a mixed program format, involving prepared presentations in only some sessions. These will also be made available on the COTA website.

The key, overarching themes that emerged across Forum discussions are:

- Older Australians are not an homogenous group, despite being largely treated as such in public policy and the media, and to some extent in our social culture.
- The experience of life in older age differs by gender, with the most notable demographic factor being that on average women live longer lives than men.
- The starkest gender inequity is older women’s lower economic status compared to older men, leading to poorer outcomes now and into the future in a number of income-dependent areas such as housing.
- There are also significant concerns around mental health and social inclusion for some older men.

- Intersex and transgender people face a number of challenges in older age including social recognition and access to services.
- Gender experience in later life also differs according to factors like ethnicity, culture, language, class, sexuality, health status and even age within the older population.
- Gender outcomes in older age are created over the life course through cultural, social and economic factors, so greater gender equity in later life is dependent on greater gender equity throughout life.
- Nonetheless, it is possible to mitigate the existing gender inequity amongst older people, as well as improving quality of life for all, through better social and economic policy settings and targeted actions.
- There is no such thing as the 'average older Australian', so government policies and programs using this as their target group and ignoring gender and other diversity characteristics cannot be fully effective.
- The gender lens (along with other factors of diversity) needs to be applied to the development and evaluation of all government policy and programs (including those aimed at older Australians) to ensure that they are targeting the correct need and are fit-for-purpose in how they operate.

COTA Australia thanks all the speakers and participants at the 2015 National Policy Forum and sees the event as opening up greater informed debate and action around gender and ageing issues.



## Gender and ageing

- equity and diversity in later life

### NATIONAL POLICY FORUM 2015

#### 8.30-9.00 Registration

9.00 **WELCOME:** Peter Mares - Forum Facilitator

9.05 **WELCOME TO COUNTRY:** Agnes Shea - Ngunnawal Elder

9.15 **INTRODUCTION TO THE FORUM:** Ian Yates AM Chief Executive COTA Australia

9.25 **KEYNOTE: Working on - workforce participation for our ageing population**  
Renée Leon PSM, Secretary, Department of Employment

10.00 **MESSAGE TO THE FORUM:**  
Elizabeth Broderick, Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission

10.10 **FACILITATED SESSION: What are the priority ageing and gender questions that the Forum needs to address?**  
Peter Mares - Forum Facilitator

#### 10.25 Morning tea

10.45 **PANEL: Richer or poorer - gender, income and wealth**

- Professor Hazel Bateman, Head of Business School, University of NSW
- Dr Cassandra Goldie, Chief Executive Officer Australian Council of Social Service
- Cate Wood, National Chair, Women in Super

#### 12.30 Lunch

1:30 **PANEL: A roof over our heads - gender, housing and homelessness**

- Helen Dalley-Fisher, Director, Equality Rights Alliance
- Dr Maree Petersen, Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Ageing Policy - Institute of Social Science Research, University of Queensland
- Adrian Pisarski, Executive Officer, National Shelter

2:30 **PANEL: Who cares? - gender and the giving and receiving of care**

- Ara Cresswell, Chief Executive Officer, Carers Australia
- Sandra Hills, Chief Executive Officer, Benetas
- Tina Karanastasis, Senior Deputy Chair, Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia

#### 3.30 Afternoon tea

3.45 **PANEL: A quality life - gender, health and wellbeing**

- Dr Gávi Ansara, Manager Research and Policy, National LGBTI Health Alliance
- Dr Anthony Brown, Adjunct Fellow, Men's Health and Information Resource Centre, University of Western Sydney
- Professor Julie Byles, Director, Centre for Gender Health and Ageing, Newcastle University

4.45 **FORUM WIND-UP:** Peter Mares - Forum Facilitator

4.55 **CONCLUDING REMARKS:** Ian Yates AM, Chief Executive COTA Australia