

COUNCIL ON THE AGEING VICTORIA
ANNUAL REPORT
2016 - 2017





COTA Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation that has represented the voice of older Victorians (aged 50 plus) since its establishment in 1951. The organisation represents all older people, however ‘people living in poverty, in inadequate housing and in social isolation, and older people experiencing abuse have always been on COTA’s action agenda and will continue to be a focus into the future.’ COTA Victoria’s work includes information provision, education, policy development and direct program delivery across a range of areas.



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OUR VISION

Ageing in Australia is a time of possibility, opportunity and influence

OUR MISSION

COTA advances the rights, interests and futures of Australians as we age

PRESIDENT'S REPORT



The annual report provides an opportunity to highlight what has been important for me in the last year – and by far the most important thing has been to work with a great bunch of people who are dedicated to their cause.

First of all, my fellow Board members: they are an energetic, hard-working group who bring a very diverse range of skills and interests to the work of the Board. I always learn a lot from them and their support is invaluable. Special thanks to those who leave the Board this year. Thanks team!

The CEO, Ronda Held, has done a remarkable job this year. She hit the ground running, and has been running ever since. It's not easy to come into an organisation following a very long-standing incumbent. The year has been a high-pressure one for Ronda, and all of the Board members are very appreciative of her skills, knowledge and dedication.

And the staff, great work everyone! All older Victorians benefit from your dedication to our cause.

Volunteers are COTA's greatest asset. You have so much to give but I'm sure you all feel that you get such a lot back from your work. The work of the Policy Advisory Committee and Seniors Rights Victoria Advisory Committee is invaluable.

A major focus for the Board during the year and, of course, ongoing, is the financial sustainability of the organisation. We are following a number

of courses of action to diversify our funding and to ensure that we have sufficient core capacity to be successful at attracting funds for key projects and priorities. We will continue to seek our appropriate place in decision-making forums.

We continue to be concerned that while there is plenty of acknowledgement of the demographic shifts creating an ageing population, there is no real commitment to actually getting to grips with what this means for all of us, and appreciating the amazing benefits that this could bring for many sectors. Older workers are an asset, older people make up an important segment of the consumer market, and growth in employment is going to come from delivery of a wide variety of services to older people. Grandparents play an important role in the lives of young people. We also need strong policies, programs and support systems to enhance the lives of those people who are most vulnerable.

Being President of COTA Victoria has been an honour and a pleasure, so thank you for the opportunity. Check out this Annual Report to see what we have been up to.

Cathy Mead
President

CEO'S REPORT



It was my privilege to take up the role of CEO of COTA Victoria in July 2016, and thank you to Jack Sach for his role as interim CEO following the departure of Sue Hendy.

Thanks to all the Board members for their service and support, especially to long-serving members Ian Jungwirth and Gary Henry. We thank Cathy Mead for her leadership as President and Chair of the Policy Advisory Committee over recent years. Cathy will step down as President at the 2017 AGM but will continue as a Board member. We appreciate the contribution of David Haynes as the independent chair of our Audit and Risk Committee. We also thank Giny Chang for her 20 years of dedicated service as our Finance Administrator and Terry Vail for his service as our auditor.

Recognising the experience of modern ageing, the COTA Federation agreed on a new national vision of ageing in Australia as being a time of possibility, opportunity and influence.

We have worked to create possibilities and opportunities by engaging with older Victorians in their diversity to understand their aspirations and needs. Through co-design processes we have tapped into the expertise of older Victorians to generate solutions to issues such as end of life planning and post-death red tape. By providing information and education we empower older Victorians with information to stay in control, make good decisions and plan ahead. Older people experiencing abuse have been assisted with

information, advice and legal and advocacy support.

COTA Victoria has sought to influence decision makers by the involvement of members and staff in key committees and by making submissions to Government. Seniors Rights Victoria has been actively involved in the work arising from the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Our submissions to the Australian Law Reform Commission National Legal Response to Elder Abuse were well received.

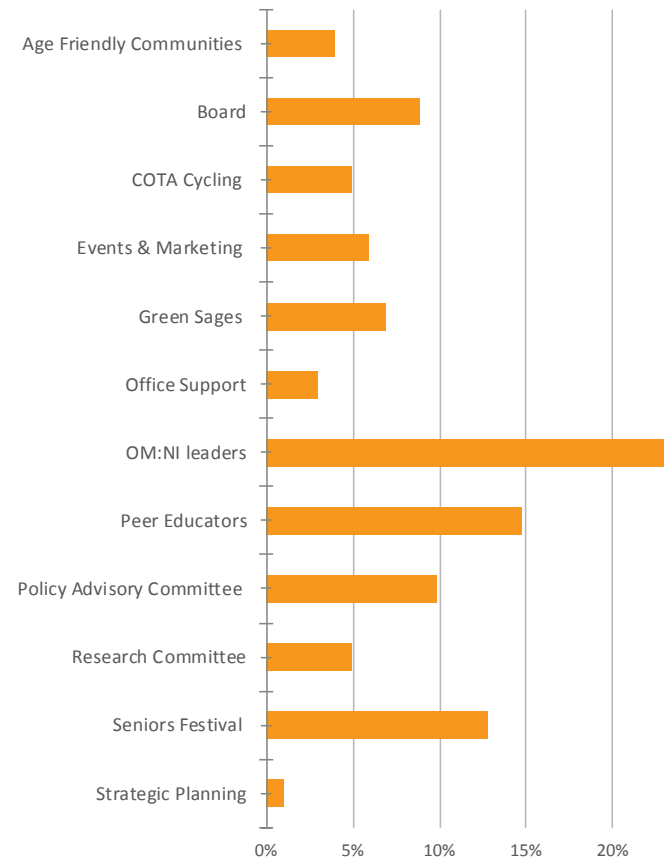
The voices of retirement village residents were strong in the Parliamentary Inquiry into Retirement Living and COTA has been actively involved in continuing to advocate for better protections for residents. We participated in the discussion relating to the outcomes of the Parliamentary Inquiry into End of Life Choices. Our policy priorities have guided our advocacy over the year and will continue to be important as we enter a state election year in 2018.

We thank all who have contributed to COTA Victoria's work over the year including our members, staff, donors, and many active volunteers. We greatly appreciate the government and philanthropic funding that supports our work.

Ronda Held
CEO

VOLUNTEERS

There are currently 102 active volunteers working across COTA Victoria.



Note the percentages in the graph above will not add to 100 percent because some volunteers perform more than one role.



GREEN SAGES

COTA Green Sages are older Victorians who want more action taken to reduce damage from climate change to leave a better environmental legacy for future generations. Over the past year we have taken action on climate change and participated in environmental campaigns and projects. We have also contributed to COTA policy development on environmental issues. Key highlights have included a COTA seminar with Climate for Change leader Tony Gleeson, where older Victorians learned the critical effects of climate change and discussed what we can do about it.

Keith Burrows and Ken Parker were invited to present at the Essendon Central Probus Club on climate change science and how to reduce carbon emissions, energy usage and lower energy bills. At our monthly meetings we developed climate change policy notes and published articles through COTA Connects and The Senior. Come and join us, we welcome visitors and new members.



GEMMA'S STORY

When she moved to Melbourne from her native New Zealand, Gemma Papprell thought volunteering at COTA Victoria would help her gain some valuable work experience – but she never dreamed it would lead to paid work.

But just three months into providing graphic design support, Gemma was recommended by COTA for a part-time position at Polaron, an international business providing translation, citizenship and genealogical research.

Now Gemma combines both roles and is pleased to be learning more about older people along the way.

“I love design so to contribute to some real projects is a great opportunity for me. To be doing work that is beneficial to older people in our community is a wonderful bonus,” she said.

Gemma said the COTA work has provided her with a great platform to utilise her Visual

Communication Design degree to craft brochure and report designs and even social media posts.

As a Gen Y, Gemma said she hadn't thought much about ageing so working at COTA was a continual opportunity to learn more and work with colleagues and volunteers who all contribute to the organisation.

“When you're young you think everything is fine and dandy. It's interesting to see the sheer amount of work that is done to support older people. It's very rewarding to be a part of it,” she said.

Gemma said she and her New Zealand boyfriend are enjoying the spoils of Melbourne, especially their new hobby of brewing beer.





COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Our Community Participation team of staff and volunteers work to listen to, engage with and involve older Victorians and enable them to influence decision makers. We work with the diverse range of older Victorians. A project funded by the Myer-GALFA Foundation has involved members of the LGBTIQ community in planning for end of life issues and working to address the barriers to having their preferences honoured. With support from the State Trustees Australia Foundation we are actively involved in

the Collaborative Panel addressing the impact of the changing nature of community support with the introduction of the NDIS and Consumer Directed Care. Here we present an overview of the activities that seek to fulfil our mission of advancing the rights, interests and futures of Australians as we age.

Sharon Granek
Manager, Community Participation

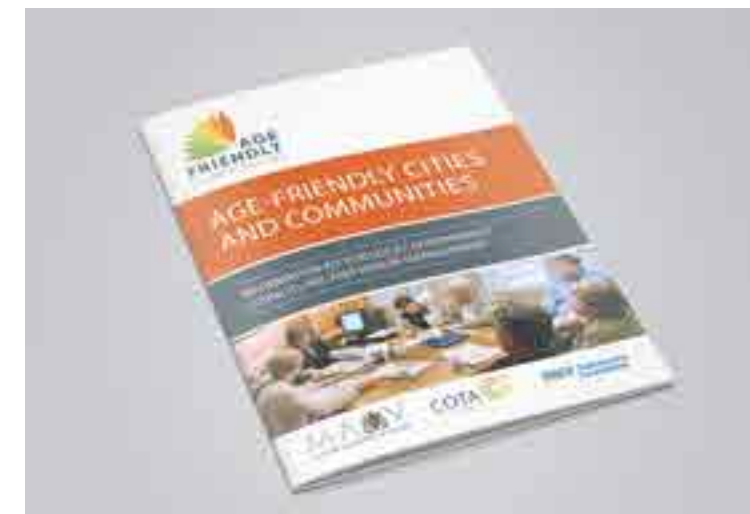
AGE FRIENDLY CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Age Friendly Cities and Communities Information Kit

COTA Victoria has been involved for many years in working towards age friendly communities. These communities are places that address barriers to participation in all facets of community life, and support the capacity of older people to connect with others and to live well in their local communities.

We were delighted to receive funding from the RACV Community Foundation to develop the Age Friendly Cities and Communities Information Kit. The kit aims to increase knowledge and action of local councillors and council executive teams on the development and implementation of age friendly communities.

Working in partnership with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and with the assistance of Katherine Wositzky, the kit summarises the key information and tools needed to support councillors and senior management to lead and activate a whole of council response. Many councils across Victoria have signed the Municipal Association of Victoria and Victorian Government Age Friendly Victoria Declaration and this kit will support local governments to continue the age friendly momentum.





Helping Brimbank to become an Age Friendly City

COTA Victoria worked with Brimbank City Council to support the update of their Age Friendly City Plan through a multi-consultative process aimed at connecting with as many older people as possible.

Using the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Age Friendly Cities guide, COTA Victoria hosted a public forum and supported Brimbank Active Seniors in conducting a community survey and interviews with local Seniors Clubs to determine the challenges of being an older person in Brimbank.

COTA Victoria CEO Ronda Held said older people live safely, enjoy good health and stay involved in a community that is planned to be age friendly.

“People across Victoria are now living longer and healthier lives. This exciting change is bringing major social change. Many generations are now living, learning, working and socialising together,” Ms Held said.

“At COTA Victoria we’ve been facilitating and supporting older people to ensure their local

communities are thriving places for all people to live, work, learn and play.”

Brimbank City began the update of their Age Friendly City Plan in 2017 with the aim of encouraging participation by older people in the community and removing barriers to social participation.

“The Age Friendly City Plan articulates Council’s role and direction for supporting Brimbank’s ageing community and will provide a view of the social, physical, cultural and economic environment experienced by older people living in Brimbank,” Mayor of Brimbank Cr John Hedditch said.

The draft Age Friendly City Plan 2017–2021 will also help Brimbank Council plan for future developments for older people.

COTA Victoria used the findings from the consultations to make 34 recommendations to Brimbank City Council to be incorporated into the Age Friendly City Plan for 2017–2021.

Challenging Ageing

Bilingual pilot program bridges gap for Chinese seniors

COTA Victoria this year ran a successful bilingual Challenging Ageing pilot project for the Chinese community, offering participants the chance to share their experiences on ageing and learn more about services.

Challenging Ageing has been a popular program for 25 years, with this pilot targeting the Chinese community. Participants included people who migrated from China to Australia since the 1970s, either as retirees joining their children or students wanting a better life post the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989.

The Chinese participants met at the COTA Victoria office to learn and discuss topics such as ageism, lifelong learning, life transition and relationships.

COTA Peer Educator Edith Chen, who led the program said the Chinese seniors were earnest in their participation in the four-week journey.

“Many of these immigrants were qualified professionals or administrators in China, but

they have had to somehow adapt to life with insignificance here as they have to live with a language barrier. They naturally gravitate to each other and find their social connections with their language-specific social groups,” Edith said.

“Challenging Ageing was assessed highly by the participants. They suggested having such bilingual gatherings continually in the future; to help them gain information and to express their views with English-speaking people.”

Participants worked on strategies for dealing with ageism and ways to maintain their independence and identity. Looking forward, the Chinese seniors explored ways to take a leadership role within their communities.

Edith presented the pilot project at the 4th International Conference on Ageing in a Foreign Land in June, as part of a group of four volunteers that represented COTA Victoria at the Adelaide conference.

INFLUENCE

In 2016–2017 we have continued to work to ensure that the voice of older people is heard by decision-makers through parliamentary inquiries, government reviews and other consultation processes. In the last twelve months we made submissions to government on a range of issues including planning, housing, end of life, gambling and energy payment difficulties.

Our policy priorities

The greatest concern expressed by older people through our 2016 policy priorities survey was access to affordable, secure and appropriate housing (44.25 percent of respondents). End of life decision-making and improved transport and access to services were also viewed as priorities for action. Elder abuse and the critical work of Seniors Rights Victoria at a state and national level was reinforced.

Our partnerships and impact

In advocating for affordable, secure and appropriate housing, our collaboration with other organisations has been an important part of our success.

Alongside HAAG we mobilised a broad alliance of organisations to call for an Older Persons Housing Strategy. The report *Homes for Life: Towards an Older Persons Housing Strategy* provided strategic direction in our housing advocacy and submission writing work to government over 2016–2017.



Rental housing

We campaigned alongside the Tenants Union of Victoria in calling for significant reform to the Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) 1997 to address rental affordability and security. The need for longer leases, minimum health and safety standards, keeping rent increases to consumer price index (CPI) levels and allowing modifications to the home to support ageing in place are key reform issues. The outcome of the RTA review will be known later in the year with legislation expected in early 2018.

Retirement housing

Providing clear information and demystifying the reform process is an important part of empowering older people to advocate for the change they see as necessary. COTA Victoria worked closely with other organisations to support older people to tell their stories of life in retirement villages to the Parliamentary Inquiry. The Parliamentary Committee report made a number of recommendations that we campaigned



for including transparency around retirement housing contracts, accreditation of providers and staff training, and reviewing the Retirement Villages Act 1986. The need for an external dispute resolution mechanism for retirement villages is a key recommendation to sector-wide reform. This work is ongoing as we wait for the State Government to take action on the Inquiry's recommendations.

End of life

We are actively engaged in end of life policy at both a community and government level and participate in a number of advisory committees. In the past twelve months we have worked on two key end of life reform areas: the Medical Treatment and Decision-Making Bill (2016) and the development of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Framework.

Our end of life working group members have attended round tables, consultations and provided input to our submission to the Ministerial Advisory



Photos far left and above: by Guruswami Perumal

Panel on Voluntary Assisted Dying. They have also taken their knowledge and passion into newly funded peer-education projects on palliative care and end of life decision-making. The interim report by the panel acknowledged the feedback of older people and the important work of Seniors Rights Victoria in safeguarding older people against elder abuse.

Transport and accessing services

Our 50+ survey told us how older people are getting around in their community and what barriers they face when trying to access the services they need. This year we laid the groundwork for future partnerships with organisations such as Link Transport and local councils such as Wyndham and Whittlesea. We have taken our research findings into our discussions with local government and we are currently advocating for improved investment and planning in community transport in Victoria.

MOBILISE

Making post-death red tape simpler

The post-death red tape project engaged with families navigating financial legal and administrative processes after the death of a loved one, and is working to mobilise change to simplify the system.

The project includes a researched report into the systemic legal reform needed and a series of fact sheets, produced in consultation with the Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria; the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages; and other partners.

The fact sheets, produced with funding from the Victoria Law Foundation, will be available from February 2018, with the topics to include:

- What to do in the first 48 hours after death
- Arranging a funeral
- Contacting government departments
- Considering changed financial circumstances
- Updating the deceased's digital legacy

Post-death red tape volunteer project workers Anita Smith and Anne MacBean are retired financial counsellors with a longstanding commitment to advocate for policies and procedures that are consistent, simple and transparent.



“Both of us are really savvy but even we’ve been flummoxed by post-death procedures and by the groundswell of anecdotal stories,” Anita said. “We found the requirements and costs to update information after someone dies is different between companies, government departments and our various states – sometimes you even get conflicting information from the same company.”

Anne said many of the project contributors experienced similar issues to her personal frustrations following the death of her husband, David, three years ago. “I have a different surname to my husband which was an added complication,” Anne said.

“We’re hoping this information will be useful for anyone who loses someone. We hope this helps people realise you do have rights and options,” she said.

“We hope the project’s findings will work towards bringing about reform of procedures and regulations to assist people in the future,” Anita said.



The 50+ Survey and Information Needs Research

Taking our research into the Community

In 2016 RMIT Social Work Masters student Rosemary Dodds investigated the information needs of older Victorians as part of her placement. In early 2017 COTA Victoria’s 50+ Survey further investigated the information and transport needs of older people by asking how people moved around their communities and what information they sought.

The invaluable work of both these projects is now being used to inform seniors groups and the wider community about how and why older Victorians search for information and what they are looking for. This information is being disseminated at Positive Ageing Summits, community forums and other meetings held by local councils and local groups. As the new Advocacy and Engagement Officer, Victoria Wells recently attended the annual Positive Ageing Summit held at Mornington Peninsula Shire Council. The focus at this Summit

was on “connecting community.” Participants viewed COTA Victoria’s 50+ Survey and research results as vital information in considering how to better target their engagement with potential new members and other community groups. Taking COTA Victoria’s research into the community provided evidence that older people prefer a regular form of contact, whether the method is email, Facebook or snail mail.

One participant told the summit that his group, the local U3A, had moved away from paper flyers and newsletters in the assumption that their members did not read them. After the summit he was going to take this information back to his group to revisit the use of regular contact by way of an e-newsletter. Influencing how other organisations can better reach and inform older people is an important measure of our research and policy impact.

SENIORS INFORMATION VICTORIA

Energy poverty: it is cold and dark for some Victorians

Many older people who are in touch with COTA Victoria are struggling with escalating energy costs that far outstrip inflation, wages and income support payments.

COTA found that many people are completely unaware that their pension status is relevant to their energy provider. Several had gone onto the pension but had not informed their energy retailer and as a result had been missing out on government concessions for years.

This is particularly prevalent in the case of non-English speaking people. Seniors Information Victoria (SIV) does regular outreach locations with two groups of Russian-speakers. All 26 members of these groups are on the age pension and none of them had any idea of their entitlements as they were sent out with their concession cards but there was little information on how to use them.

Pensioners are entitled to 17.5 percent off usage and supply charges on every electricity bill throughout the year. They are also entitled to 17.5 percent off usage and supply charges on their gas bills, but only in the winter months (May to October).

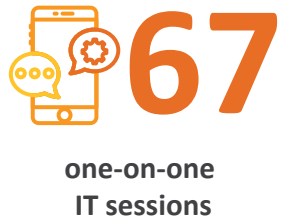
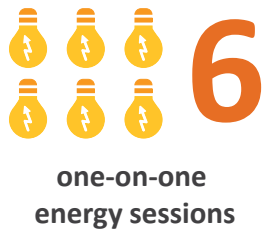
At the end of a talk many people wanted to know more. By way of demonstration a 20-minute consultation with Mr Z showed he could save \$300/year on his electricity bills and he could also receive a credit of \$656 for unpaid concessions.

COTA is in the process of up-skilling the workers at these locations so that they can provide the same service to other residents.

In addition to one-on-one assistance for individuals and capacity building in the sector, COTA Victoria is part of the COTA-wide project to build capacity among community members to advocate as consumer representatives with energy companies. Randal Harkin and Anne MacBean have been working very hard in this space, specifically in relation to high tariffs and network pricing.



Phone Line and Outreach



Over a decade of help with technology

Basil Theophilos has been helping people with their phones for over a decade. He has helped many hundreds understand the intricacies of their phones and has seen the wonderful technological developments culminating in today's smart phone and tablet.

Basil has made a valuable contribution by assisting so many older Victorians to come to terms with and appreciate what their phones can do for them. Basil is taking some time off to reflect on his future and we want to thank him for his unconditional support as a volunteer.

Thank you very much Basil!

“Basil is patient and he puts directions in writing and even prints them out for me”

- Norma



COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Our experienced team of fifteen volunteer peer educators have been very busy delivering talks on a range of topics across Victoria including Consumer Directed Care (CDC), Your Wellbeing Your Plan, Live Well Die Well, Medicines, Depression, Palliative Care, Retirement and Sleep.

Peer education sessions delivered in 2016–17 by 15 volunteer peer educators



114

Consumer Directed
Care (CDC)



104

Your Wellbeing
Your Plan



43

Palliative Care



1

Depression



3

Medicines



2

Retirement



3

Sleep



270

Total peer education
sessions delivered

22

Languages
spoken

Participant comments

"People's experience of palliative care highlighted their lack of understanding of what can be provided and the support services that are available."

"Recent experience of supporting a partner without palliative care highlighted the need for the community to have greater awareness of services available."



Palliative Care
Victoria

43 Sessions
7 Languages

Peer Educator Feedback

At first the group was reluctant to talk about palliative care. Someone who was dealing with terminal illness promoted living every day well.

Participants expressed appreciation for the session after they had more understanding of palliative care.

Participant comments

"We can choose our own care and services provided depending on the level of health needs."

"I can get help when I need it. I will have to start assessing myself as I now realise there are things I cannot do."

Participant comments

"You need to speak up and have a voice in what decisions need to be made in your life, rather than others making them for you."

"It's important to take charge of wellness. Some ideas include setting goals (social, physical and mental) and smaller actions with target dates, and marrying these into our care plans."



Your Wellbeing,
Your Plan

104 Sessions
10 Languages



Consumer
Directed Care

114 Sessions
20 Languages

Peer Educator Feedback

Participants had very little understanding of how to access services, asking "Don't you just call the Council?"

We discussed the types of services and where to get help and accessing My Aged Care. The group enjoyed practical advice.

Peer Educator Feedback

Diet, depression, exercise and loneliness were hot topics.

Participants were able to do a good assessment of their current social-mental-physical condition and also what steps they could take for further improvement.

WELLBEING

Mutual Support

OM:NI – Older Men: New Ideas

These men’s discussion groups provide a safe place where men meet and listen to other men and share their knowledge and experiences. This initiative aims to enhance the health, wellbeing and lifestyle of older men. The OM:NI program has great plans to expand its reach to country Victoria and open four more groups in Melbourne’s South East.

“When my wife of 63 years died I felt my life was over too. The loneliness was almost impossible to bear until a friend took me along to an OM:NI meeting. The camaraderie was instantly heart-warming. From then on, I had something to look forward to. It was like a new lease of life with just a couple of hours, twice a month, and meeting kindred spirits, being accepted and respected by my peers. I gained confidence in meeting others and my circle of friends grew. I still miss my wife very much and when I talk about her at OM:NI the tears begin to flow. But that’s okay. We all trust each other and acknowledge our weaknesses as well as our strengths.”

- OM:NI participant



23 OM:NI groups, and more than 200 participants

Suburbs:	Casey/Narre Warren	Hurstbridge
Banyule/	Cranbourne East/	Lilydale
Greensborough RSL	Balla Balla	Pakenham
Beaconsfield	Croydon Hills	Ringwood East
Belmont	Diamond Creek	Surrey Hills
Box Hill	Eltham	Thornbury at SPAN
Brentwood Park/	Greensborough/	Wantirna South
Berwick	Watsonia	Warrnambool
Canterbury	Hawthorn	Werribee



Physical Activity

COTA runs a number of programs to help older people to stay active, including cycling, strength training and camps.

COTA Cycling

COTA Cycling continues to roll along nicely. We have over 50 riders on our list and we’re out on the bike paths every Wednesday. We alternate short and long rides but like all cyclists the common theme of our rides is finding a good coffee shop. We discover parts of Melbourne you’ve never heard of and enjoy picnics in parks large and small.

Our group of enthusiastic leaders is always seeking out new routes but we return to some old favourites on a regular basis. We’re a friendly bunch and always ready to welcome newcomers. Lycra is definitely not compulsory but many of us proudly wear our COTA cycling jerseys with “COTA Silver Streaks” across the back.

Living Longer Living Stronger™

Strength or resistance training has particular benefits for older people. As we age, we lose muscle mass and bone density, resulting in the loss of function we associate with getting older. An appropriate strength training program not only helps you to gain muscle strength but has many other benefits.

In the past year 15,000 people have participated in Living Longer Living Stronger™ strength training programs run in 91 locations around Victoria, including 36 rural and regional locations.

“I appreciate the opportunity to increase my fitness in an extremely welcoming, fun and inclusive environment.”

“I enjoy the company and exercise which keeps me healthy.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We greatly value the input of our Policy Advisory Committee, and all those who contribute their expertise and lived experience to working groups and submissions.

Policy Advisory Committee

Cathy Mead (Chair, 2016)	Peter Willcocks
Ian Jungwirth (Chair, 2017)	David Brant
Sheryl McHugh	Rhonda Day
Marion Lau	Jenny Alvin
Bob Barron	Patrick Moore
Ken Parker	Marilyn King
Randal Harkin	Sally Stabback
	Gregg Nicholls

Thanks to staff and volunteers for their contribution to COTA Victoria over the year.

Organisational Support

Jack Sach, Interim CEO
Ronda Held, CEO
Jill Bodnar, Executive Assistant

Giny Chang, Finance Administrator
Trish Coxon, Finance Officer
Thanks also to Lee Nabben and Kate Fuelling for their assistance.

Community Participation Team

Myfan Jordan, Manager
Sharon Granek, Advocacy & Engagement; Manager
Arati Vidyasagar, Outreach Information Officer
Brett Morton, Information Officer
Brenda Lacey, Information Officer
Kirsty Chalmers, Information Officer
Elizabeth Harvey, Policy Officer
Donna Swan, Policy Officer
Karen Ivanka, Peer Education and Volunteer Coordinator
Alan Bull, Age Friendly Projects
Brendan O'Dwyer, Media and Communications
Lizbeth Gonzalez Naranjo, Marketing and Communications

Mitsuko Penberthy,
Administrative Assistant

Victoria De Lacy,
Project Officer

Darcy Whitworth, Administrative Assistant

Volunteers

Peer Educators	John Douch
Alicia Maclan	Patrick Moore
Carol Smith	Randal Harkin
Edith Chen	Ruth Hosking
Helen Wu	Ruth Skewes
Isobel Buchan	Wilma Marmur
Janet Wood	
Mabel Png	Administration Support
Margaret Jones	Meena Lalwani
Margaret Thorne	Nerolie Powell
Mary Walsh	Thelma Rodillas



WHAT IS ELDER ABUSE?

Elder abuse is any act which causes harm to an older person and is carried out by someone they know and trust. The abuse may be physical, social, financial, psychological or sexual and can include mistreatment and neglect.

While elder abuse is vastly under-reported, the World Health Organization estimates up to 10 per cent of older people worldwide experience it. Increasingly, elder abuse has been acknowledged in the Victorian Government's family violence law reforms, supporting the data that in most cases the perpetrators of elder abuse are family members – particularly adult children. Like other forms of family violence, elder abuse is about one person disrespecting the rights of another, and abusing power and control. Elder abuse reflects gender inequality and the ageism that is still endemic in our society.

The different forms of elder abuse are:

Financial abuse

Using someone's money, property or other assets illegally or improperly. For example, by forcing them to sign documents.

Emotional or psychological abuse

Using threats, humiliation or harassment causing anguish and feelings of shame or powerlessness. This often occurs in a combination with other forms of abuse.

Physical abuse

Inflicting pain or injury. For example, hitting, slapping, pushing or using restraints, including medication.

Sexual abuse

Any sexual activity for which the person has not consented.

Social abuse

Preventing contact with relatives, friends or service providers, or restricting activities.

Neglect

Failing to provide the basic necessities of life, either intentionally or unintentionally.



Seniors Rights Victoria is the key state-wide service dedicated to stopping elder abuse. Seniors Rights Victoria recognises the intrinsic value, skills and strengths of older Victorians, and helps them to stand up for their rights.

Seniors Rights Victoria's mission is to empower older people through leading the prevention, and response to, elder abuse.

Seniors Rights Victoria's vision is to promote a just, equitable and inclusive society in which the human rights of older people are respected.

Seniors Rights Victoria provides information, support, advice casework and education to help prevent elder abuse and safeguard the rights, dignity and independence of older Victorians.

Our services include a Helpline, specialist legal services, short-term support and advocacy for individuals. We also participate in policy development, law reform and education, working with organisations and groups to raise awareness of elder abuse.

Established in 2008, Seniors Rights Victoria is a program of the Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria.



Fiona Richardson

Senior Rights Victoria would like to acknowledge the fearless advocacy work of former Victoria Minister for Women and Minister for Prevention of Family Violence Fiona Richardson MP who passed away in 2017. Fiona is remembered for giving a voice to those suffering injustice; a "trailblazer driven by a fierce determination for change".

“Older Victorians suffer from high rates of family violence and abuse, yet it's rarely discussed in public. We need to increase people's awareness of this problem so senior Victorians are supported and empowered.”

- Fiona Richardson

JUDY'S STORY

Judy, in her 70s, lives in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. She has two adult children, Rosemary and Jeremy. Three years ago Jeremy moved back in with Judy after the breakdown of his own relationship. He shares the care of his six-year-old daughter Claire with his former partner.

At the time, Jeremy did not work and he became verbally abusive towards Judy when she suggested he look for a job and contribute to the household expenses.

Judy found Jeremy's behaviour increasingly threatening but because she was concerned for Claire's welfare she was reluctant to take action. As Jeremy's behaviour escalated Judy no longer saw her other grandchildren or had friends visit.

Judy contacted Seniors Rights Victoria with the assistance of her daughter. The lawyer and advocate at Seniors Rights Victoria advised Judy that she could apply for a family violence intervention order. Judy had the process for making an application explained in detail and was given the contact details for the Applicant Support Worker at the local Magistrates' Court. Both the lawyer and advocate offered ongoing support and representation for Judy throughout the court process.

Judy made an application for a family violence intervention order and was granted an interim order. The police served a copy of the order on Jeremy that evening. Judy found the police

who attended very helpful and reported that they spent time with Jeremy explaining housing options and other help available to him. One of the police officers kept in contact with Judy to keep her informed of Jeremy's whereabouts and update her on whether he had accessed support services. This support from police helped to ease some of Judy's concerns about her son's wellbeing and it has also eased some of her anxiety over the action she had been forced to take against her adult son.

Jeremy contested the application for an intervention order and the matter was set down for a second mention hearing. After protracted negotiations at this hearing Jeremy consented to a two-year order. The order permitted telephone contact between Judy and Jeremy. Judy continued to have regular time with Claire.



OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

The past year saw tremendous growth in recognition of elder abuse. For Seniors Rights Victoria this meant a hectic year due to the pace of reforms, increased government interest in elder abuse and a higher level of demand upon our services, both for assistance with elder abuse from those experiencing it and services consulting with us for our expertise.

Enormous stimuli were the focus on family violence reform by the State Government, the publicity given to family violence and elder abuse in the community, and the Federal Government setting objectives to tackle elder abuse. Seniors Rights Victoria was invited to participate in high level committees and working groups. We were very keen to take part despite the load it placed upon us as a very small service. To assist us to take part the Victorian Government supported us with a grant for a part-time policy position, and funds to enable our Advocacy Coordinator to contribute our expertise in meetings and consultations. This helped keep older people in the big picture. The Federal Government's commitment to tackling elder abuse was demonstrated through referrals to the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) inquiry into elder abuse. We contributed two submissions to the ALRC inquiry; both highly professional and valuable contributions written by our Principal Lawyer with input from staff. Our submissions were quoted extensively in the final report.

The greater prominence of elder abuse led to more interest from other agencies and a greater demand on our services. Our Helpline calls increased by 25 per cent and our advices grew by 42 per cent. We received more requests than the previous years to work with organisations as expert informants through consultation, meetings, partnerships and delivery of education.

The staff have been fantastic in their sense of purpose and engagement in influencing the developments and achieving results. The quality of their work is exceptional and is a source of pride.

Throughout the year the Seniors Rights Victoria Advisory Committee has provided useful input on the strategic issues arising out of the developments and demands.

I thank the Advisory Committee members, staff, and peer educators for their contributions. And particular thanks to the older people who shared their stories of abuse and their efforts to achieve change.

Jenny Blakey
Manager, Seniors Rights Victoria



EMIL'S STORY

Emil, in his 80s, was living with his sister Sofia when her adult grandson Nick moved in after a relationship breakdown. Nick had a drug addiction and verbally abused Emil and Sofia. He didn't contribute to living costs, and he forced Emil to give him a significant amount of his pension, hitting him if he refused.

Nick played music at all hours, controlled the TV and had "friends" visit during the night. Emil and Sofia were too frightened to say anything because of the abuse it would trigger, and other family members were too scared to visit or intervene.

Emil wanted to feel safe. His chiropractor encouraged him to call Senior Rights Victoria and use the interpreter service to seek assistance. Seniors Rights Victoria teamed a lawyer and social worker advocate to meet with Emil, his health practitioner and an interpreter over an eight-month period. An intervention order was taken out to stop the family violence, but both Emil and Sofia were too frightened to report breaches.

Emergency housing options for men experiencing family violence are limited, so Emil was assisted to gain short-term aged care respite. The team then linked with service providers to seek a CALD-specific independent unit in a nearby community, where Emil's emotional and physical health continued to improve. Emil hopes to one day mend the relationship with Nick.

OUR PRACTICE

The helpline 1300 3687821

The Seniors Rights Victoria confidential telephone helpline provides information, support and referral. It is open weekdays from 10am to 5pm (excluding public holidays and between Christmas and New Year's Day).

In 2016–17, the helpline service received 3379 calls (2696 previous year), of which 3285 were related to elder abuse or associated issues.

Women made up more than 75 per cent of all callers, with men still a considerable proportion of callers (almost 25 per cent) and a minority of callers not identifying as male or female. We recognise that elder abuse can affect all older persons and cater our services accordingly.

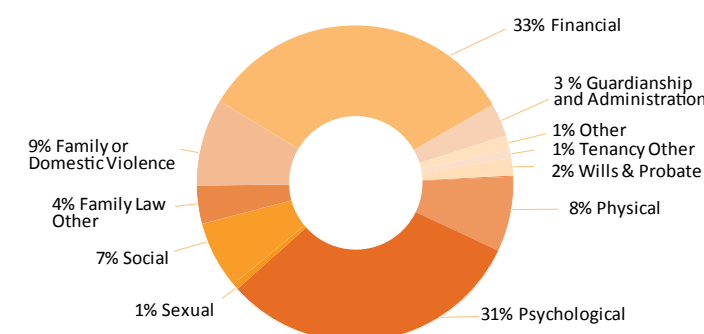
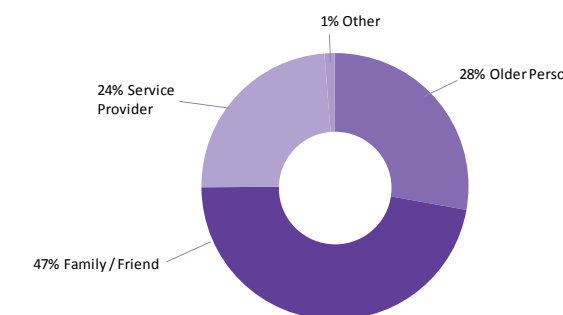
The most prevalent issues raised were financial abuse at 25 per cent (28 per cent last year) and emotional/psychological abuse at 24 per cent (29 per cent last year), followed by adult children returning home at 10 per cent (6 per cent last year), physical abuse at 9 per cent (5 per cent last year), and neglect at 8 per cent (6 per cent last year). Very often a client experienced more than one type of abuse.

A significant number of our callers were from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, with 234 advices made to clients whose birth country was not Australia, representing 35 different countries of origin.

Caller types

Overall we provided 2865 instances of information, 897 advices (legal and advocacy) and 103 secondary consultations to other organisations.

Right: Older people made up 28 per cent of callers, down from 36 per cent the previous year. Approximately 24 per cent were from aged care, health and other services, up from 20 per cent. Friends or relatives calling with concerns was 47 per cent, up from 42 per cent.



Above: 897 advices were provided to 486 clients, on the telephone and in person. Financial abuse accounted for 33 per cent, and emotional/psychological abuse 30 per cent. Advices were also given for family violence, physical abuse, social abuse, neglect and issues related to family laws, wills, probate, guardianship and tenancy.

Advice to clients

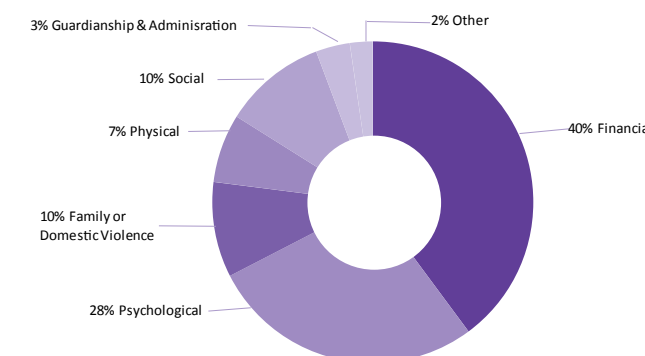
An "advice" is given by staff when a caller requires support that is more tailored to the person's concerns, rather than just information.

There were 486 people who received advice from the integrated advocacy and legal service in 2016–17. This is consistent with Seniors Rights Victoria's ethos of empowering older people through direct practice, not third parties.

Casework

If a client requires further assistance after receiving advice, then a case is opened. In 2016–17, casework was delivered by both our advocacy and legal services. Seniors Rights Victoria opened a total of 185 new cases and closed 77 cases.

Right: The most common cases involved financial abuse (39.8 per cent), followed by psychological abuse (27.5 per cent). In our experience, psychological abuse is a major component of the financial abuse experienced by many older people.



LEADERSHIP AND INFLUENCE

Seniors Rights Victoria is an influential thought leader, shifting attitudes and behaviours. We advocate and achieve positive change for and with older people. The past year was a highly significant year with our engagement in rare and constructive opportunities to stop elder abuse.

Australian Law Reform Commission

The ALRC launched its report Elder Abuse – A National Legal Response at Seniors Rights Victoria’s World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) forum in June.

The report contains 43 recommendations for law reform in aged care, enduring appointments, family agreements, superannuation, wills, banking, social security, guardianship and financial administration. These included many of our own recommendations endorsed in the report:

- Creating a national plan, inclusive of a prevalence study to consider the needs of diverse communities
- Creating a national power of attorney register
- Modifying the jurisdiction of state tribunals to resolve family disputes involving “assets for care” arrangements
- Creating an agency to investigate suspected elder abuse without requiring mandatory reporting.

The report is now being considered by the Federal Government. Seniors Rights Victoria is working with Governments to ensure these

recommendations are enacted to protect the rights of older people and respond to elder abuse.

Family Violence Reforms

As a consequence of our success in raising awareness of elder abuse as a form of family violence we were invited to take part in high-level government committees as the only service representing older people. We participated in the state-wide Family Violence Steering Committee, and associated Taskforce and Working Group. As a result, elder abuse is referenced in the key documents developed during the year including Ending Family Violence: Victoria’s Plan for Change, the Family Violence Rolling Action Plan 2017–2020, and Free from Violence: Victoria’s Prevention Strategy.

The government adopted a co-design approach and we contributed to work on a new risk assessment and management tool, sharing of information between services and the support and safety hubs. The pace of reform was fast and challenged our ability to participate. While elder abuse is visible in the reforms, the next challenge is transferring that to concrete action given the dominant focus on women and children in family violence.



Photo by Ronn aka "Blue" Aldaman

Community Education

Seniors Rights Victoria’s community education program underpins our empowerment and prevention frameworks, raising awareness of elder abuse and building the capacity of the community to respond and enable older people to take action. Delivered by the Community Education Coordinator with peer educators, this powerful and effective model provides accessible resources, workshops and presentations to older people, family members, carers, community groups and service providers.

Community education sessions include information about ageism; types of elder abuse and its risks, prevention, support and assistance; and enduring powers of attorney.

Seniors Rights Victoria also provides professional education for management, staff and workers in aged and community care, health services, local government and legal services. These sessions are designed to improve workers’ understanding

of the indicators of elder abuse, appropriate responses, legal issues and assistance available including referrals and secondary consultations.

In 2016–17, Seniors Rights Victoria delivered:

- 85 community education sessions to 2716 participants, of which 15 were to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups (417 participants) and 30 sessions in regional/rural Victoria (956 participants)
- 33 professional education presentations to 1241 participants, of which 4 were to CALD organisations (84 participants)
- 2 sessions for bilingual educators at the Ethnic Communities’ Council Victoria
- One 2-day induction program for 11 new Seniors Rights Victoria volunteer speakers
- 2 community education sessions (23 participants) and 1 professional conference presentation (50 participants) to Aboriginal communities



World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

Seniors Rights Victoria and the Office of Public Advocate co-hosted a forum on World Elder Abuse Day (WEAAD), June 15, welcoming the Federal Government's release of the ALRC report Elder Abuse – A National Legal Response.

Appearing via video link, Federal Attorney General Senator George Brandis said the report was a foundational document for our nation's understanding of the rights of older Australians and their value in our society.

Speakers, including ALRC President Professor Rosalind Croucher and Federal Age Discrimination Commissioner Dr Kay Patterson, acknowledged

the release of the report which will provide a strong foundation for future action.

Seniors Rights Victoria welcomed broad community participation in WEAAD, with more than 50 events hosted across the state in conjunction with local groups, with organisations accessing resources from our dedicated website.

We provided 20,350 WEAAD merchandise items this year, guest speakers at 14 events and 990 show bags for organisations and individuals who “went purple” to support the rights of older people to live safely and with dignity.

Elder Abuse Prevention Advisory Group

The main business of the Advisory Group during the year was the development of the Integrated Models pilot across three sites, increasing to five. Each health service site will have a liaison officer positioned with the ACAS worker to provide secondary consultations on elder abuse to staff and families. Training is provided by the Bouverie Centre in partnership with St Vincent's Health and ourselves. The model provides referrals for family counselling and mediation.

Elder Abuse Prevention Networks

On 2 December 2016, the Government announced a further \$1 million for the prevention of elder abuse at a Victoria Against Violence event. As a result the Elder Abuse Prevention Networks (EAPN) and the Seniors Rights Victoria EAPN Project worker received additional funds to increase the number of funded networks to 10.

MEG'S STORY

Meg was living with her son and daughter-in-law in a property they purchased together in Healesville. Meg owned one third of the property and her daughter owned half of the property as tenants in common. Unfortunately, Meg's daughter was verbally and emotionally abusive towards her. Unable to stand the abuse, Meg left but continued to pay some of the bills. Meg engaged a private lawyer to ask her daughter to seek an agreement to sell the home or purchase Meg's interest. When there was no response she contacted Seniors Rights Victoria for advice and a lawyer repeated the request.

After no response, Seniors Rights Victoria issued an application in the Building and Property List of VCAT, a process that Meg could not have navigated without representation. SRV sought orders that the property be sold and that the mortgage be repaid from share attributed to the daughter and that the proceeds be divided in accordance with their entitlements.

Even after the matter settled, Meg's family delayed this process every step of the way; they did everything they could to make Meg's life harder. The VCAT compulsory conference required Meg to be in the same room as the perpetrators of the abuse which was a very stressful process for her. The Seniors Rights Victoria advocate was able to support her throughout the process.



COTA VICTORIA BOARD

The COTA Victoria Board is responsible for the good governance of the organisation. The Board consists of dedicated people with a diverse range of skills and backgrounds who bring a wealth of knowledge and experience in areas important to COTA's work and reputation.



Cathy Mead, President, has qualifications in medicine and public health and has worked in the Commonwealth Public Service and academia.



Lynette Moore, Deputy President, has 30 years of experience working in aged care and disability services, including as CEO of Alzheimer's Australia Vic. Her initial training as an occupational therapist led her to work in academia and management.



Graeme Bird, Treasurer, has extensive knowledge in the finance and banking sectors with experience in risk management, accounting, and human and media relations, with roles as company director, business manager and board member. He is a Foundation Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and has also been involved with Apex and Rotary for many years.



Gary Henry, Chair Governance Committee, is a company director and management consultant providing strategic and operational advice to not-for-profit organisations including health services, research institutes, universities and aged care providers. Gary holds a Bachelor of Health Administration, is a Fellow of the Australasian College of Health Service Management and a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



Mike Lescai, Chair Business Development Advisory Committee, is a specialist on strategy and runs his own business consultancy practice focusing on business improvement. He has worked as an accountant, chief operating officer and has board experience. Mike has an MBA and has lectured in international trade, and has also been involved with Jaycees.



Sylvia J Geddes has extensive experience in philanthropy as CEO of the Ross Trust and Director of the Scanlon Foundation and Trust for Nature. She held a number of senior policy and program management positions in the Victorian and Commonwealth Public Services and has a Bachelor of Arts (First Class Honours).



Marilyn King is the cofounder and president W.O.W! (Willing Older Workers Incorporated) and passionate advocate and activist for mature-aged unemployed people across Melbourne. She is also member of various committees and advisory groups.



Sue Harris is a Partner at Madgwicks Lawyers and has been a practising lawyer for over thirty years. She was a member of the Law Institute of Victoria's Elder Law Committee and has taught at Melbourne University and the Leo Cussen Centre for Law. Sue has had various director roles in community and arts organisations.



Jenny Alvin is an experienced management consultant, working predominantly in the public, not-for-profit and education sectors. She has consulted to and worked with a range of boards and management committees on governance, organisational effectiveness and people management issues and has experience as a board director.

TREASURER'S REPORT



On behalf of the Board of Management I have great pleasure in presenting the Treasurer's Report for the financial year ended 30 June 2017.

The final result at 30 June 2017 was a deficit of \$31,666 (the 2015–2016 deficit was \$37,527).

The past twelve months has seen a consolidation of the finances of COTA (Vic). The careful management of the financial position has ensured the continuation of the important work of COTA (Vic) to represent and be the voice for older Victorians.

Revenue grew by 4 percent this financial year. This is a pleasing result in the current economic climate. Operational costs saw a small 3 percent increase attributed to increased information technology costs and award increase in employee salaries.

A number of new projects started during this year and we appreciate the support of all our funders. Please see page 38 for details. The following table highlights the result from ordinary activities before depreciation. This shows a small deficit before depreciation. The operating result after depreciation is a deficit of \$32,000 compared to a deficit of \$38,000 last year. This year's result is an improvement on the prior year of \$6,000.

Please refer to the financial statements and notes for a more detailed explanation of the financial position as summarised in the table.

At balance date, COTA's net asset position is \$739,871. The financial position, while requiring careful management, is robust enough for the challenges that lie ahead.

The 2016–2017 year has provided a solid base for the next twelve months, which sees COTA (Vic) move to new premises and start a new chapter. I would like to thank our auditors for their work with us over recent years, with particular thanks to Terry Vail for the attention to detail and advice he has provided during my term as Treasurer. The company is retiring from our audit process due to a rotational requirement for good practice.

As always, I would like to thank the audit and risk and finance teams for their dedication and commitment to COTA (Vic) and for providing

such excellent and reliable management of the finances; their support and loyalty to COTA is much appreciated.

Graeme Bird
Treasurer

Key Results	2016–2017	2015–2016	Variance
Income	000's	000's	000's
Grants	2,556	2,408	148
Investment Income	46	46	0
Program Fees	11	17	(6)
Membership, Commission & Sales Income	256	264	(8)
Other Income	16	49	(33)
Total Income	2,885	2,783	102
Expenditure	000's	000's	000's
Staff Costs	1,802	1,694	(108)
Other Operating Costs	1,101	1,112	11
Total Expenditure	2,903	2,806	(97)
Total Ordinary Operating profit / (loss) before depreciation	(18)	(22)	4
Less: Depreciation	(14)	(16)	2
Total Operating profit / (loss) including Depreciation	(32)	(38)	6

THANK YOU

The staff at Seniors Rights Victoria bring together knowledge and experience from a range of backgrounds including aged care, the community, health and legal sectors, government, adult and tertiary education, communication and the private sector. Drawing on our multidisciplinary strengths, the Seniors Rights Victoria team is committed to building the knowledge-base around elder abuse to further advance the rights of older members of the Victorian community.

Staff

Jenny Blakey Manager	Mandy Walmsley Advocate
Pam Morton Principal Lawyer	Stacey Van Dueren Helpline Advocate
Carol Stuart Acting Principal Lawyer	Bernadette Maheandiran Policy Officer
Melanie Perkins Community Lawyer	Melanie Joosten Policy Officer
Tabitha O'Shea Community Lawyer	Alexia Huxley EAPN Project Officer
Gary Ferguson Education Coordinator	Caitlin Evans/Jenny Lord Communications and Media Advisor
Philippa Campbell Advocacy Coordinator	Danielle Di Carlo Administration Officer
Jane Eeles Advocate	Andrea Staunton WEAAD Project Officer
Margherita Riccioni Project Grants Fundraiser	

Our community education volunteers

Jennifer Evans	Alison O'Keefe
Ken Humphries	Deirdre Penhale

Partners we support

Eastern Community Legal Centre

Kaz McKay – Partnerships Coordinator

Justice Connect: Seniors Law

Lauren Gordon (until April 2017) – Lawyer
Health Justice Partnership at St Vincent's Hospital

Seniors Rights Victoria Advisory Committee

Aaron Wyllie Policy and Research Officer, Benetas PhD candidate, Monash University	VMIA, Risk Management & Insurance George Koulis General Manager, Commercial and Corporate Services Doutta Galla Aged Services
Dr John Chesterman Manager of Policy and Education, Office of the Public Advocate	Mike Lescai See page 33
Liz Cox Head of Risk DHHS, DET	Sue Harris See page 33

Senior's Rights Victoria would also like to acknowledge

Barristers Daniel Aghion Nic Cozens Michael Gronow Lionel Wirth Tim Jeffries Jennika Anthony Shaw	Jacqui Morse, debriefing consultant Denise Lawry, Human Resources Consulting Jason Saultry of Justice Connect Yvonne Lay, Yvonne Lay Consulting Lee Nabben, Lee Nabben Consulting
Firms Maddocks Wotton Kearney	

To our funding bodies

Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services | Victoria Legal Aid | Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet | Federal Government Department of Health | Federal Government Attorney-General's Department | Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation | Victoria Law Foundation | Clayton Utz Foundation | Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust | Palliative Care Victoria | Sidney Myer Fund | Gay and Lesbian Foundation Australia | RACV Community Foundation | City of Casey | Brimbank City Council | Victorian Department of Justice and Regulation | Equity Trustees | Wicking Trust | Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust | State Trustees Australia Foundation | COTA Australia | Consumer Affairs Victoria | Energy Consumers Australia | Epilepsy Foundation Victoria



To our supporters

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