

Department of Local Government and Communities

Submission to the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee Inquiry into Policy Implications of an Ageing Community, June 2014

The Department of Local Government and Communities (DLGC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into the Policy Implications of an Ageing Community. Improving outcomes for the community is a key strategic objective of the DLGC. This includes supporting seniors to 'age in place' in the communities where they live and belong.

Background

Ageing is a key feature of the WA population. According to the 2011 Census of Population and Housing, more than 410,000 Western Australians, or approximately 18 per cent of the population, were aged over 60 years. It is projected that this number will grow to 595,000 (21 per cent) by 2021.

The former Department of Communities developed '*An Age Friendly WA: The Seniors Strategic Planning Framework 2012-2017*' (hereafter 'the framework') to achieve its key strategic objectives by assisting agencies and their community and business partners to better plan and develop policies and programs that will meet the needs of our current and future ageing population.

The Age-friendly Communities program and planning framework is the part of the government suite of initiatives to enhance and improve the lives of Western Australian seniors, which includes the WA Seniors Card and Safety and Security Rebate. It was informed by consultations with key stakeholders and desktop research of local, national and international literature, and a commissioned report undertaken by Painted Dog Research, to identify and examine best-practice in planning for an ageing community.

International best-practice is the World Health Organisation's (WHO) *Age-friendly Cities framework*¹ that was developed to respond to future challenges posed by an ageing and rapidly urbanising global population. This framework, reflecting the WHO principles of active ageing², has been tested and is being used in more than 100 communities globally.

An age-friendly community is one that:

1. recognises that seniors are a diverse group;
2. promotes their inclusion in and contribution to all areas of community life;
3. respects their decisions and lifestyle choices;
4. anticipates and responds flexibly to ageing-related needs and preferences; and
5. benefits people of all ages and abilities in the community³.

The age-friendly methodology acknowledges that older people should be key contributors to the planning, development and implementation of policies, programs and strategies to ensure that they adequately account for and address the needs of seniors. This involves extensive consultation with seniors, carers and service providers to consider the eight identified essential features of community life:

1. outdoor spaces and buildings;
2. transport;
3. housing;
4. social participation;
5. respect and inclusion;
6. civic participation and employment;
7. communication and information; and
8. community support and health services.

¹ Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide World Health Organisation 2007

² WHO: Active Ageing : A Policy Framework http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2002/WHO_NMH_NPH_02.8.pdf?ua=1

³ Adapted from WHO's definition of an age-friendly city.

Question 1: The effectiveness of the Seniors Strategic Planning Framework 2012-2017 in guiding policies and programs to create age-friendly communities throughout the State

Since its launch in December 2012, there has been a significant uptake of and interest in the framework from State Government agencies and local government authorities, and a number of the outcomes from the implementation process. The framework is underpinned by the following principles:

1. an individual's choice, rights and dignity are fundamental
2. ageing well is a lifelong journey
3. 'ageing in place' benefits everyone.

Implementation of the framework and these principles has enabled both levels of government to effectively plan policies and programs that meet the different needs of their varied community within the resources that are available to them. The following are examples of this.

The Department of Planning and the Western Australian Planning Commission have developed the *Age Friendly WA: State Seniors Strategic Planning Framework*. This framework recognises that the needs of seniors need to be incorporated into the State's planning strategies, policies and guides, which include *Directions 2031 and Beyond State Planning Strategy*, *Liveable Neighbourhoods* and *Diverse City by Design*.

The Department of Regional Development (DRD) has undertaken research as part of its *Ageing in the Bush* project. The research focused on examining the issues associated with ageing in the community from the perspective of aged care service providers. The DRD has also provided funding of \$2.5 million for the *Creating Age-Friendly Communities in Small Towns* project.

The Department of the Premier and Cabinet has initiated the scoping of the '*Positive Ageing in WA – supporting an ageing population*' project at the Premier's request.

A number of State Government agencies participate in the virtual across-government Seniors Officers Group, which communicates regularly to provide information on State Government policies, programs and services relevant to seniors.

In the 27 local government areas where the framework has been adopted, the resultant policies and programs are at varying stages from development to completion. However, there have been a number of positive outcomes which include, but are not limited to:

1. the establishment of the *WA Age Friendly Communities Network* in response to feedback from funding recipients. The Network will be managed by Local Government Managers Australia WA and will provide a vital communication, promotion and networking tool for groups who are using or are interested in the age-friendly methodology; and
2. a high level of state-wide interest from local governments and other stakeholders that have requested that the DLGC deliver presentations on the framework/methodology.

The WHO is currently developing benchmarks against the effectiveness of age-friendly indicators. Consideration will be given to using these once they are made available and their suitability for the WA context is determined.

The DLGC has budgeted for a range of initiatives to support the implementation of the above identified planning principles.

The State Government's elder abuse initiatives support the choices, rights and dignity of WA's seniors. The DLGC works collaboratively with WA Police and the Office of the Public Advocate, and funds Advocare and the Older People's Rights Service, and through the Alliance for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (APEA), to provide services and information to prevent or address elder abuse. Examples of this work include:

1. the launch the Elder Abuse Protocol Guidelines brochure by the Minister on 1 April 2014
2. providing joint funding of \$80 000 for an elder abuse Helpline in partnership with the Department of Health which will be operational before the end of the first quarter 2014-2015
3. providing funding of \$245,551 to the Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre for the Older People's Rights Service.

The seniors' Safety and Security Rebate supports older people to age in place. The focus of the scheme has shifted from home to personal safety and security, enabling seniors to purchase personal safety devices which can be used outside of the home. This allows seniors to not only live in their own homes, but to be actively involved in the wider community. Since January 2014, more than 1,600 claims have been paid for personal safety devices.

In April 2014 the Minister for Seniors approved:

1. expenditure of \$50,000 to establish the WA AFC Network and delivery of a sector-wide capacity building forum for 2014-2015
2. continued exploration of strategies to support regional local governments to adopt the AFC approach.

2. The extent to which age-friendly communities have been established in WA

The age-friendly methodology is intended to be implemented as an ongoing, sustainable, inclusive and adaptable planning tool, rather than simply a label through which a community can declare itself to be age-friendly.

Between 2006 and 2011, 27 Western Australian local governments received State Government grants of up to \$10,000 each to undertake age-friendly research as part of their strategic planning process. The amalgamation of the then Department of Communities with the Department of Local Government on 1 July 2013 provided an opportunity to widely promote the framework to local governments, and encourage the incorporation of the methodology into the development of Strategic Community Plans, as required under the State Government's Local Government Reform Program.

The first four local governments were funded in 2006-2007. They were the City of Melville, Shire of Augusta-Margaret River, City of Rockingham and City of Mandurah. These local governments incorporated their research findings into their planning processes and continue to develop seniors' specific strategies. In 2010 – 2011, a further 23 local governments in Western Australia were funded by the Department for Communities and committed to adopting an age-friendly approach to their planning.

This translated to 32.89 per cent of the total seniors population in Western Australia living in a local government area that has adopted an age-friendly approach to its planning. More than one-third (42 per cent) of seniors living in the metropolitan area reside in a local government area where an age-friendly approach has been adopted. Conversely, of the total number of seniors living in the non-metropolitan area, only 7.5 per cent reside in a local government area where the age-friendly approach has been adopted.

In July 2012, the then Department of Communities undertook a collective examination of the final research reports of each of the participating local government's research. A key finding was that seniors who participated in the research reported that they enjoyed living in their local area and were keen to assist in making improvements to their environment. They had also contributed solutions to the issues they raised in their local government report.

It was found that the significant advantage of the age-friendly approach is that older people are included in local government planning. They felt that their involvement in the project had given them a real sense of belonging and ownership of the research, as this quote captures: *'I am impressed with this project. Seniors have a wealth of life experiences and abilities. With this project we can feel useful, feel required and feel we are not lost or forgotten.'*

The WHO maintains an international age-friendly cities/communities network. Membership is only granted to organisations that can prove they meet strict criteria relating to research, analysis, implementation and evaluation of their use of the age-friendly methodology. The WHO monitors members' compliance with these criteria every five years, and revokes the membership of those who do not comply. Two WA local governments, the Cities of Melville and Rockingham, are currently members of the network.