



Statement by the Council on the Ageing Queensland to the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on the Fourth Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing – 29 June to 1 July 2022- Bangkok.

Thank-you on behalf of Council on the Ageing Queensland (COTA Queensland) for the opportunity to make a statement to the meeting today. COTA Queensland is a non-government organisation that advocates on behalf of older Queenslanders.

The Australian Government response to the Voluntary National Survey was very comprehensive and created the impression of substantial progress having been made since MIPAA was adopted in 2002. However, from the perspective of many older Australians a lot more work needs to be undertaken across many aspects of our society before Australia can be considered an age-friendly country.

In Australia we are fortunate to have a health system staffed by highly qualified professionals who can access leading medical technology. However, these carers are handicapped by the current lack of capacity in Australia's public hospital system. The media shows on almost a daily basis images of ambulances queued for many hours waiting for patients to be admitted. There is no guarantee that those experiencing a serious medical episode will have a paramedic arrive to save them.

Those most at risk are those 65 and over who nationally comprise 21% of Emergency Dept presentations. While COVID and Influenza are placing additional demand on hospital capacity, there were capacity issues pre-COVID. The Queensland Government announced last week it would invest an additional \$9.78b over six years to increase capacity. It will take five years at least before any new capacity becomes available.

In recent years public focus has been on aged care reform (given the distressing information that emerged during the Royal Commission into Aged Care), the quality and safety of aged care and the

aged care workforce have fully occupied the attention of the Australian Government. The broader objective of enabling active and healthy ageing in Australia has fallen from sight.

The Australian health care system is complex in both its operation and structure given that it is funded and managed across multiple levels of government. The older health consumer often finds our health system to be confusing and difficult to navigate. If you have a low income and are dependent upon the public system it can be hard to get timely access to treatment due long wait times. Many seniors pay for private medical insurance to enable prompt treatment despite the large financial impact this has on their limited budgets. Those over 65 can be prevented from accessing vital health care due to ageist government policies. For example, under the National Disability Insurance Scheme a person under 65 years who is diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease can access 24/7 care, however, if diagnosed when 65 and over you are not covered by NDIS, instead you are funded through the age care system that will provide you with only two hours of care per day.

Encouraging and facilitating the growth of Age-Friendly communities in Queensland is about enabling the development of environments that support all aspects of living in a community that is fully integrated and mutually supportive to ensure that community members can live active and healthy lives. COTA Queensland is advocating for a more age-friendly and integrated Australian health system that enables a person to be at the centre of care throughout their lifespan despite their age and financial situation.

John Stalker
Policy Coordinator
Council on the Ageing Queensland