

How we make a difference

COTA SA 2025 year in review





We are pleased to share COTA SA's 2025 year in review with you, which showcases the breadth and impact of our work and the collective effort of everyone who contributes to COTA SA's mission.

At COTA SA, we celebrate ageing and challenge ageist stereotypes. Growing older is a privilege and we exist to ensure every older South Australian can age with purpose and dignity, and on their own terms.

Older South Australians are a vital and growing part of our community, with diverse experiences, voices, and needs. As this population increases, our mission to represent the rights, interests and futures of people aged 50+ has never been more important.

With a Federal Election behind us and a South Australian state election approaching in early 2026, we continue to ensure the voices and priorities of people aged 50+ are heard. Our advocacy has focused on listening, sharing evidence-based research, and engaging decision-makers to help ensure the lived experience of older people shapes policies and services across the state.

We completed our first full year working with Minister for Human Services, The Hon Nat Cook MP, in her expanded portfolio, which includes Seniors and Ageing Well. We've strengthened our productive partnership

with Minister Cook and look ahead to the launch of the state's new Plan for Ageing Well 2026–2036, while shaping COTA SA's own strategic plan to align with these priorities.

We also congratulate Rainbow Hub SA on their first year of independence following their transition from COTA SA, and we continue to support their growth and advocacy for older LGBTI+ South Australians.

This year, we were pleased to celebrate the contribution of several long-serving staff whose dedication reflects the heart of COTA SA's work. Our Digital Coordinator, Kirsteen, marked 20 years of service, joining colleagues Sarah, Ross and Germaine who have been part of the organisation for 10, 17 and 34 years respectively. We thank them, and our entire COTA SA team and Board members, for their commitment and shared passion for improving the lives of older South Australians.

None of our achievements would be possible without the support of our wider COTA SA community. To our volunteers, Patrons, funding partners, supporters, and sponsors, thank you for believing in and strengthening our mission.

Finally, to our members and the thousands of older South Australians who share their experiences and insights with us, your voices guide everything we do. We're proud to stand beside you, listen to you, and work with you to make every stage of ageing rich with possibility.

Emeritus Professor Anne Edwards AO
President

Miranda Starke
Chief Executive

Strong leadership for the future

Led by President Anne Edwards AO, the COTA SA Board continues to guide COTA SA with clear direction and a shared commitment to creating a better future for older South Australians.

Alongside the retirement of long-serving Board member Anne Burgess AM (see article below), this year saw renewal across our Board as we farewelled several valued members and welcomed new appointments.

Barry Apsey stepped down after eight years of service and will continue to contribute through the Policy Council, where he has

served for 12 years, and the Climate Change Group. We also thank Dr Kate Barnett OAM for her passion and support during her time as a Board member.

We are pleased to welcome Michelle Bentley, who joins the Board and will also serve as Chair of the Policy Council, bringing strong expertise in business development and organisational growth.

Rajendra Pandey adds experience in governance, risk and community leadership, with a deep commitment to supporting older people in multicultural communities.

We are also delighted to announce that Alexandra Cannon OAM has been appointed as our new Deputy President.

COTA SA's diverse and experienced Board brings wide-ranging knowledge and insight to guide our work into the future. We thank them for their continued support in 2025.



Thank you and farewell to Anne Burgess AM

COTA SA warmly acknowledges the outstanding leadership and dedication of Anne Burgess AM, who is retiring from the Board after twelve years of service.

Anne joined the COTA SA Board in November 2013, when she was also appointed Deputy President and Chair of the Policy Council. Over the years, she has provided thoughtful leadership across many areas of COTA SA's work, including as a long-serving member of the

Governance Committee and an inaugural member of the Policy Council Environment Sub-Committee (now known as the Climate Change Group).

Anne has also worked closely with our staff over many years, generously sharing her time, experience and guidance as a mentor. We are proud that her leadership has also been recognised more widely as a finalist for the 2025 South Australian Senior Australian of the Year, Chair of the Aged Care Council of Elders, and Chair of the Aged Care Transition Taskforce. These important national roles have taken her to Canberra, ensuring the voices of older Australians remain central as we navigate major aged care reforms.

Anne's leadership has shaped COTA SA's advocacy and ensured the voices of older South Australians are heard, leaving a lasting legacy. We sincerely thank Anne for her years of service, generosity and commitment, and wish her every success and happiness for the future.

Raising the voices of older South Australians

Our policy, advocacy and engagement work

COTA SA engages with older people from all walks of life from across South Australia to understand their experiences, priorities, and aspirations. This engagement helps us advocate for policies that reflect the real needs and diverse perspectives of older people throughout the state.



Key concerns of older South Australians

Through our extensive engagement with older South Australians, we know that **cost of living** and **access to healthcare** are their most pressing concerns, including rising costs for essentials such as groceries, insurance, and medical care.

In response, we have strongly advocated for measures to address cost-of-living pressures through meetings with ministers and MPs, our 2025/26 State Budget submission, and ongoing engagement leading up to the 2026

state election, including the development of our Election Platform and beyond.

We have continued our ongoing advocacy for **equitable ambulance reform**. South Australia remains the only state that does not provide this essential service to those on a full Age Pension. With some of the highest call-out fees in the country, many older South Australians on fixed incomes face significant financial stress. Our advocacy for free ambulance services gained strong media coverage in the lead-up to the State Budget, helping to raise public awareness and highlighting the need for reform.

COTA SA community and Policy Council member Reeva (pictured) shared her experiences with The Advertiser about receiving a large ambulance bill.

Cost-of-living navigation program with The Wyatt Trust

COTA SA has identified a growing need for navigation support to help South Australians aged 50+ access services and advice to age well. Through COTA SA's research and engagement consultancy The Plug-in, we partnered with The Wyatt Trust to co-design a cost-of-living navigation program that helps people access financial and social supports.

Insights from workshops and interviews shaped a model focused on empathetic, trauma-informed guidance delivered by trained "navigators". This project strengthens COTA SA's advocacy for accessible supports and services for older South Australians.



A workshop about the cost-of-living navigation program



Ageing in country South Australia

In 2025, COTA SA visited communities across the Yorke and Fleurieu Peninsulas to hear directly from older people about regional life. While locals value strong community ties, they raised concerns about limited healthcare, transport challenges, rising living costs, and access to online services.

The algal bloom is also affecting social connection, mental health and wellbeing in our two oldest demographic regions. These conversations guide COTA SA's advocacy for better access to essential services and ensure regional voices shape planning and policy across South Australia.

Engaging with older people in the Fleurieu Peninsula

Older victim-survivors will now have a voice in shaping the design of new services and solutions, a critical step toward truly inclusive and effective responses to violence.

COTA SA Chief Executive Miranda Starke responding to the release of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Royal Commission's With Courage report.



The Climate Change Group presenting to residents from the City of Burnside

Expert evidence to inform South Australia's Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Royal Commission

COTA SA was honoured to appear as an expert witness at the 2025 Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. As one of only two organisations representing older people, we are proud to have helped ensure their experiences informed the Commission's lived experience recommendations. Drawing on our 2024 research into violence against older women in South Australia—cited in the final report—we highlighted the often hidden forms of abuse older people face and the need for campaigns that raise awareness, challenge ageism, and drive action.

Presenting evidence at the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Royal Commission

Caring for our planet

Following the 2025 Federal Election, older South Australians told us that climate change was in the top 3 issues that influenced their vote. Our Climate Change Group continues to be active and engaged in supporting older people to take positive actions to care for the environment.

The group shares credible, easy-to-understand information and personal stories to help others make informed choices. This year, they delivered a webinar about solar with the City of Mitcham and hosted an information session for residents of the City of Burnside, empowering communities to take practical action for a more sustainable future. The group continues to be active in COTA SA's Policy Council, providing assistance in shaping our 'climate in all' policy approach.



Stranded patients

We continue to play a key role in ministerial roundtables addressing the issue of "stranded patients" - older South Australians who are medically ready for discharge but remain in hospital due to a lack of aged care places to meet their needs.

Stranded patients have been described as a "wicked problem" that fall between State and Federal responsibilities, leaving hundreds of older people without appropriate care options. We will continue to work with Government to share insights and advocate for person-centred solutions.



Connection, conversation, and celebration

Natasha Stott Despoja AO at International Day of Older Persons



Events that inspire and empower

COTA SA events create opportunities for older people to connect, share experiences, and explore topics that support ageing well.

We hosted three of our popular Conversations in the City events this year, exploring themes around positive ageing with support from a Community Impact Strategic Grant from the City of Adelaide. Guest speakers shared insights on topics such as health and fitness, nutrition, and digital literacy, helping participants build knowledge, confidence, and connections.

We celebrated the UN's International Day of Older Persons and kicked off SA's Week of Ageing Well with our free, flagship, intergenerational event that grows from year to year. Our keynote speaker Natasha Stott Despoja AO delivered a thoughtful and inspiring address to an audience of 250 guests on the theme: *Ageing well in public (and private) life*.

In partnership with the City of Salisbury, we co-hosted three events in Adelaide's northern suburbs addressing issues and topics that affect older adults, including knowing your rights, sharing lived experiences, cost of living and healthy eating.

Through our Community Connect program, COTA SA attended 25 community forums and expos, providing information, support and connections for older people across metropolitan and regional South Australia.



Volunteers playing a vital role in our work

COTA SA's work is strengthened by the support of around 120 dedicated volunteers who empower older South Australians to stay connected, informed, and supported. From offering friendly information at our reception desk and community events, to supporting programs, projects and contributing to policy, advocacy, and community initiatives, our volunteers play a key role across the organisation. Their dedication and collective contributions make an extraordinary difference to the lives of older people and communities across the state.

We were delighted to celebrate our volunteers during National Volunteer Week in May with an appreciation event at the volunteer-run Capri Theatre.



Our Community Connect team with Federal Member for Boothby, Louise Miller-Frost MP



This event reinforced for me how important it is to focus on the positive aspects of ageing. There is so much to enjoy about getting older!

International Day of Older Persons event attendee

Guests at International Day of Older Persons

Programs and services that make a difference

Experts in aged care navigation

Funded by Adelaide PHN, COTA SA's Aged Care Navigators provide intensive aged care navigation support to older people with complex needs and limited family or carer assistance, helping them understand, navigate and access the aged care services they need.

Through COTA SA's Let's Talk Aged Care program, customer service staff and volunteers provide mainstream aged care information and referral pathways to older South Australians over the phone, including to those who may not be eligible for direct support from our Aged Care Navigators. Additionally, the Let's Talk Aged Care team has shared information and engaged with older people and communities through aged care expos and events, including discussing and sharing information about the new Aged Care Act and Support at Home.



Friends for older people

The COTA Visitors program, part of the Australian Government's Aged Care Volunteer Visitor Scheme, sees friendly volunteers bring conversation, news, new interests and friendship to older people who are at risk of social isolation or loneliness.

Research this year shows the COTA Visitors program is making a profoundly positive impact on people's lives. Since receiving visits from a volunteer as part of the COTA Visitors program, 97% of older participants report feeling more socially connected, 93% feel they have someone they can rely on, and 87% report having something to look forward to in life.

I used to isolate myself...(visits from my volunteer) has led me speaking more regularly with others. We relate very well. She was a guest at my 80th birthday.

COTA Visitors participant

Navigating the aged care system felt daunting, but the guidance I was given by COTA SA made all the difference... Every question I had—no matter how small—was answered with patience and care. The process was explained step by step, and I never felt alone in making important decisions for myself... It truly made a difficult journey much easier.

Let's Talk Aged care client



Rainbow Rights in conversation

COTA SA's new Rainbow Rights in Conversation podcast, developed with support from the South Australian Government's Office for Ageing Well, offers accessible, in-depth insights into ageing well for older LGBTI+ people.

Hosted by Julie McCrossin AM, the podcast features interviews with local advocates from the rainbow community. The podcast follows the release of the Rainbow Rights Toolkit last year and delves into topics aligned with the toolkit's key pillars: Health, Housing, Overcoming Discrimination, and Planning Ahead.

The Rainbow Rights in Conversation podcast is available to listen through Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

From strength to strength

We relaunched our Strength for Life program in July, building on its proud 21-year history with refreshed branding and an expanded range of programs, offering older South Australians more choice than ever before, all under the trusted Strength for Life brand.

New marketing initiatives are helping raise awareness and participation across the state, supported by a new standalone website with tailored areas for providers, instructors and participants. Through a new Instructor Start-Up Initiative, a 12-month partnership with Preventive Health SA, we're supporting 100 new instructors with funded training, mentoring and marketing.

The Start-Up Initiative focuses on increasing access to Strength for Life in priority populations including culturally and linguistically diverse, regional and lower socioeconomic communities. In 2026, we'll build on this momentum by expanding our provider and instructor network and deepening community connections, helping more older Australians stay strong, active and independent. To find out more, or find a Strength for Life provider near you, visit strengthforlife.com.au.



Strength for Life instructors in training

I knew that I needed to keep up my strength so decided to give it a go – best thing I ever did.

Strength for Life participant

COTA SA

COTA SA is the peak body representing the rights, interests and futures of more than 700,000 South Australians aged 50+, who together make up more than a third of our population. COTA SA is an independent, not-for-profit community organisation and a proud partner in the COTA National Alliance, made up of COTAs in each state and territory, along with COTA Australia. Our sights are firmly set on calling out ageism; promoting ageing well; overcoming disadvantage and inequality; championing the diversity of ageing; and offering programs which create new possibilities for and with older South Australians.



COTA SA

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COTA SA acknowledges all Aboriginal nations throughout South Australia. We honour Aboriginal people's continuing connection to Country and recognise that their sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all Aboriginal people.

COTA SA Board

COTA SA's Board bring with them a wealth of knowledge and experience to ensure COTA SA and everything we do is guided strategically into the future.

Emeritus Prof Anne Edwards AO
President

Anne Burgess AM
Deputy President, Chair Policy Council
(retired Nov 25)

Alexandrea Cannon OAM
Chair of Governance Committee
Deputy President (from Nov 25)

John Lipkiewicz
Chair Finance and Audit Committee

Michelle Bentley (appointed Aug 25)
Chair Policy Council (from Nov 25)

Barry Apsey (retired Aug 25)

Kate Barnett OAM (resigned Oct 25)

Mike Dixon

Helena Kyriazopoulos OAM

Rajendra Pandey
(appointed March 25)

COTA SA Patrons

Her Excellency the Honourable
Frances Adamson AC
Governor of South Australia

Mr Rod Bunten

Leadership Team

Our leadership team works closely with staff and volunteers to make COTA SA's vision a reality.

Miranda Starke
Chief Executive

Sarah Groth
Finance Manager

COTA SA Supporters

Beyond Bank

Catapult Wealth

Centennial Park

City of West Torrens

Copper Coast Council

COTA Insurance

ECH

Eldercare

Flinders University's Caring Futures Institute

Gawler Community Retirement Homes

Helping Hand Aged Care

Hender Consulting

HESTA

Kalyra Communities

Life Care

Port Augusta City Council

Resthaven

St Basil's Homes (SA)

Town of Walkerville

Ageing Well Peak Body Program Partner

South Australian Government's
Office for Ageing Well

IDOP Event Sponsors

Kalyra - Principal Partner

COTA Insurance - Supporting Partner

ECH - Supporting Partner

Resthaven - Supporting Partner

Hender Consulting - Event Sponsor

Flinders University's Caring Futures Institute - Event Sponsor

Office for Ageing Well and Seniors Card - Event Sponsor

Program Partners

Adelaide PHN

City of Adelaide

City of Salisbury

Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

Department of Social Services

Office for Ageing Well

Office for Women

Preventive Health SA

The Wyatt Trust

Thank you also to InterContinental Adelaide, Langmeil Wines and Vili's Family Bakery for their support of COTA SA events.