COTA
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

COTA SA Social Impact Report



About COTA SA

COTA SA is the peak body representing the rights, interests and futures of more than 700,000 South Australians aged 50 and over, who together make up more than a third of our population.

In addition to our policy and advocacy, research and engagement work which ensures the voices of older people are influential, COTA SA delivers services, programs and information that connect with more than 100,000 older South Australians each year, helping all South Australians age well.

COTA SA is a proud partner in the COTA National Alliance, alongside independent COTAs in each state and territory and COTA Australia.

Our work

- We listen to the experiences and priorities of older South Australians and deliver evidence-based **advocacy** on issues including cost of living, health, aged care, housing and transport.
- Through **The Plug-in**, our consumer research and engagement consultancy, we help researchers, governments and businesses connect with and better understand older people.
- Our **Strength for Life** program supports older people to build strength, improve fitness and stay connected at more than 100 locations across South Australia.
- Our **Let's Talk Aged Care** team provides support that helps older people access aged care and other supports in the community.
- Our staff and volunteers provide information and support to older South Australians, including at expos, forums and information sessions across the state.
- Our **COTA Visitors** program helps reduce social isolation and loneliness by connecting volunteers with older people living alone or in residential aged care.
- We contribute to **research, reviews and public policy processes,** ensuring the voices of older South Australians inform decisions that affect them.
- We deliver **events** that bring older South Australians together to learn, connect and celebrate ageing.
- Our **communications and media activities** amplify the voices of older South Australians and connect thousands of people with information, opportunities and support.
- Our **members, supporters and partners** help strengthen our impact across the state.

Our community

Through our engagement and advocacy, we know many older people feel unheard and invisible in public and political discourse. We work to change this by amplifying their voices and lived experiences, particularly those of people who are vulnerable or experiencing disadvantage.

We recognise that the experiences of older South Australians can vary across metropolitan, regional and remote communities. Through initiatives such as our Country Listening Posts, we hear directly from older people across the state and use these insights to inform our advocacy, policy positions and submissions.

We are committed to ensuring the voices of vulnerable, marginalised and underrepresented older people, including First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and LGBTI+ communities, are reflected in the decisions that affect their lives.

Measuring our impact

At COTA SA, we are committed to creating a future where ageing is celebrated as a time of possibility, opportunity and influence, and where older people are visible, heard and able to shape the decisions that affect their lives.

This Impact Report reflects our commitment to understanding, measuring and communicating the difference our work makes for older South Australians. While participation measures such as program attendance, event participation and service usage remain important, they only tell part of the story.

What matters most is the impact behind the numbers: whether people feel less isolated, more confident, more connected to their communities, better informed, healthier, or more able to navigate life's changes and challenges.

By measuring impact, we gain a deeper understanding of the outcomes achieved through our work and ensure we remain focused on creating meaningful change. It also strengthens the evidence that underpins our advocacy, policy and engagement work, helping us remain a trusted and independent voice for older South Australians.

How we measured our impact

This report was developed by COTA SA through its team at The Plug-in, our research and engagement consultancy specialising in connecting with and understanding people aged 50+.

The findings are based on data collected across COTA SA's programs, services, advocacy and engagement activities across 2025/26, and are aligned with indicators in our Social Impact Framework. The report is organised around our Ageing Well themes and draws on a range of evidence sources, including impact surveys, participation and administrative data, demographic information, case studies, lived experience insights, and advocacy and policy tracking.

By combining quantitative and qualitative evidence, the report assesses progress against intended outcomes and highlights how COTA SA contributes to positive change for older South Australians.

How to read this report

This report is organised around COTA SA's Ageing Well themes. Each section explores a key area of impact and highlights the outcomes achieved through our programs, services, advocacy and engagement activities.

Information relating to COTA SA's governance, financial performance and compliance can be found in reports published on the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) website.

Executive Summary

COTA SA advances the rights, interests and futures of South Australians as we age. This report shows how our engagement, programs, policy and advocacy are creating meaningful change with and for older South Australians. Grounded in their voices and lived experience, it highlights the outcomes that matter most: being seen, heard and valued; staying healthy and connected; feeling secure; participating with purpose; and navigating life's transitions with confidence.

Older South Australians tell us that ageing well means more than support; it means being respected, included and able to shape the decisions that affect their lives. COTA SA works alongside older people to challenge ageism, amplify lived experience and turn insight into action. Through trusted information, direct engagement and strong advocacy, we have helped secure policy commitments while continuing to push for reforms in health, affordability, life navigation and community support. Across our work, one message is clear: older South Australians are active contributors whose voices matter and whose wellbeing is essential to inclusive, connected communities.

Across every theme, the results show a strong story of impact. The below graphic provides aggregated data of how COTA SA is delivering positive outcomes for older South Australians through our programs. The data presented in this graphic is an average of the indicators across all of our programs.

How COTA SA is performing across all themes

Aggregated data across all programs

- Safety and Security 94%
- Purposeful Life 91%
- Optimal Health 90%
- Positive Ageing Attitude 87%
- Social Connection 83%



Older South Australians feel seen, heard and valued

Older South Australians consistently tell us that feeling seen, heard, and valued is central to ageing well. Yet many continue to experience ageism and feel invisible in everyday life whether in the media, in public conversations, or in the way decisions are made. Ageism remains persistent in our society with more than two in five (41%) older South Australians reporting that they have experienced one or more forms of ageism since turning 50[1]. Creating positive attitudes towards ageing and ensuring older people and their experiences are respected is essential to building inclusive, connected communities where older people feel valued and able to participate fully. Through our advocacy, communications, and community engagement, we work to challenge ageist stereotypes and promote positive, realistic ageing narratives, with the aim of making positive ageing a reality in South Australia.

One way we put this into practice is through COTA SA's monthly eNewsletter, which is distributed to over 12,000 older South Australians. Notably, 77% agree that the content in COTA SA's e-News helps them feel seen as an older person.

We sought feedback from older South Australians about their experiences of receiving COTA SA's communications. They told us that COTA SA provides:

- Accurate information I trust 86%
- Information about issues that matter to me 86%
- Information that is free from stereotypes about older people 87%
- Information that feels relevant to ageing in South Australia 90%
- Information that inspires me 75%
- Events that make me feel positive about ageing 90%

1 State of the Older Nation (SOTON). COTA Australia. 2026.

Optimal health at every age

Optimal health plays a vital role in ageing well. Older South Australians tell us that staying physically active and maintaining good mental health and wellbeing are key to sustaining their quality of life.

For older South Australians, proactive and preventative approaches to health make a meaningful difference and supports them to live well at every age.

COTA SA's Strength for Life program supports South Australians aged 50+ to stay strong, active and connected through tailored, evidence-based exercise programs. Designed specifically for older people, Strength for Life supports both physical and mental wellbeing, while also creating opportunities for social connection in a welcoming and inclusive environment.

Strength for Life participants consistently report positive changes to their health, confidence, and wellbeing:

I feel I am being more proactive to improve or maintain my physical health

95%

I feel an improvement or maintenance of my overall personal wellbeing

88%

Strength for Life offers a tailored program to meet my needs

94%

Many participants describe Strength for Life as "best thing you could ever do," "rewarding," and "good value for money" for older South Australians.

Other key insights, which demonstrate the value of this program to the health of older South Australians include:

"It is mentally rewarding as well, not just getting yourself stronger."

"My upper body strength improved to the extent that I no longer get back pain when I walk with a backpack."

"I started to notice a profound improvement in my balance, strength, and general well-being. I cannot speak highly enough of Strength for Life, and I have recommended it to all of my friends."

"It's a great place to meet people, stay fit and have fun."



CASE STUDY

Susan's journey to strength and connection

When Susan* was forced into early retirement due to ill health, her specialist recommended she join a Strength for Life class. Susan said she felt instantly welcomed into the Strength for Life community and participating in the program has had a significantly positive impact on her health and wellbeing.

"Strength for Life has enabled me to enhance and improve my fitness and regain strength lost through my illness," Susan says.

"The changes in my overall strength and fitness have improved dramatically. My balance was shot when I was experiencing ill health, and I couldn't get down or off the floor, but thanks to Strength for Life, I can do all this now."

Susan says the social connection of the class, as well as its affordability, is important to her. "One of the things that prompted me to attend Strength for Life was its affordability for older people and I also love the comradery of the class; the social interaction is a great part of the program." Susan says.

*Susan is not pictured above

Older people feel secure in their homes and communities

Older South Australians regularly share with us their preference to stay in their own homes, as they age. However, this desire is often met with challenges in navigating a complex aged care system along with a lack of personalised support or information. These challenges are more acute for older people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage or those from diverse backgrounds. Changes across the aged care system have further increased the need for clear, trusted guidance to ensure older people have access to the services intended to support them.

COTA SA's Let's Talk Aged Care and Care Finder programs provide tailored information and direct support to help vulnerable older South Australians navigate and access My Aged Care and related services. While the program supports people to connect with aged care services, its impact extends beyond access - helping people to make informed decision on services available to them.

Older South Australians who engage with COTA SA's Care Finders reported feeling "supported" and "empowered".

Many older South Australians described feeling more confident, reassured, and secure as a result of the support they received from COTA SA Care Finders.

After receiving support from COTA SA Care Finders, older South Australians reported:



"We could not have worked our way through the system without help from [COTA SA Care Finders]. I am now so confident and feel more secure in our everyday living knowing I can access help if needed."

"It was a turning point in me sorting out my mind and knowing what help is available to me."



CASE STUDY

Greg's story of accessing aged care

Greg* lives in a community housing unit and was referred to COTA SA's Care Finders by his housing provider as he was at risk of losing tenancy due to squalor.

Life had become increasingly difficult for Greg. His wife passed away many years ago and with no children and just one sister who lives interstate, he had limited support around him. He was not connected to any health or support services and was struggling to manage his personal care and the upkeep of his home.

COTA SA Care Finder John said he instigated ongoing home visits over many months to gain Greg's trust and build rapport, to start the journey of him getting access to the support services he needs to remain safely housed and connected to the help available in his community.

"Greg initially was suspicious of people he didn't know, and it took considerable time to reassure him, he would not let me in the door at first. It took a lot of time for me to get to know Greg and his background story and slowly, he began to trust me. And this led to him gradually understanding the benefit of services."

John says that while Greg was physically well, it became clear that he had some cognitive decline and difficulty understanding information and managing day to day tasks.

"One of the first steps I took was arranging an industrial clean of his unit. I then talked with Greg about health and aged care services and then with his sister, arranged some health support and assessments."

John said his support of Greg extended over 11 months with around 60 hours of support.

"Greg has very little understanding or recent memory of his supports; however a good Home Care Package provider is visiting every day to support Greg to continue living in his unit, and the risks to his health and wellbeing have been significantly reduced.

"Greg is a lovely man, who simply would not have been able to access care and maintain his independence without our support."

Ageing well through purpose and participation

Living a purposeful life, being able to contribute, share lived experience and have agency in decision making is central to ageing well. It helps older people sustain a sense of identity, fosters connection, and reinforces that their voices and perspectives still matter. However, many older people tell us that finding meaningful opportunities to contribute, where their perspectives are genuinely heard, valued, and acted upon, can be challenging.

COTA SA's consumer research and engagement consultancy The Plug-in provides inclusive and meaningful opportunities for older South Australians to participate in research, and engagement conversations. The Plug-in centres the voices of older people, ensuring their lived experiences are transformed into actionable insights that directly inform policy development, decision-making, and systemic change. These engagements strengthen COTA SA's policy and advocacy work to make life better for older South Australians.

For older South Australians, their participation in our engagement activities feels rewarding. Sharing insights into their experience with The Plug-in, older South Australians said:



Insights shared by The Plug-in community included:

"As we mature some of us enjoy being of service yet there are not too many chances to be useful".

"I learnt a lot. We had the opportunity to reflect and share whilst not allowing anyone to 'hijack' the session. I felt valued and included. I liked that feeling."

"I find the surveys meaningful as they provide useful data & qualitative evidence, e.g. my feedback was quoted in a submission to state government."

"Attending & participating in the 'Ageing Well in Public and Private Life' meeting I felt my opinion was valued & important & appreciated the chance to [participate]".

COTA SA also hosts a number of events throughout the year which create welcoming opportunities for people to participate, share their experiences, learn about ageing well, and connect with others. These events provide spaces for older South Australians to reflect on what ageing well means to them and to contribute their insights in ways that feel relevant, inclusive, and rewarding.

Older South Australians share that the events organised by COTA SA:





Julie, who participates in The Plug-in at a COTA SA event.

CASE STUDY

Having a voice after retirement

For Julie, The Plug-in provides something she missed after retiring from a career in nursing: the opportunity to share her views, learn from others and contribute to issues that matter to older South Australians.

"Once you retire, you don't get to have your opinion with your workmates," Julie explains. "And I find the conversations I have with family are different and not necessarily about my views or opinions."

"I find it really interesting and really encouraging just to realise that I've still got an opinion and it's important."

Over the years, Julie has participated in a variety of Plug-in workshops covering topics such as transport and ageing well at home. She enjoys being part of discussions where everyone is encouraged to contribute.

"I think we all sort of got a common reason why we're there. We're sort of interested in the subject, and we also have our opinions on it."

"Everyone gets a chance to put their opinion. It's no one's wrong or right. It's just what we think."

One transport project particularly resonated with Julie, helping her understand some of the challenges older people face and the support available to them.

"A lot of people just don't know what is available in their area until you have a conversation and hear what information other people have..."

Julie believes opportunities with The Plug-in help ensure older people's experiences are heard and can influence positive change.

"How can you change anything unless you've been able to voice an opinion?"

Reflecting on her involvement, Julie says she continues to value every opportunity to participate.

"It's been quite a few years now, and it's been different things all the time. It's not the same sort of subject or conversations. It's been really good".

"I thoroughly enjoy my visits from [volunteer], thank you for giving me this gift at my time of life"

Creating meaningful connections to support Ageing Well

Feeling part of a community, having valuable friendships, and feeling that you belong can make a real difference to ageing well for South Australians aged 50+. For many older South Australians their local community is an important source of support, identity, and connection. However, staying socially connected is not always easy as we age. Many older people face barriers such as mobility limitations, disability, cultural or language isolation, sensory impairment and reduced social networks. Without support, social isolation can significantly impact wellbeing, confidence, and mental health.

COTA SA's volunteer visitors program, a part of the Australian Government's Aged Care Visitor Scheme, responds to this need by fostering genuine, ongoing friendships between trained volunteers and older South Australians. Through regular visits, the program supports people to feel connected, supported and less alone.

On average, 83% of older South Australians who have engaged with COTA SA's programs reported feeling more socially connected with other older people through their engagements across all of COTA SA's program.

COTA Visitors Program makes a significant impact on older people, they tell us that:

- They feel more socially connected 97%
- They feel more confident speaking with others 87%
- They have something to look forward to in life 87%
- They engage more regularly in conversation 80%

"I used to isolate myself. [visits from my volunteer] has led to speaking more regularly with others. She doesn't let me down and we relate very well".

"I look forward to her [volunteer] visits; we can talk about anything. She has made life better for me"

COTA SA Volunteer Visitors shared that, since becoming a COTA SA volunteer:

- I feel like I have a greater connection to my community 68%
- I feel like I am making a difference to older South Australians 100%
- I have a greater understanding of issues relating to older people in South Australia 84%



Phil and his COTA Visitors volunteer Brian on one of their visits.

CASE STUDY

The impact of connection

Every Wednesday, Brian visits Phil at a residential aged care facility in Adelaide's eastern suburbs, as part of the COTA Visitors program. What began three years ago as a volunteer visit through COTA SA has grown into a friendship built on trust, laughter and shared stories.

What led Brian to COTA Visitors was an understanding of how much a simple visit could mean to someone who is feeling alone and isolated.

"I decided to become a COTA volunteer as I have no family and I thought that, when I am in that situation I would appreciate someone to visit me from time to time," Brian explains.

Through the program, the two men have formed a special bond through sharing memories and stories, along with a special weekly chocolate tradition.

"Phil has had an interesting life and career working for Ansett Airlines. He loves to reminisce about that time," Brian explains

"I bought a box of chocolates when I first visited, and he told me to hide them in his wardrobe draw so that each time I visit, I get the chocolates out and we have one each. He refuses to share them with anyone else!"

Brian says his friendship with Phil has had a profound impact on both their lives. "The impact of my visits is immense, we have many laughs and in-depth conversations. He has become a good friend."

Policy and advocacy: turning older people's voices into change

"Strong advocacy will be very important. Keep them on their toes, as the opposition may not be able to. Older voters are in big numbers."

At its heart, advocacy is about influence and inclusion. It gives older South Australians opportunities to shape the decisions that affect them and helps build a fairer, more inclusive state—one where all of us have a better chance to live well as we age.

COTA SA's policy and advocacy work helps close that gap between the needs and experiences of older people and the services and systems that support them. We listen to older South Australians, bring their experiences to the attention of decision-makers, and advocate for practical changes that make everyday life better.

Through surveys, conversations, workshops and community engagement, we hear what matters most: being able to afford essentials, access healthcare, find a secure home, get around and stay connected. We also hear from people whose experiences are too often overlooked, including older people in regional communities and those facing financial hardship, discrimination or barriers to services.

COTA SA brings these insights together with research and policy expertise to develop solutions. We make submissions, meet with government and other stakeholders, contribute to public debate and build partnerships that help turn community priorities into action.

The impact of this work reaches beyond any individual service or program. A fairer concession, a more accessible transport option or a service designed around older people's needs can improve life for thousands of South Australians. Challenging ageism helps create communities that recognise older people's contributions and support their continued participation.

Navigating life's transitions with tailored support: an unmet need

As we age, life transitions such as retirement, changes in health, caring responsibilities, loss, housing transitions, and increasing cost of living pressures can be difficult to navigate. COTA SA knows there is a clear gap in the support available to older people who are trying to plan, make informed choices and navigate change before they reach crisis point. COTA SA is advocating for the establishment of a Life Navigation Service to respond to this need by providing trusted, tailored guidance that helps people understand their options, connect with the right services and take practical next steps with confidence and dignity. COTA SA does not currently have any program or services to help older South Australians to navigate major life changes. This is a priority for us now to move ahead from advocacy to actual service delivery for older South Australians.

"COTA SA should continue lobbying the government [regarding] seniors to ensure that the government does spend time and funds on the aging population."

COTA SOUTH AUSTRALIA

COTA SA has a Policy Council, a group of 22 individuals who meet five times a year to help to pressure test COTA SA's policy and advocacy work, ensuring that it is representative and well targeted.

COTA SA enjoys a productive relationship with government and is able to share what we hear from older people in regular meeting with relevant ministers and other parliamentarians. We had 16 such meetings in 2025-2026.

COTA SA's 2026 State Election platform included five priority areas, including brain health and dementia, cost-of-living navigation for those 50+, free ambulance for full age pensioners, reform of the PATS and streamlined concessions, including expanded Seniors Card eligibility. We were pleased that the government responded to three of these, with the work hours limits dropped from Seniors Card, broader access to PATS, and supports to informal carers of people living with dementia.



COTA SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Thank you

We thank the older South Australians whose experiences and insights help shape our work and inform this report. Your voices, perspectives, and lived experiences continue to guide and strengthen our policy, advocacy, and programs.

We are also deeply grateful to our partners and funders, whose support enables COTA SA to deliver programs, services and advocacy that improve the lives of older South Australians.

Get involved

Our work is powered by more than 100 volunteers and thousands of members who stand alongside us. For more information on volunteering with COTA SA, and becoming a free member, visit cotasa.org.au or phone us on 8232 0422.

Our Strength for Life program is delivered at more than 100 partners across the state. To see all of our providers and find a session near you, visit strengthforlife.com.au.

Learn more about the work of our specialist research and engagement consultancy The Plug-in by visiting www.theplugin.com.au.

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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.

Adrian Skull
President

Alexandrea Cannon OAM
Deputy President
Chair Governance & Risk Committee

John Lipkiewicz
Chair Finance and Audit Committee

Michelle Bentley
Chair Policy Council

Elaine Delgado

Mike Dixon

Dominic Stefanson

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

Ageing Well Peak Body Program Partner

South Australian Government's Office for Ageing Well

Program Partners

Adelaide PHN

City of Adelaide

City of Salisbury

Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

Office for Ageing Well

Preventive Health SA

COTA SA Supporters

Beyond Bank

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

Kalyra Communities

Life Care

Port Augusta City Council

Resthaven

St Basil's Homes (SA)

Town of Walkerville