



Ageing Fabulously: a Report from the Sydney World Pride Human Rights Conference

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Australia has been at the forefront of health and wellbeing measures for LGBTI people internationally. In 2012 Australia was the first country in the world to develop an LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care Strategy that outlined what proactive steps the government would take to reduce the stigma and discrimination faced by older LGBTI people. Building on this work, at the conference Australia's Health Minister Mark Butler and Assistant Minister Ged Kearney, announced a 10 year national LGBTIQ+ health plan and a \$26m investment into LGBTIQ+ health research. (LGBTIQ+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Allies.)

In Sydney from 1-3 March 2023, nearly 2,000 people from across the globe congregated in the International Convention Centre, Darling Harbour, Sydney. Over 60 leaders of the LGBTI community along with government ministers, ambassadors and array

of celebrities spoke of inspirational actions they were undertaking.

It was the largest LGBTIQIA+ Human Rights Conference ever to be held in the southern hemisphere. It was an incredible opportunity to hear from and exchange ideas with advocates around the world. Most were volunteers, working at the grassroots with their local communities. It was a sobering reminder that 1 in 4 people live in countries that still criminalise homosexuality.

The pre-conference caucus of older people discussed the need to celebrate and embrace older LGBTI people within the community. The caucus identified a number of issues important to older attendees at the conference:

- Older people wanted respect, community and a place for themselves, not just services delivered to them. While some members might 'grieve their youth', there was a need to show

respect for older people and portray positive images of older people within the community.

- They wanted a meaningful opportunity to participate in the community both amongst themselves and with intergenerational opportunities. There was a recognition that disproportionate amount of LGBTI work relies on volunteers. Older people wanted to see pathways that brought them into a community that is not built around service delivery for older people.
- There was an acknowledgement that funding for non-service activities to support an ongoing space for older LGBTI people was limited. Support for older people should be more than just aged care services.
- Older LGBTI people want to be part of the narrative in a community that the media often

portrays as predominately youth focused. They want to be heard and seen in community and other media.

- Attendees wanted respect for older people for the work they did to create the freedoms that younger LGBTI members of the community enjoy today. They wanted younger people to understand how quickly their rights could be taken away and the importance of defending them.
- Some older LGBTI people might have been rejected from their family and this meant in later life they had few people to support them. LGBTI community should consider how to support social networks and the sense of a community of support for older people.
- In the area of online activities there was a need for safe spaces to learn online skills and safety. Most funding to support this was mainstream meaning that tools for some of the apps and websites LGBTI people frequent were often not included.
- For some older LGBTI people access to affordable housing in later life was challenging. Finding ways to connect older housemates should be a priority for services to address the growing risk of homelessness.

COTA Australia's Deputy CEO Corey Irlam presented on a panel discussing the challenges globally and nationally faced by older LGBTI people. The panel discussed the need for better data collection to understand the needs of older LGBTI people. This requires organisations to disclose why they are collecting data and how it will be protected and or kept anonymously in order to build the trust that will enable people to disclose their identities. Corey presented on some of the messages from the pre-conference caucus and challenged organisations supporting LGBTI people to think about what they can do to actively invite people to their events.

COTA SA's Rainbow Hub Project Officer Jackie Wurm spoke of the work of the Rainbow Hub in the Presenters Corner held over the lunch. Jackie talked about the Rainbow Horizons project working with older LGBTI people in an intergenerational project to improve end-of-life care and planning. The project has co-designed and trialled an LGBTI compassionate community model working with community and service providers such as funeral businesses and palliative care services. This model has been developed to be replicated in future by other organisations.

In South Australia, COTA runs the state wide LGBTI Community Visitors Scheme. The visitors scheme recruit volunteers to bring conversation,

news, new interest, friendship, and a special connection through a shared language, life experience or cultural understanding, for older people who are at risk of social isolation or loneliness. There is an LGBTI visitors scheme in every state and territory. Jackie's Victorian counterpart, Meredith Butler – Out and About Program Manager presented on the success of the visitor's scheme.

Many COTAs across the country work directly with older LGBTIQIA+ people on a range of programs. In Tasmania COTA partnered with Working It Out as part of the Aged Care Navigators trial. In Victoria through a partnership with Transgender Victoria COTA developed 'Safeguarding the End of the Rainbow resource' on planning for end of life choices.

The Sydney Worldpride human rights conference provided an opportunity to reflect on the good work COTA does working with diverse groups of older people. It also provided inspiration for what else we can do to ensure the voices of all older people are included and heard.

A number of the keynote speeches from the conference are available on ABC iView. Search for "Sydney Worldpride Human Rights Conference" or visit:

<https://iview.abc.net.au/show/sydney-worldpride-human-rights-conference>

