

# Ageing Plan 2018-2022

## Discussion Paper



**Involved Connected Valued**

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# 1. Introduction

Australia's population is ageing. This is a result of increased life expectancy, declining birth rates and the baby boomer generation reaching 65. These factors have contributed to an increase in the number and proportion of people aged 65 years and over; a trend that is predicted to increase more rapidly over the next decade.

In 2016 there were 35,934 people aged 65 and over living in Wollongong; this is expected to increase by 38.5% by 2036 (i.d Community 2016). At that point one in five people living in the Wollongong Local Government Area will be aged 65 and over. As our population ages the demand on health, housing, transport and aged care services will continue to increase.

This discussion paper provides the background and context for the consultation and development of Wollongong City Council's Ageing Plan 2018-2022. The paper considers current Government responses to population ageing and examines the new and emerging issues experienced by our older population. It identifies key priority groups and Council's current approach to supporting the needs of our older population.

## 2. Background and Policy Context

Populations around the world are rapidly ageing. The opportunities and challenges presented by population ageing require a coordinated response from multiple sectors and all levels of government. The consistent message in these policy documents is the importance of shifting our understanding of ageing to recognise diversity and respond to underlying inequalities.

### International

Adopted by the World Health Organisation in 2015, the *World Report on Ageing and Health* predicts that ageing populations will create significant strain on health systems, workforces and national budgets. As a response to these challenges the report recommends significant changes in policies, stating that expenditure is an investment which will enable the ability and well-being of older people and their contribution to the community. The report outlines the following areas as essential to improving older peoples' experience of ageing:

- Financial, housing and personal security
- Environments that foster growth, learning and decision making

- Infrastructure and support services that assist older people in remaining mobile
- Opportunities to foster social connections and maintain healthy relationships
- Opportunities to contribute to the community.

The report states that embedding the idea of healthy ageing in all levels of government policy will be crucial. Strategies and action plans at national, state and local levels should guide an inter-sectoral response. This response will provide opportunities for both individuals and the greater society.

## **Australian**

The Australian Government Productivity Commission published an inquiry report, *Caring for Older Australians*, in 2011. This report recommended that fundamental reform of the aged care system would be necessary for Australia to be able to support its ageing population into the future.

In response to the increase of the older population, the Australian Government has made significant changes to the aged care sector. In 2012 the Australian Government assumed primary responsibility for administering aged care services to people aged 65 and over, and Indigenous Australians aged 50 and over.

The reform to the aged care sector has a strong focus on investing in home-based care packages that support older people to remain in their home for longer. 'My Aged Care' is underpinned by a consumer-directed care model that allows older people to choose how their services are provided and by whom. This program also provides targeted services to groups requiring additional support. These groups include Indigenous communities, Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) communities, and the homeless. This reform is being rolled out over 10 years with the aim of developing an aged care sector that is flexible in responding to a diverse range of consumers' needs, preferences and financial circumstances (Aged Care Sector Committee 2016).

## **New South Wales**

The NSW Government is responsible for providing access to Government services and facilities, including transport, health care, social housing and police services. The NSW Government has continued its commitment to improving older people's experience of ageing with the release of their second NSW Ageing Strategy in 2016.

The *NSW Ageing Strategy 2016-2020* (Family and Community Services 2016) is described as a whole of government and whole of community strategy. It focuses on engaging the most appropriate partners across State Government, the private and not-for-profit sectors, Local Government and the broader community to deliver its outcomes.

The Strategy identifies the following priority areas for action:

- Health and wellbeing
- Working and retiring
- Housing choices
- Getting around
- Inclusive communities.

The Strategy recognises that the experience of ageing can differ greatly depending on the circumstances of the individual. It considers and responds to the needs of older people from diverse communities such as:

- Indigenous
- LGBTI
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)
- Carers
- People living with a disability
- People living with dementia or chronic disease
- People who live in remote or rural areas.

## **Local Government**

Local councils have traditionally provided a range of programs and direct services to meet the needs of their older residents. Strong local knowledge of their communities means that Local Governments are well placed to develop and implement initiatives that support an environment in which older people are enabled to participate in their communities in a physical, social and economic capacity.

Local Government NSW (2012) has published *The Integrated Age-Friendly Toolkit*. It has been informed by all NSW local government areas and is intended to assist councils in identifying ageing population needs in the development of their plans or policies. The Toolkit outlines a number of priority actions which are relevant to councils when planning for ageing populations, and advises that the creation of an age friendly community should involve council staff from multiple disciplines.

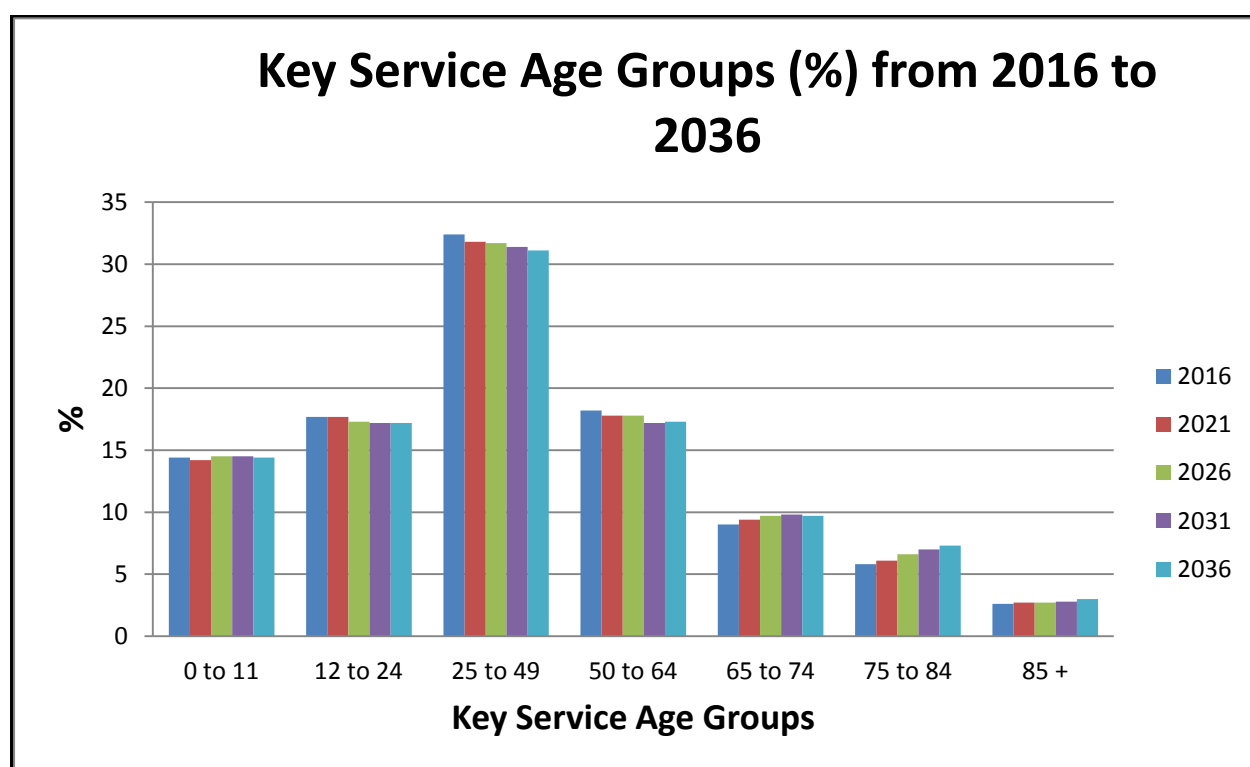
## Wollongong

In 2016 there were 203,632 people living in the Wollongong Local Government Area (LGA) (.id Community 2017). Of these, 17.7% were aged 65 years and over. This is higher than the NSW average of 16.2% (ABS Census Data 2016).

Between 2016 and 2036 the population aged 65 years and over is forecast to increase by 38.5%. By 2036 it is estimated that nearly 1 in 5 people (19.9%) will be over the age of 65 (.id Forecast 2017).

During the period 2016 to 2036 the fastest growing age cohort will be people aged 75 to 84; this cohort will experience an increase of 51%. The number of people aged 85 and over is expected to increase by 39.2% during the same period. In 2036 the 75 to 84 and 85 and over age groups will make up 7.3% and 3.0% of the LGA population respectively (.id Forecast 2017).

Table 1: Population Change (%) of Key Service Groups from 2016 to 2036



Source: .id Forecast 2015 *Population and household forecast 2016 to 2036*.

A number of business, government and community organisations from across the Illawarra region have come together to form the Age-Friendly Illawarra Alliance (AFIA). The Alliance aims to create opportunities for older people so they can lead active and engaged lives and be supported to positively contribute to their communities across the Illawarra. The AFIA (2017) has recently published the *Age Friendly*



*Illawarra Alliance Strategy 2017-2019* which outlines their strategic approach in achieving this aim.

## **Wollongong City Council**

Wollongong City Council is in a strong position to respond to population ageing as it has knowledge and understanding of local community needs, provides services to older people, and has the ability to regulate local development. Council has committed to supporting its older population through its first *Wollongong Positive Ageing Plan 2013-2017* (Wollongong City Council 2013) which is nearing completion. The opportunities and challenges that come with an ageing population are still relevant to Wollongong.

Council's *Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2016-2020* (Wollongong City Council 2016) sets out a series of strategies and actions to support people with disability in gaining greater access to information, services and facilities. The delivery of the strategies and actions in this Plan will play a role in supporting an ageing population.

### **3. Key Challenges and Opportunities for Older People**

Older age should provide people with the opportunities to live healthy, positive and productive lives where they are supported to maintain social connections and continue to participate in community life. It is important that ageing policy and plans effectively respond to the challenges faced by older people and embrace opportunities that will improve people's experience of ageing. The information below outlines contemporary challenges and opportunities experienced by older people.

#### **Technology**

Digital technology plays a significant role in connecting people to services such as banking, shopping and job applications. Technology also provides a way of accessing information about health, education and community activities. Being able to access the internet helps people make informed choices about services, maintain connections, and gain support to remain independent.

Half of all Australians aged 65 and over do not have access to the internet. Whilst local data isn't available it can be assumed that this statistic is a close reflection of the experience of older people living in the Wollongong LGA.

Older people want information that is easily accessible and up to date. However as more business and government services go online, older people who are not computer literate are at risk of being left behind. This makes them vulnerable to disadvantage.

National Seniors Australia (2011) produced a report titled *Older Australians and the Internet* which outlines initiatives that support older people to become confident and competent users of technology.

Such initiatives include:

- One-on-one training
- Free access to internet in public spaces
- Web page designs which are easy to navigate.

## **Social Isolation and Participation**

In 2015 Aged and Community Services Australia produced an Issues Paper, *Social Isolation and Loneliness Amongst Older Australians*, which explains the impact social isolation can have on an older person's health and well-being. The risk of social isolation can increase with age due to factors such as living alone, changes in social networks, physical and mental health problems and life events such as loss of a partner.

Supporting older people to remain involved in the development of their communities and participate in meaningful activities can reduce the risk of individuals experiencing social isolation.

Such meaningful activities should:

- Promote healthy lifestyles
- Celebrate life experiences
- Provide opportunities to contribute to the community by volunteering.

The participation of older people in the community can be further supported by the availability of communal or meeting spaces, both indoors and outdoors, which offer accessible toilets and places to rest. These places should be connected to the rest of the community by safe and reliable transport, footpaths and pedestrian crossings.

## **Access to Services**

Affordable services that are reliable and easily accessed are vital if older people are to stay active and participate in their communities. In July 2013 the Commonwealth Government launched 'My Aged Care' with the aim of developing an information portal to make it easier for older people to have their needs assessed and to find services. In July 2015 the



Commonwealth Government introduced the Consumer Directed Care model to give consumers greater flexibility and choice about how their services are delivered.

By 2020 it is expected that the number of people aged 85 years and over will quadruple, placing greater demand and pressure on home and community care, health services, rehabilitation services and palliative care. In order to meet increasing demand, governments, service providers and communities will need to work in collaboration to support older people to remain in their communities (Department of Health 2016).

## **Dementia**

Dementia is not a natural part of ageing, however, the greatest risk factor to people is growing older. One of the expected consequences of an ageing population in Australia is an increase in the number of people living with dementia over time. Dementia was recognised as a national health priority in 2012 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015). In 2017 there were 1772 people living with Dementia in the Wollongong LGA and this is expected to continue to increase (Alzheimer's Australia NSW 2017).

In response to the increase of people living with dementia, the *National Framework for Action on Dementia 2015-2019* (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015) was adopted by the Australian Government Department of Health. This framework aims to improve the quality of life for those living with dementia and their carers. It identifies a number of strategies and actions including:

- Develop dementia-friendly communities where all aspects of the communities' built environment and approaches are dementia-friendly, inclusive, promote respect and acceptance and enable participation.
- Support and resource community-based programs and initiatives to promote social engagement and develop dementia-friendly environments.
- Develop dementia-friendly communities and workplaces that support people living with dementia to live with meaning, purpose and value.

These strategies and actions could inform planning at a local level.

## **Diversity**

It is important to recognise that older people are as diverse as the rest of the community.

An individual's experience of ageing can be influenced by factors such as gender, age, cultural background, sexuality, health, mobility, socioeconomic status, and where a person lives. Through the *National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Ageing and Aged Care Strategy* (Department of Health and Ageing 2012) and *NSW Ageing Strategy* (Department of Family and Community Services 2016) the Federal and NSW Governments have recognised that these differences have a direct impact on the challenges and opportunities that individuals face, and as a result have endeavoured to capture this diversity in their consultation processes.

## **Employment**

The *NSW Ageing Strategy 2016-2020* (Department of Family and Community Services 2016) identifies work and retiring as a priority area. Paid work is important for wellbeing and maintaining the independence and financial security of older people. However older workers often experience discrimination on the basis of age. Workplaces can challenge ageism and discrimination by adopting strategies that help older workers to remain in the workforce longer, such as access to re-training programs and flexible work practices which support people to transition to retirement. Programs that support the increasing number of older workers who juggle work and caring commitments could also help people remain in the workforce longer.

## **Volunteering**

Older people possess a wealth of knowledge and skills that often go unrecognised and underutilised. Volunteering can provide an opportunity for older people to use their expertise to give back and remain involved in community life. It provides many benefits for older people as well as the broader community. At an individual level volunteering can result in increased self-esteem and wellbeing, improved social connections and provide an opportunity to remain physically active. The time given by volunteering is a valuable resource for the broader community that can build social capital and expand the community's capacity.

The *NSW Volunteering Strategy 2016-2020* (Department of Family and Community Services 2016) recognises the importance of making better use of new technology to link volunteers with organisations that may need support. It also outlines actions for supporting people to explore volunteering opportunities in their local communities.

## **Carers**

While caring for someone can be rewarding it can pose many challenges. Many carers experience declining health, difficulties remaining in the workforce, financial hardship and social isolation because they are not adequately recognised and supported.

The valuable and important contribution carers make to our community, saves the Government billions of dollars each year (National Seniors Australia, 2015). The *NSW Carers Strategy 2014-2019* (Department of Family and Community Services 2014) aims to raise awareness and recognition of the challenges carers face, and to improve their position as a carer in NSW.

## **4. Wollongong Positive Ageing Plan 2013-2017**

Council recognises it has a key role in proactively responding to the opportunities and challenges that come with an ageing population, and has shown its commitment through its *Wollongong Positive Ageing Plan 2013-2017* (Wollongong City Council 2013).

This Plan has guided Council in the delivery of services and programs to meet the needs of our older people.

As a result of the community consultation process five focus areas were identified for the *Wollongong Positive Ageing Plan 2013-2017*:

- Focus 1: Liveable and Safe Built Environment
- Focus 2: Wellbeing, Social Inclusion and Recreational Activities
- Focus 3: Access to Support Services
- Focus 4: Accessible Transport System
- Focus 5: Volunteering Opportunities and Access to Work.

59 strategies were included in the *Wollongong Positive Ageing Plan 2013-2017* with over 96% of the strategies being actioned. Many of the strategies are ongoing and will continue to be delivered into the future. Several of these are reflected in the next section of this paper.

## **5. Council Services Supporting our Older Population**

### **Community Transport & Social Support**

The Community Transport: Wollongong-Shellharbour program, funded by Transport for NSW, provides affordable transport options to eligible older people and those who are transport disadvantaged. The service

provides a taxi voucher program as well as individual and group transport which is supported by an extensive team of volunteers. These programs currently provide service to approximately 1300 people.

Council provides Social Support Services to eligible older residents. These support services provide an opportunity for older people to engage in social activities and outings. Social Support programs currently support over 200 local residents and include programs such as individual support, flexible respite and support for people living with dementia and their carers, centre-based day groups, and a Men's Shed.

## **Libraries**

Council's seven libraries have approximately 82,700 members, of which 13.7% are aged 65 and over. The libraries deliver a range of programs to support older people such as the Home Library Service and Tech Savvy classes. The Home Library Service delivers books to approximately 275 people who are housebound. Tech Savvy classes provide participants with the basic skills needed to operate a computer or personal device, access the internet and social media, as well as cyber safety.

## **Beaton Park and Lakeside Leisure Centres**

Council operates two leisure centres that offer a variety of facilities for members. Facilities include pools, tennis courts, squash courts, athletics fields, gym equipment and group exercise classes. The Centres also offer 15 senior-specific programs per week, as well as membership concession rates for people aged 65 and over.

Across the two Centres there is a strong base of members aged 65 and over. At Beaton Park Leisure Centre 43% and at Lakeside 25% of the membership base is aged 65 and over.

## **Volunteering**

Council currently runs a number of programs which rely on the valuable contribution of volunteers. These programs provide many older people the opportunity to use their skills and knowledge to give back to the community. These programs include:

- Community Transport - Volunteer drivers provide both group and individual transport for medical appointments, shopping visits and group outings.
- Bushcare - Council bush regenerators and volunteers work to conserve and restore valuable natural areas of community land.

The program currently has a volunteer base of 300 people, of which 75% are over 60 years of age.

- Home Library Service – The service provides books to people who are housebound. The service runs with the support of 28 volunteers, 24 of whom are retired or semi-retired.
- Volunteering Illawarra – This service links many people aged 65 and over with various volunteering opportunities.
- Friends of the Library – There are over 300 Friends of the Library, of which many are aged 65 and over. The Friends provide support to the libraries and its collections through fundraising and sponsorship of community events.
- Friends of the Wollongong Art Gallery – The Friends of the Gallery provide support to the Gallery and its collections through fundraising and sponsorship of the annual Artist in Residence Program. There are 286 friends, of which approximately 70% are aged 60 and over.
- Friends of the Wollongong Botanic Garden – There are 190 Friends of the Botanic Garden, of which approximately 70% are aged 65 and over. They volunteer their time towards a number of activities at the Garden, from guided walks and propagation to fundraising and social activities.

## **Community Development – Aged and Disability**

Council employs a Community Development Worker, partly funded by the Australian Government. The position provides information and advice to other Council business units on planning, policy and service delivery matters affecting older residents, as well as providing information and referral to the community. The position undertakes sector support and community development projects which promote and respond to the needs and aspirations of our City's older residents.

## **Aged and Disability Directory**

Council produces an 'Aged and Disability Directory' which is available in hard copy and online. The directory contains information and contact details for services which provide support to older people, people with disabilities and their carers. The most recent version of this directory was produced in 2015.

## **Seniors Festival**

Council celebrates the contribution of Wollongong's older community through the annual Seniors Festival. Council convenes a Seniors

Festival Committee to provide advice regarding the festival's program of events. These events are designed to recognise the contribution of our older community and showcase their diverse culture and interests. In 2017 the 10 day program contained 87 activities and events, with most attracting capacity audiences or participants.

## **Community Centres and Halls**

Across Wollongong LGA there are many community centres and halls, including:

- 3 District Community Centres
- 5 Local Community Centres
- 24 Community-Managed Centres.

These centres host a range of activities, services and programs that serve a broad range of community needs. Meeting rooms and halls within these centres are available for hire. These spaces are well used by the older community as they provide a place to meet, gather and offer range of activities.

## **Botanic Garden**

The Friends of Wollongong Botanic Garden offer 45-minute garden tours in their electronic buggy on a weekly basis. In addition to the tours the Garden has two mobility scooters available for hire free of charge every weekday. Both the guided tours and the mobility scooters are well utilised by older visitors.

## **6. Conclusion**

As Australia's older generation continues to grow it is important to ensure that the opportunities and challenges associated with population ageing are effectively planned for. The Australian and NSW Governments are currently undertaking a number of initiatives to improve people's experience of ageing.

Wollongong City Council has a strong knowledge of its community and has a key role to play in proactively responding to our ageing population at a local level. The delivery of the *Wollongong Positive Ageing Plan 2013-2017* (Wollongong City Council 2013) has guided Council and the community in its response.

The Development of the *Ageing Plan 2018-2022* will allow Council to identify and focus on the new and emerging issues for older people in our community, and provide a framework in which to continue to respond to population ageing in the Wollongong LGA. The information in this

paper, together with the results of the consultation process, will be used to set priorities and actions for Council's next Ageing Plan.



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