



# WA Seniors Strategy 2023-2033

## Consultation: draft vision, pillars and key focus areas

### Overview

Seniors in Western Australia (WA) are valued members of our community. Their wealth of experience, wisdom and contribution to the community must be celebrated.

The WA Seniors Strategy will acknowledge all seniors in our state including seniors from marginalised communities and seniors who are:

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander aged 55 years and over
- from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and/or asexual (LGBTQIA+)
- living with disability, chronic illness, mental health issues and/or physical and/or cognitive impairment
- carers
- veterans
- living in rural and remote areas.

The Strategy will set a clear path forward for how the WA Government will support seniors over the next ten years. The Strategy itself is made up of:

- **A vision** which provides a shared goal or aspiration for WA seniors, which is the ultimate aspiration guiding the Strategy and its delivery.
- **Four pillars for change** which outline the most important features of a good life for seniors, reflecting the World Health Organization (WHO) Age-Friendly Cities Framework.
- **14 key focus areas**, which recognise known gaps experienced by seniors in WA, as highlighted by seniors throughout our consultations and by trends in other jurisdictions.

Two detailed, five-year action plans will be developed to translate the WA Seniors Strategy into tangible initiatives to be achieved during its lifetime. Through these action plans, opportunities for alignment and collaboration across Government will be further identified to bring together activity across sectors. Collaborative implementation and shared responsibility will be critical enablers of the Strategy.

To ensure that we deliver on our ambition, the Strategy will be underpinned by a monitoring and evaluation plan with a clear outcomes framework that will enable us to track and evaluate our progress.

## Our vision

The Strategy represents the WA Government's commitment to all seniors in WA. It will be informed by – and will focus on – the views and experiences of WA seniors and provides a shared aspiration for how the WA Government and our communities more broadly will enable seniors in WA to live their best lives.

The Strategy is anchored in a vision for all seniors in WA:

**To ensure Western Australian seniors are happy, culturally safe and supported to thrive, engage, and participate in inclusive age-friendly communities which value their contributions.**

This vision will benefit everyone in our state. It paves the way for more inclusive and engaging communities, where everyone can participate and contribute in a meaningful way regardless of age or ability. It recognises and celebrates the diversity of our seniors, and their valuable contributions to the community.

Achieving this vision will require a whole-of-community approach that considers what seniors need to thrive, and how we create, design, and deliver initiatives that meet their needs.

## Pillars for change and key focus areas

Extensive engagement with seniors, their families and carers, service providers and representative organisations, has told us what seniors consider the most important features of a good life for them. We have synthesised this into four categories, or 'pillars', which reflect to the WHO Age-Friendly Cities Framework. These pillars form the organising framework for the Strategy and will guide us as we strive to support better outcomes for our seniors:

1. Thriving physically and mentally
2. Safe and friendly communities
3. Staying connected and engaged
4. Having a voice that's heard

Each pillar reflects the elements of the WHO Age-Friendly Cities framework and includes several key focus areas (14 in total). Each key focus area recognises gaps and opportunities for change experienced by seniors in WA, as highlighted both through our consultations for the Strategy and the review of evidence that has further informed it.

Each Strategy pillar and key focus area is described in more detail below.

## Thriving physically and mentally

Seniors told us that physical and mental health and wellbeing is central to their happiness. That means having access to the right supports to ensure overall health and wellbeing, including appropriate, affordable and locally available housing and healthcare.

Within the thriving physically and mentally pillar, three key focus areas will inform how the WA Government can better support and enable our seniors. These are shown in Table 1 below and are described across the following pages. These are shown in Table 1 below and are described across the following pages.

**Table 1 | Thriving physically and mentally**

Pillar	Key Focus Areas	Alignment with WHO age-friendly cities domains
Thriving physically and mentally	Affordable and appropriate housing Increased support for ageing at home Available and accessible health care, informed by individual choice	Community and Healthcare Housing

### Affordable and appropriate housing

Safe, secure, affordable and reliable housing is a basic human right. Having a choice of location and type of housing helps to support wellbeing. However, some older people need to relocate to receive the support they need or find themselves at risk of homelessness because appropriate housing is not available where they are.

Through consultations for the Strategy, stakeholders highlighted the importance of access to affordable and diverse housing options which met the needs of the individual. Gaps were particularly evident for seniors living in regional and remote parts of the state. Fourteen per cent of WA seniors live in regional and remote areas, and this number is expected to continue to grow.<sup>1</sup> It is essential that we focus on ensuring seniors have access to appropriate and affordable housing, regardless of where they live, and can be close to their families and support networks.

Through the consultations, we heard of the unique challenges in securing and maintain housing faced by women who are seniors. Women over the age of 55 have been identified as one of the fastest growing cohorts of people experiencing homelessness.<sup>2</sup>

We also know that overcrowding is a considerable issue, particularly for some Aboriginal households.<sup>3</sup> Seniors we spoke to echoed this, reminding us that overcrowding continues

<sup>1</sup> WA Country Health Service (2022) [Health Strategy for Older People 2022-27](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Poverty and Homelessness – The Reality For Too Many Older Women](#) (Streetsmart, July 13, 2021)

<sup>3</sup> Commissioner for Children and Young People (2014). [The State of Western Australia's Children and Young People Edition Two.](#)

to be a concern for Aboriginal households in WA, which has a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of older Aboriginal people.

### **Increased support for ageing at home**

Many seniors want to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. Over 80 per cent of seniors in Australia own their own home and want the agency and opportunity to age with choice at home.<sup>4</sup>

Through consultations on the Strategy, we heard that having access to services which allow seniors to manage their health and personal care at home helps them to age well in their own home and community. For some seniors, these services are not always available. Older people are better supported where they can adjust their homes to enable them to age safely and comfortably in their current space, and have ready access to support services.

Support for carers, including accessible and flexible respite care, was also highlighted as a key priority for WA seniors. Around two in five Australian seniors report needing assistance as they aged, with much of this care and support provided by family members, friends, or neighbours.<sup>5</sup>

### **Available and accessible health care, informed by individual choice**

Having local, easily accessible and affordable health services is fundamentally important for seniors.<sup>6</sup> Older people need good access to all health care options, and want to have choices around the services they use.

Health care that is accessible, affordable and respectful of seniors' needs helps people to live a good life as they age. However, for some older people access to timely and affordable healthcare was an issue. Seniors in regional and remote areas were concerned about the lower levels of access for specialists and allied health professionals.

Some Aboriginal older people talked about their worries in accessing culturally appropriate and culturally safe healthcare services. Aboriginal people felt they would like to see more aged care services delivered by Aboriginal organisations and by Aboriginal staff. All seniors must be confident that their cultural needs will be respected and addressed at all times, including in healthcare settings.

Seniors from CaLD backgrounds also expressed the need for culturally appropriate and culturally safe services provided in their own language. They also wanted to have translated information available. Seniors from CaLD backgrounds believe that aged care provided in small, homely establishments, rather than hospital style institutions, would better suit their needs.

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020) [Housing Occupancy and Costs](#)

<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) [Aged care services](#). PC Report on Government Services.

<sup>6</sup> World Health Organization (2007). [Global age-friendly cities: a guide](#), p67

Similarly, older people who identify as LGBTQIA+ wanted to have access to aged care and health care that was informed and non-judgemental and respected their LGBTQIA+ identity, culture, and community.

The unique nature of Australian Defence Force (ADF) service can enhance a person’s health and wellbeing, a phenomenon known as the ‘healthy soldier effect’. However, ADF service increases the likelihood of exposure to trauma. These experiences mean that some seniors who are ex-serving ADF members may encounter challenges in everyday living above those of the general Australian population, especially those who discharge involuntarily. Access to accessible and affordable health services, informed by individual choice is required to meet their unique needs.

## Safe and friendly communities

Seniors have told us that when they feel safe and secure in the community, they are able to navigate it freely and actively engage. Safe and friendly communities are crucial for our seniors. This means communities need to be places where seniors are treated with respect and included in community activities. To facilitate this, infrastructure and transport systems must be accessible and affordable for all people regardless of age or ability.

Within the safe and friendly communities pillar, three key focus areas will inform how the WA Government can better ensure communities are safe, inclusive, and age friendly. These are shown in Table 2 below and are described across the following pages.

**Table 2 | Safe and friendly communities**

Pillar	Key Focus Areas	Alignment with WHO age-friendly cities domains
Safe and friendly communities	Respectful and inclusive communities, regardless of background or needs  Age-friendly public spaces, infrastructure, and facilities  Accessible, appropriate, and cost-effective transport options	Respect and social inclusion  Transportation  Outdoor spaces

### Respectful and inclusive communities, regardless of background or needs

At the core of any community is its people, and their values, and attitudes towards each other. When a community is inclusive and respectful towards all seniors, it creates space for them to feel culturally safe and to thrive. Respectful and inclusive communities make seniors feel at home, value their contributions, provide equitable access to services, and recognise that people come from all walks of life, and that our different wants, needs, and values enrich our communities.

Consultations highlighted that seniors appreciate being treated with respect and equity. During some consultations we heard of older people encountering attitudes that were discriminatory and lacked respect, highlighting the need to raise awareness of ageist comments and address ageism. Across Australia, 63 per of seniors reported experiencing ageism within the past five years.<sup>7</sup>

Learning about and understanding the role of Aboriginal Elders and practicing cultural awareness is a community-wide undertaking and represents one aspect of how we must come together as a community to promote respectful, inclusive communities.

Unfortunately, Aboriginal seniors felt they were often subject to age-based discrimination. During consultation, Aboriginal people repeatedly raised concerns about the lack of respect and understanding for Aboriginal Elders.

### **Age-friendly public spaces, infrastructure, and facilities**

Public spaces (including outdoor areas) bring people together and foster a sense of togetherness in the community. Appropriate and safe environments, including walkways, seating, and public toilets, are essential for allowing our seniors to enjoy their communities. Community spaces should be accessible to everyone, providing facilities that cater to all needs regardless of age and ability.

Many seniors enjoy spending time in nature and outdoor spaces. This is important for their health, wellbeing, and happiness. Consultations for the Strategy highlighted that older people want public spaces, infrastructure and facilities across WA that are accessible for seniors. People said that they appreciated spaces and places where they had access to good walkways, appropriate parking, seating, and accessible toilets, and that facilities where these were available were well used. Older people wanted to encourage councils and developers to ensure that places were planned and built with accessibility in mind, to ensure that everyone could enjoy them.

### **Accessible, appropriate, and cost-effective transport options**

Transportation, including accessible and affordable public transport, is a key factor influencing positive and active ageing. During the consultation, seniors informed us that when they are unable to drive and needed to rely on other forms of transportation to get around, it created a major barrier for engagement in activities outside their home.

Older people liked having access to good transport services, including specific parking spaces, good public transport which was accessible, and private services which catered to their needs. Some seniors noted issues with accessible transport, particularly for people requiring mobility assistance. Seniors in regional and remote areas had more difficulties, as they often lack public transport options and have to travel greater distances to access services and facilities.

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<sup>7</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2021) [What's age got to do with it?](#)



## Staying connected and engaged

Being able to stay engaged, make independent choices, and contribute to society allows us to manage life and meet our personal needs. For seniors, this means having ways to stay connected with friends and family, opportunities to contribute through paid and unpaid work, and access to and the ability to engage with relevant information.

Within the staying connected and engaged pillar, five key focus areas will inform how the WA Government can increase the participation and contribution of seniors. These are shown in Table 3 below and are described across the following pages.

**Table 3 | Staying connected and engaged**

Pillar	Key Focus Areas	Alignment with WHO age-friendly cities domains
Staying connected and engaged	<p>Accessible and culturally appropriate information which enables informed choices</p> <p>Improved digital literacy</p> <p>Available and appropriate opportunities for contributing to the community, including through employment and volunteering</p> <p>Recognition of Seniors' contributions to their communities, including carers and grandcarers</p> <p>Enhanced opportunities for socially participating in the community, including government and community-led activities and events</p>	<p>Communication and information</p> <p>Civic participation and employment</p> <p>Social participation</p>

### Accessible and culturally appropriate information which enables informed choices

Having access to information is essential to navigating the community and making informed choices. For WA seniors, staying connected with the community and getting timely and practical information relevant to them is essential for positive ageing.<sup>8</sup>

While many older people are able to access internet and online services, some reported they still preferred face-to-face interactions. People liked to access facilities such as libraries and Community Resource Centres which provided information and support to older people. These centres also provide some support for digital inclusion. Services that

<sup>8</sup> World Health Organization (2007). [Global age-friendly cities: a guide](#), p.60

provided information in accessible and clear ways were preferred. Some people felt that a 'one-stop-shop' model would work well, so that older people would contact a central point which could assist them with navigating information they needed.

Older people also wanted organisations, including government, to consider how they present online information, to make it more accessible and more easily understandable for the target audience.

### **Improved digital literacy**

As technology continues to advance and digital connectivity becomes more important, so does the need for better digital inclusion for people. Strategies like the WA Digital Strategy signal an intent to move many government services to online platforms, with fewer paper-based and face-to-face engagement touchpoints. Therefore, there needs to be careful consideration for the barriers that these advances may present and how best to address them.

Seniors saw this increase in digital presence as signalling a need for more support for digital inclusion to ensure they stayed connected. Older Australians remain the least digitally included age group,<sup>9</sup> with over 20 per cent of seniors not using the internet due to a lack of confidence and/or understanding.<sup>10</sup> Limited ability to use (or access) the internet is a growing cause of social exclusion among seniors.<sup>11</sup>

Supporting seniors to improve their digital literacy will ensure that they can access the information they need, and enable them to stay connected to family, friends, and their community.

### **Available and appropriate opportunities for contributing to the community, including through employment and volunteering**

Embracing opportunities to continue to contribute to their communities in a way that reflects their individual circumstances and interests was highlighted as a key interest through the consultation. Many WA seniors are still in the workforce and/or are carers for their partners, children or grandchildren.<sup>12</sup>

During our consultations, many older people talked about continuing working part-time, and about being more active in the community, both through volunteering and participating in social activities. We know that our seniors are some of our most active volunteers (with 25 per cent of over-70s volunteering in 2019),<sup>13</sup> and social participation and social support are strongly connected to good health and well-being throughout life.<sup>14</sup> Seniors did explain that there were increasing barriers of cost and compliance around volunteering roles, and

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<sup>9</sup> Social Innovation Research Institute, Swinburne University (2020). [Improving the digital inclusion of older Australians](#)

<sup>10</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020) [Use of information technology by people with disability, older people and primary carers](#)

<sup>11</sup> World Health Organization (2007). [Global age-friendly cities: a guide](#), p63

<sup>12</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) [Household and families: Census](#) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021)

<sup>13</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019), [Volunteers](#)

<sup>14</sup> World Health Organization (2007). [Global age-friendly cities: a guide](#), p38



wanted government to consider how it could reduce these barriers to increase access to volunteering for older people.

Volunteering WA raised similar concerns in their written submission as part of the consultation, reporting a decrease in the number of seniors volunteering due to increasing requirements for training, administration, and compliance.

### **Recognition of Seniors' contributions to their communities, including carers and grandcarers**

Carers are people who provide unpaid care to someone who needs help with their day-to-day living. An estimated 320,000 Western Australians provide unpaid personal carer, support and assistance to another person needing assistance with daily life. They provide a valued contribution to the community as the care that they provide reduces the demand for and dependence on paid care and the health and community services sector.

Everyone deserves to have their contributions to society recognised and celebrated. This includes contributions that are often overlooked, but which play a pivotal role in our society, such as caring for those who cannot care for themselves.

Seniors who are carers for their partners, children or grandchildren expressed concerns about the recognition and support for carers. There are 6,930 grandparent families in WA, many of whom are seniors, and they contribute greatly to their communities by caring for those who need them.<sup>15</sup> It is imperative that our communities understand and appreciate seniors and their contributions, and that seniors who continue working and caring for those who rely on them are appropriately supported and recognised.

### **Enhanced opportunities for socially participating in the community, including government and community-led activities and events**

People who participate in community activities, including government and community-led activities, have better and more positive social outcomes, regardless of age.<sup>16</sup> Community activities and events allow everyone, including seniors, to come together and be part of a community.

Seniors in the consultation often talked about the activities they engaged in and their importance for their social, physical and mental wellbeing. Activities helped people to remain connected to community, enhanced physical health and reduced social isolation.

Social isolation and exclusion continue to be a significant issue for seniors across Australia, particularly in the more sparsely settled regions in WA.<sup>17</sup> Some older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds had limited options for socially participating in their communities, including cases where there were few activities available where their preferred language was spoken. Social activities and social centres for older

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<sup>15</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021). [Household and families: Census](#)

<sup>16</sup> Head to Health (2019) [Connecting with community](#)

<sup>17</sup> Beer A, Faulkner D, Law J, Lewin G, Tinker A, Buys Let al. (2016). [Regional variation in social isolation amongst older Australians](#). *Regional Studies, Regional Science* 3: 170-84.

people of all backgrounds help to enhance social inclusion and enable seniors to engage with their peers and the wider community in a positive way.

Aboriginal seniors, seniors from CaLD backgrounds, seniors who identify as LGBTQIA+ and seniors with disability said they valued the opportunity to socially participate in the community but sadly, reported feeling greater social exclusion in the community than many seniors in WA.

## Having a voice that’s heard

Seniors told us that they feel valued when they feel heard, and their contributions are respected. Having a voice is essential for seniors to influence issues that matter to and impact upon them, and ensures that all policies, initiatives, and activities designed to support and empower them are informed by their views and experiences. This means seniors should have the opportunity – both locally and nationally – to have their voices heard and have agency and opportunity to advocate for themselves, or have effective representation should they have someone speaking for them. This is particularly important for seniors who also belong to marginalised groups, whose voices have often been marginalised in the past.

Within the having a voice that’s heard pillar, three key focus areas will inform how the WA Government will support seniors. These are shown in Table 4 below and are described across the following pages.

**Table 4 | Having a voice that’s heard**

Pillar	Key Focus Areas	Alignment with WHO age-friendly cities domains
Having a voice that’s heard	Frequent and meaningful opportunities to make Seniors’ voices heard  Influence on the issues and policies that matter to and impact upon Seniors  Elevating the diverse voices of Seniors	Civic participation and employment  Respect and social inclusion

### Frequent and meaningful opportunities to make Seniors’ voices heard

Having a voice that’s heard means that organisations and services that represent and support seniors are informed by seniors’ views and experiences. Seniors want to have frequent and meaningful opportunities to speak up and to influence the world around them. Seniors have told us that they may feel disempowered and unable to make their voices heard, with some highlighting that they have been ignored or overlooked when they have

sought opportunities to speak out.<sup>18</sup> For some, the lack of digital inclusion or of accessibility makes this even more difficult.

We must ensure that all seniors have frequent and meaningful opportunities to speak up, including through peak bodies that can represent them and their needs when they might not be able to.

### **Influence on the issues and policies that matter to and impact upon Seniors**

The wisdom of our seniors is one of their greatest assets. An age-friendly community provides options for seniors to be engaged in the policy process, in particular (but not exclusively) on matters that relate to their needs as older adults.<sup>19</sup> Seniors want to have opportunities to design policy and initiatives relevant to them, using their own experience and wisdom to improve the way government does business with and for older people. The power of the lived experience of older people is essential in developing good policy and initiatives for older people.

The engagement approach as part of the development of the Strategy provides a template for how seniors can and should be engaged during the drafting of policy, initiatives, activities, and events that impact them, to ensure that their voices and valuable contributions are not lost or ignored.

### **Elevating the diverse voices of Seniors**

Seniors in our community are diverse and the Strategy will reflect the diverse range of voices, experiences and needs among seniors in WA. People have diverse and specific needs across the spectrum of life. We want to capture and act on the voices of all seniors, including those who belong to groups who are often under-represented, in ways that respect the needs and views of people. This includes elevating the voices of Aboriginal seniors, seniors from CaLD backgrounds, those who identify as LGBTQIA+, seniors living with a disability, veterans, and senior carers, who all report facing even greater difficulties in navigating life.<sup>20</sup> We need to ensure there is opportunity to speak about their experiences, and for them to influence services, policies, and initiatives so that they work for all who need them.

We must elevate the diverse voices of all seniors, in a way that reflects their diversity of experience and needs. Targeted and tailored opportunities to engage with diverse and harder to reach groups must be a central feature of the Strategy, including in planning, decision-making and service delivery.

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<sup>18</sup> IPS Management Consultants for the Department of Communities (2022). WA Seniors Strategy Consultation Summary 2022

<sup>19</sup> World Health Organization (2007). [Global age-friendly cities: a guide](#), p51

<sup>20</sup> IPS Management Consultants for the Department of Communities (2022). WA Seniors Strategy Consultation Summary 2022