



# Executive summary

The designation of the 1999 United Nations International Year to 'Older Persons' is noteworthy as the term is both chronological and relative, and alludes to the different perceptions of what ageing means and when older age starts. Regardless, it will become impossible for the community and business sectors to ignore the magnitude and the impact of Australia's ageing demographic. The IYOP slogan, 'towards a society for all ages' reiterates the importance of adopting a 'whole of society' approach around the issues of ageing and older persons.

The objective of the not-for-profit, non-government and apolitical Australian Coalition '99 was to bring about positive, real and sustainable change in many aspects of life for older Australians. The Coalition employed a unique concept of partnerships during IYOP. Partner organisations demonstrated and shared their different styles and methods of promoting positive ageing and sustainable age-related developments. Viable and innovative partnerships were promoted between non-government organisations (NGOs) which were often not previously aware of each other's existence, as well as groups that had not been involved with ageing issues in the past.

The International Year of Older Persons 1999 is deemed a success for a number of reasons.

- Through the integration of non-government sector planning by AC '99, there was a strong ownership of the Year by older people themselves. The founders of AC '99 recognised the significant opportunity to involve older people in the planning, decision making and organisation of IYOP. Consequently older people's and the wider community's participation in the extraordinary diversity of celebrations, activities, initiatives and programs throughout 1999 was heightened.
- From 1995 through to the close of 1999, the partner organisation base grew to more than 1,200 national, state, regional and local organisations across the country. Through this network, it was estimated that more than six million Australians were represented by AC '99.
- The AC '99 national secretariat worked collaboratively with the media to increase the recognition and value of older people through an ongoing IYOP presence in a wide range of media. This involved engagement of media and advertising industry representatives. Although limited funding was available to the secretariat in the execution of media strategies, several targeted campaigns were implemented, kickstarting the process for attitudinal change towards older people and ageing.
- Importantly, many of the Year's achievements were made possible by the generation of new liaisons, collaborative relationships and partnerships between individuals, non-government organisations (both for-profit and not-for-profit) and government. Many of these relationships have a strong promise of being sustained into the future with considerable evidence of likely success.



The first years of the project relied on generous and mostly in-kind contributions from a small number of organisations and dedicated volunteers. AC '99 received a grant from the Sidney Myer Fund to establish a part-time secretariat for a year in early 1997 which was pivotal in the advancement of planning at national level. The national leadership of COTA resonated to AC '99 at state and territory level where every Council on the Ageing provided similar administrative and financial underpinning.



In August 1997, the Commonwealth Government of Australia recognised AC '99 as the official focal point for non-government activity for IYOP, and in 1998 provided interim funding followed by an IYOP grant of \$563,000 to COTA. The funds supported the work of the AC '99 secretariat as an IYOP information office and communication conduit between different NGOs and sectors across Australia during the period July 1998 to April 2000.



AC '99 in the eight states and territories achieved very exciting outcomes through engaging large numbers of groups and individuals in celebrations and sustainable age-friendly programs across the country. There were varying levels of financial support provided to state and territory AC '99 secretariats, which impacted on AC '99's progress in implementing national strategies.

The national secretariat became a valuable resource for Australian communities and interested individuals, NGOs, media outlets and the business sector. AC '99 also provided an interface between the NGO sector, the Commonwealth Government and state governments (through state AC '99 secretariats). Key communication tools were developed by AC '99 including the wide-reaching and popular national monthly newsletter, *Update*, and a national website which housed the official calendar of national and international events.

AC '99 developed a marketing communications plan to address and challenge attitudes towards ageing and older people, particularly attitudes held by younger Australians. Ongoing contact with key media outlets and representatives translated into a consistent presence of IYOP, particularly on radio and through print media editorial. The outcomes were impressive, particularly given that the marketing budget only accommodated AC '99 staff time to nurture relationships and achieve outcomes across a wide range of media.

The ability to gain the attention and interest of the business and private sector was extremely difficult due to a lack of broader community awareness. Without a higher level of general awareness of IYOP within the Australian public and specifically the business community, in most cases it was possible to attain only the empathy of a number of businesses rather than a commitment to undertake specific initiatives to advance positive ageing.

The sustainability of IYOP achievements at all levels of the community is vital and necessary. It is evident that many AC '99 partner organisations are keen to continue the work that they undertook and continue to undertake as a result of IYOP. It may be that networking mechanisms like those developed by AC '99 need to be developed to assist NGOs to maintain their responsibility for older people through collaborative programs.

In the 12 months to June 1999, 42% of older men and 33% of older women participated in some form of sport or physical activity, with walking and lawn bowls being the most popular. Older people attended cultural venues such as the cinema (36%), library (34%), and the botanic gardens (27%).

Source: ABS; Older People, Australia: A Social Report, 1999 (Catalogue no. 4109.0)

Regardless of the size or duration of IYOP projects and the number of people engaged, it is already clear that numerous exercises undertaken by the NGO sector have been used as springboards for building on organisational programs and policies. A number of national NGOs have indicated that they will sustain partnerships and linkages established during IYOP in recognition of the opportunities and benefits to be gained.



Longer term developments within different non-government sectors have been realised. For example, there is evidence of policy and position change on issues regarding older people, particularly within national professional organisations. Further, several national NGOs will continue to play an instrumental role in enhancing the value of older people in society through national awards and recognition campaigns.

Discussions with various media and advertising outlets on future awareness campaigns have already commenced and it is hoped that ageist stereotypes held by many Australians will be increasingly challenged by intelligent coverage of the issues of ageing and older people by public and commercial media across the country.

The continuation of different education programs introduced to mark IYOP is strongly supported and already in train. These programs range from encouraging older people in various and new fields of interest as well as education of employees and various NGO sectors on addressing ageing issues and providing better services to older people.



The issue of Australia's ageing population is becoming increasingly difficult to avoid, particularly for the business sector. Consequently a real opportunity exists for businesses to demonstrate longer-term social responsibility and address the value of older employees, older consumers and older stakeholders. The changing social environment will demand strategies that will contribute to our policy shift towards a more 'age friendly Australia'.

There is a strong likelihood of ongoing positive developments around the issues of ageing and older people. *The National Strategy for an Ageing Australia* provides an unparalleled opportunity for the development of policies and strategies. There is much evidence of sustainable actions arising from NGO participation in IYOP 1999. We move into this century with a belief that cooperative and collaborative work between NGOs, the business sector and all levels of government will lead to a better life for older Australians.