



The origins of Australian Coalition '99

In 1995, a small group of people met in the office of the Council on the Ageing (COTA) to discuss the strategies needed to approach 1999, the United Nations proclaimed International Year of Older Persons.

Each of them had been very involved in two earlier UN Years – the International Year of Disabled Persons and the International Year of the Family. This rich background led to an agreement that the IYOP would be successful if there was:

- maximum participation and involvement of older people themselves
- engagement of organisations of older people
- promotion of the *UN Principles for Older Persons*
- establishment of an Australian organisation which invited non-government organisations (NGOs) to join as partners in a 'coalition', similar to the international Coalition '99 established by the American Association of Retired Persons

COTA agreed to offer to auspice such a coalition of NGOs for IYOP at its Annual General Meeting in 1995. Accordingly, it met with representatives of relevant national groups who accepted COTA's generous offer and elected an Interim Steering Committee of what became known as Australian Coalition '99. This early action was considered necessary to provide time to inform, motivate and resource older people across Australia to be directly engaged in the planning and development of their own International Year.

The Interim Steering Committee comprised:

Gary Andrews, Australian Assoc. of Gerontology

Brian Carpenter, Carers Assoc.

David Deans, National Seniors Assoc.

Trevor Giles, Aged Care Australia

June Healy, Council on the Ageing (Aus)

Joan Heard, Assoc. of Independent Retirees Inc.

Delys Sargeant (Chair)

Edith Morgan, Australian Pensioners' & Superannuants' Fed.

Harkan Akyol, Fed. of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia Inc.

Colin Scott, RetireInvest Pty Ltd

Jean Wilkinson, Older Women's Network (Aus)

In 1996, agreement was established on a number of issues, including the Australian Coalition '99 mission statement and the strategies that AC '99 would employ to communicate with the NGO partner network. The Interim Steering Committee developed the following mission statement which was ultimately endorsed by all states and territories, with minor variations.



AC '99 Mission Statement

1. To achieve a full realisation of the United Nations principles on healthy ageing by and for older Australians, through promoting: independence; participation; care; self-fulfillment and dignity.
2. To work through 1999, establishing a coalition of partnerships between:
 - older people in Australia and other countries
 - organisations of older people
 - relevant community and government sectors
 - organisations which include interests of both younger and older people



3. To achieve positive, supportive and creative ways for Australians to approach older age by planning and implementing a wide range of local, regional, statewide and national activities.
4. To encourage collaboration and health promoting interactions across generations, which will use the developments to 1999 to promote successful and positive ageing into the 21st century.

From 1996 until early 1999, organisations were encouraged to join the Coalition as partners in planning and working towards the objectives of the International Year. The support and interest in IYOP began to snowball in early 1998 when an increasing number of NGOs recognised the relevance of an ageing population and the issues of ageing to their own organisations. The partnership design and the objectives of the Coalition ensured that the whole (i.e. the outcomes of IYOP) would be greater than the sum of the work of its parts (the individual NGOs). The Coalition aimed to nurture cooperation and collaboration, provide stimulation of new ideas and strategies and foster the sustainability of good ideas and practices.

The plans and activities of these partnerships will contribute more to the sustainability beyond 1999 of the good ideas and the good outcomes than would the work of individual organisations alone. Further, the notion of associate partnership was extended to work between the AC '99s and government at local, state and Federal levels. The AC '99 model of partnerships has been considered by the United Nations as the most significant feature of AC '99's work in Australia.

The National Coordinating Committee: May 1998 – April 2000

By mid 1998, the current National Coordinating Committee had been formed and included a broad representation of national NGOs, from the following sectors:

older persons' organisations; organisations not exclusive to older persons; service providers; research, tertiary education and professional organisations; business sector and government.

All state and territory COTAs were asked to establish equivalent Australian Coalition '99 Steering Committees within their respective COTAs.

The National Coordinating Committee ultimately comprised:

Delys Sargeant, Chair
Joan Heard, Deputy Chair and representative of Assoc. of Independent Retirees Inc.
June Healy, Council on the Ageing (Aus)
Anna Howe, Australian Assoc. of Gerontology
Bev Knowles, Turnbull Porter Novelli
Maureen Lyster, Aged and Community Services Australia
Helen Matthews, National Seniors Assoc. Ltd.
Edith Morgan, Australian Pensioners' & Superannuants' Fed.
Michal Morris, Fed. of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia Inc.



Jean Wilkinson, Older Women's Network (Aus)
Jo Smyth, AC '99 QLD
Betty Graham, AC '99 NT
Sandra King, Office For Older Australians Commonwealth Government of Australia
Jan Feneley, Office For Older Australians Commonwealth Government of Australia
Deborah Kirwan, AC '99 WA
Ann Lloyd, AC '99 SA
Ann Hughes, AC '99 TAS
Vivienne McCutcheon, AC '99 VIC
Louize Glenn, AC '99 ACT
Heather Johnson, AC '99 NSW



A brief description of the organisations comprising the National Coordinating Committee follows.

Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA): Service provider

ACSA a non-profit organisation working to ensure the provision of quality services for the older members of our community by addressing those issues related to their accommodation, care and support. The largest national aged and community care peak body in Australia, ACSA membership represents 1,125 church, charitable and community organisations providing residential and community aged care services to 170,000 older people throughout Australia.



Association of Independent Retirees Inc. (AIR): Older persons' organisation

The Association of Independent Retirees Inc. was formed in 1990. The aim of the Association is to protect and advance the interests of retirees who have funded, in whole or in part, their own retirement. There are currently around 775,000 self-funded retirees in Australia, plus around 500,000 who are partly self-funded.



Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG): Research, tertiary education and professional organisation

The Australian Association of Gerontology aims to promote gerontology and disseminate and share knowledge in the field of gerontology. Membership of the AAG is open to people from all disciplines involved in the field of ageing.



Australian Pensioners' & Superannuants' Federation (AP&SF): Older persons' organisation

The Australian Pensioners' & Superannuants' Federation is a national network of consumer organisations of pensioners, superannuants and older people. AP&SF's aims include promoting independence, opportunity and choice for older people, providing independent information and educational resources and promoting older people's views to governments, business and services to ensure older people have a say in decisions that affect them.



Council on the Ageing (COTA): Older persons' organisation

Council on the Ageing is an independent national organisation run by older people. It exists to protect and promote the well-being of all older people and works as an advocate for older Australians by providing information, policy analysis, publications, referral and advisory services, consultation and representation.



Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia Inc. (FECCA): Organisations not exclusive to older persons

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia Inc. was established in 1979 as a non-profit voluntary organisation concerned with the goals and aspirations of ethnic communities throughout Australia. The Federation consists of Ethnic Communities' Councils in each state and territory in Australia. The major issues on which FECCA lobbies include generic access and equity issues across the three tiers of government, across all portfolio areas; immigration; racism; health and community services; employment, education and training; law and justice; media and the arts; small and newly emerging community needs; women and youth.



National Seniors Association Limited (NSA): Older persons' organisation

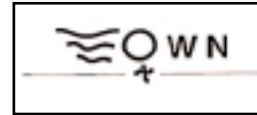
National Seniors Association Limited is the largest over 50's membership based association in Australia. NSA's objectives are to represent its members at all levels of government, to provide economical and social benefits to its members and to support age-related charitable organisations.





Older Women's Network (Australia) (OWN): Older persons' organisation

Older Women's Network (Australia) has a national membership of some 3,000 women, primarily over 55 years of age. OWN's aims are to lobby for social justice and equity for older women; to promote appropriate policy on older women's economic security, housing, health, home and community care and transport; to achieve recognition of the work and contribution of older women to society; and to celebrate the positive aspects of age and ageing.



Turnbull Porter Novelli (TPN): Business sector

Turnbull Porter Novelli is Australia's only truly national consultancy, with offices in every Australian capital city. TPN combines the advantages of localised Australian expertise with the global capability of Porter Novelli.



The consultancy provides specialised services in strategic corporate counselling and core practices in health care, information technology, consumer and business to business marketing, community relations, food and nutrition, telecommunications, employee communications, investor relations and government relations.

AC '99 and States/Territories

By mid 1998, all state and territory Councils on the Ageing had established an equivalent Australian Coalition '99 Steering Committee within their respective COTAs.

Regular communication and information sharing between the national secretariat and the state project officers was recognised as being critical for the non-government IYOP effort.

It was evident that considerable progress and engagement of older people occurred in those states and territories where funding for an adequately resourced secretariat was allocated. The implementation of national strategies was somewhat hindered by some states receiving limited funding from their respective jurisdictions. Nonetheless, it was significant that good relationships were maintained between the AC '99 steering committees and their respective state and territory governments.

AC '99 and the Commonwealth Government of Australia

As the 'agent' for the United Nations, the Commonwealth Government of Australia was instrumental in IYOP. The ministerial responsibility for IYOP was accepted first by The Hon. Judi Moylan, then The Hon. Warwick Smith with the assistance of The Hon. Kay Patterson and finally, The Hon. Bronwyn Bishop, all of whom showed considerable respect for the work of AC '99 and its collaboration with, and representation of the non-government sector for IYOP.

In August 1997, AC '99 was recognised by the Commonwealth Government of Australia as the official focal organisation for non-government organisations for the International Year of Older Persons 1999. It was critical for AC '99 to be financed to optimise this responsibility.

The Commonwealth Government's Office for Older Australians (OFOA) was very collaborative in the achievement of an excellent NGO – government partnership in many joint activities. This was considered noteworthy by both the UN and one country, Canada. The Commonwealth Government of Canada was so impressed with the AC '99 development that the Project Manager of AC '99 was invited to Ottawa to share the strategies and procedures which encouraged and resulted in effective collaboration between the Australian Government and the AC '99 non-government organisational network.



Strategies were developed from as early as 1996 and were substantially closer to being realised when the Commonwealth Government announced its funding of the AC '99 national secretariat in July 1998.

The National Coordinating Group was established to assist coordination between AC '99 National and the Federal Government. The Chair of AC '99, the federal senior public servant in OFOA or the Minister responsible for IYOP, and the chair of the intergovernmental Healthy Ageing Task Force, met on a regular basis. During the Year itself, regular meetings ceased in favour of ad hoc meetings between the Project Manager of AC '99 and the staff of OFOA. These meetings focused on particular activities or initiatives.

Both state and federal governments were kept well informed of ideas and preferred strategies for promotion and motivating activities developed by NGOs. There was much evidence of the advantage this provided government bureaucracies in the planning of their own IYOP work. In the long run there was a substantially improved, more diverse and extensive production of posters, diaries, calendars, information kits, newsletters, TV community advertisements, cards, and websites. In most cases these were produced in collaboration with the respective AC '99 Secretariat.

International Relations

Carrying responsibility for the IYOP was the United Nations Program on Ageing, Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. This office was severely under-resourced, resulting in information and products (e.g. posters, logo, guidelines for use in campaigns) being unavailable before the commencement of the International Year.

Regardless, there was always an encouragement and enthusiasm for what we were doing and how we were working with the non-government sector and government. This was expressed very strongly to the Chair of the AC '99 National Coordinating Committee (Delys Sargeant) when she visited the United Nations in August 1999.

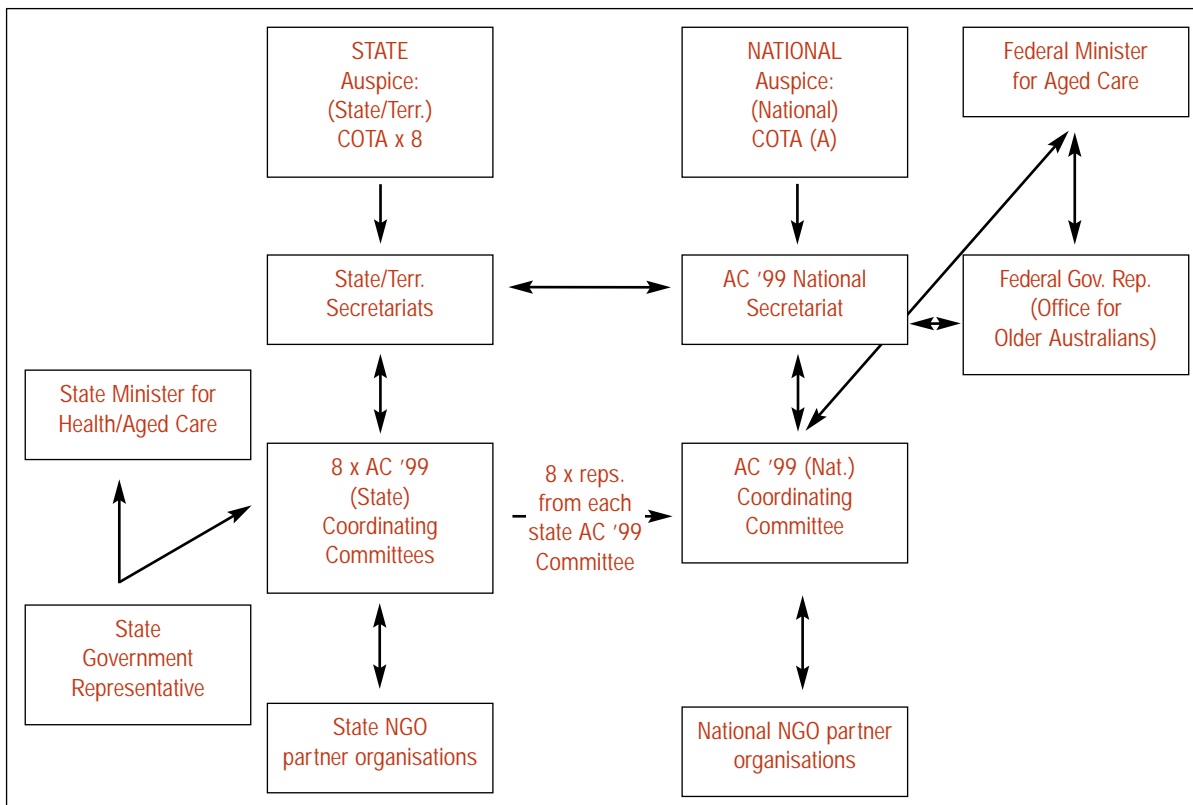
AC '99 also liaised with the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, members of the Task Force on Older Women, the United Nations Non-Government Coordinating Group on Ageing, and AARP (formerly American Association of Retired Persons). Ideas and developments were shared on the media portrayal of older women, as mentioned earlier.



AC '99 provided COTA and other AC '99 partners with information regarding the policy developments and recommendations resulting from meetings held in Macau and Singapore in 1998 under the joint auspices of HelpAge International and the United Nations. These meetings were relevant to ageing and, in particular, to IYOP in the Asian – Pacific Region.



AC '99 Organisational Structure



The AC '99 National Secretariat

The AC '99 National Secretariat comprised the Project Manager, Executive Assistant, Website Coordinator and Senior Journalist. The Project Manager was contracted on a part time consulting basis from 1997 with the grant from the Sidney Myer Fund.



On the successful funding submission to the Commonwealth Government of Australia, the national office was established adjacent to Council on the Ageing (Australia) to maximise resources available for the project. The Executive Assistant commenced work in mid – 1998. In late 1998, the Senior Journalist and Website Coordinator commenced work. Both of these were part-time positions.

The Secretariat became a valuable resource for Australian communities, interested individuals, non-government organisations including those at state/territory and international level, media outlets and the business sector. AC '99 also provided an interface between the NGO sector and the Commonwealth Government of Australia.

As IYOP progressed, the Secretariat remained flexible and responsive to the increasing demands placed on it from different sectors.

Regular Project Management Committee meetings were held to monitor the progress of AC '99. Ad hoc working group meetings for different IYOP projects which directly engaged AC '99 Secretariat staff were frequently held. These were an important means by which to motivate commitment of partners from different sectors (e.g. business, media) to support the IYOP mission.