

A great journey with many significant wins

THIS IS MY last stakeholder column as chief executive of COTA Australia, after over 20 years in that role and 33 years in COTA leadership roles.

It has been a great journey, with many significant wins in aged care for the benefit of older people; and of course, across a range of other areas of public policy and government portfolios where we are active on behalf of older Australians.

Aged care reform has been COTA Australia's most consistent and central policy and advocacy focus for the last decade and a half.

Over that time we have played leading or key roles in the development of the National Aged Care Alliance's "Our Vision for Support and Care of Older Australians", the Productivity Commission inquiry report



Ian Yates, chief executive of COTA Australia

Caring for Older Australians – which included significant key recommendations from COTA's submission, the NACA "Australians Deserve to Age Well" campaign and the Gillard government's 2012 Living Longer Living Better reform package.

In the 2018 federal budget's More Choices

"There have been many gains, but much remains to be achieved."

for a Longer Life package, of which COTA was the instigator, there was more aged care reform based on the Tune Review.

A key initiative was the trial of Aged Care System Navigators, an idea which COTA developed and which the royal commission went on to recommend as the Care Finders program.

Clearly the big bang in aged care reform was the royal commission and the government's response.

I was the first expert witness for most of the first day of hearings and COTA

made 14 submissions, attended numerous roundtables and forums, and appeared several times.

We then worked hard with the prime minister, ministers and senior public servants as they put together the comprehensive \$18 billion response, which together with the new Labor government's extra responses, will be the gamechanger for aged care in Australia.

There have been many gains, but much remains to be achieved.

I am stepping aside from COTA Australia because it's the right thing to do so COTA can transition in a planned and stable way.

Patricia Sparrow will be a good successor.

But the agenda for change in aged care is not yet complete, and I will continue to play a significant role in working to see it achieved. ■

Future care homes should be co-designed with future users

DESIGNING FOR the future in aged care is challenging – how do we know what the future will look like, or what the next generation of older people in aged care facilities may prefer?

It is unlikely that clinical conditions will change dramatically, but perhaps the functional and demographic profile will.

Australian society is growing older, with increasing numbers of people living with dementia, already making up at least 60 per cent of the residential care population.

Australia is a multicultural society, with First Nation and migrant populations a growing proportion of the older cohort.

When designing care homes of the future, Let's ask, and co-design with, those who will potentially be using the services, either as residents themselves or someone they care for.

"Older people can and will be heard if we pause to listen."

No doubt artificial intelligence and digital technologies will be prominent, but how do we expect diverse individuals to interact with them? These questions need to be unpacked.

Older people want to be heard. Older people should be heard. Older people can and will be heard if we pause to listen.

Designing aged care for the future, inside and out, will only meet the needs and preferences of the intended recipients if every effort is made to include their voices in the discussion – from the outset.



Dr Claudia Meyer, president of the AAG

And it begins with language. Compare, for example, the term 'residential facility' with that of a 'care home'.

The former suggests an institution, whereas the latter suggests a home where the necessary 24-hour care is provided in a person-centred and culturally appropriate manner.

There is considerable

academic and best-practice literature regarding universal design principles and dementia enabling environments.

This provides us with the required evidence to make solid decisions about the physical environment, to support the physical, emotional and social wellbeing of residents.

Having areas of quiet and privacy, green spaces, and individualised meaningful programs would seem to be best practice for all.

Designing care homes of the future will rely on a willingness to lay biases and assumptions to rest and, instead, co-design with future users from the first iteration of planning, thereby fostering and celebrating diversity and inclusion for all. ■

