



**Australian Association of Gerontology  
50<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference – “Ageing – the Golden Opportunity”**

**Communique:  
Latest evidence on creating environments to age well in**

**29 November 2017**

AAG’s 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference “Ageing – the Golden Opportunity” was held in Perth from the 8-10 November.

AAG is a membership organisation whose purpose is to improve the experience of ageing through connecting research, policy and practice. Since 1964, AAG has been Australia’s peak body linking professionals working across the fields of ageing. The multidisciplinary membership includes researchers, aged care leaders, geriatricians, nurses, allied health professionals, policy makers, advocates for older people and others with expertise in ageing.

AAG’s Housing and Built Environment Special Interest Group (HBESIG) ran a workshop on the day before AAG’s 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference which explored late life changes in housing: choices, enablers and barriers to ageing in place. Presentations provided context to the workshop:

- Dr Debbie Faulkner (Deputy Director of the Centre for Housing, Urban and Regional Planning at The University of Adelaide) and Dr Victoria Cornell (Convenor of AAG’s HBESIG and Postdoctoral Research Fellow at The University of Adelaide) explored issues affecting older people in precarious housing.
- Professor Julie Byles (Past President of AAG and Director of the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health at the University of Newcastle) and Dr Meredith Tavener (Research Fellow with the Research Centre for Generational Health and Ageing and Athena SWAN Fellow for the University of Newcastle) presented an analysis of 12 years of data from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health.
- Confronting but heartening life stories of two vulnerable older people that were helped by the services provided by St Bartholomew’s House in Western Australia were presented by Sally Kingdon-Barbosa (Aged Care Services Manager) and Sandra Iso (Community Aged Care Services Manager).

A discussion by participants in response to two questions followed:

1. What matters in housing service design and delivery?
2. How can service providers and policy makers encourage and support affordable, equitable and accessible services – at a range of prices, tenures and sizes – and make a substantial contribution to people’s ability to age in place?

The key conclusions reached by participants included:

- Housing is a universal right.
- Housing is the basis for wellbeing.
- Housing should be built for people **not** for profit.
- Providers and Government must begin to think innovatively about housing solutions that cross a range of ages, circumstances and needs; and therefore also a range of services, e.g. financial assistance, aged care, disability support.

Day 2 of the 50<sup>th</sup> AAG Conference included a symposium on ageing well and the built environment. Dr Beatriz Arakawa Martins, geriatrician and student at the University of Adelaide, presented the results of a novel study that used a passive monitoring device to capture people aged 65 years and over's physiological reactions to public spaces. Among other findings, Dr Arakawa Martins highlighted the importance of volunteer way-finder helpers in hospitals in helping people navigate these public spaces. Rachel Ambagtsheer, PhD Candidate and Research Fellow with Torrens University, presented the results of the IMAGEin My Healthy Ageing Project which used photos to show that older people understood and experienced the meaning of healthy ageing in a retirement village as feeling well, safe and connected. Dr Helen Barrie, President of AAG and Research Fellow at University of Adelaide, presented results from a South Australian survey of over 2,000 retirement village residents which has provided valuable information regarding resident and village demographics, likes and attitudes of residents, costs, reasons for moving and residents' understanding of contracts. The main reasons people moved to a retirement village were for a smaller home, convenience and affordability. While the vast majority (94 percent) said they enjoyed village life there was concerning feedback about the lack of understanding of contracts and a lack of transparency with contracts, rules and fees. Some residents expressed feeling a lack of control over finances, and the home and neighbourhood in which they lived.

Dr Penny Flett, Geriatrics specialist at Brightwater Care Group, took a 'helicopter perspective' on old age, as she believes it allows us "to reflect on learnings from yesterday and today, be intelligent and honest about tomorrow, and be brave and bold enough to change, radically: to truly innovate". Dr Flett noted that "good accommodation is going to do more for keeping the cost of aged care down than building more and more facilities".

The AAG David Wallace Address was given by Professor Billie Giles-Corti, Director of the Urban Futures Enabling Capability Platform at RMIT University, and an Honorary Professorial Fellow of the University of Melbourne. Professor Giles-Corti demonstrated that "cities are critical for health" and that environment changes can lower the "disability threshold" for all age groups. By designing supportive environments, Professor Giles-Corti's presentation showed that co-benefits will include physical, social and planetary health. As an example, Professor Giles-Corti cited research showing that people in environments rich in public transport do a lot more walking.

Jeanette Walters, Director of Intergovernment Relations and Ageing at the Office for the Ageing, South Australia Health presented results of the Innovation in Social Housing 90 Day Project which highlighted the importance of recognising, valuing and tapping into the diverse expertise and experiences of older people to better understand and tailor responses to their needs as they age. "When it comes to age friendly housing, one size does not fit all", said Ms Walters.

Dr Debbie Faulkner, Deputy Director of the Centre for Housing, Urban and Regional Planning at The University of Adelaide, spoke about a national research and development project trying to bridge the gap between research, policy and action to address homelessness and the threat of homelessness.

Professor Takemi Sugiyama from the Institute for Health & Ageing at the Australian Catholic University presented his study using data from 1602 adults which found that, counterintuitively, people living closer to city centre exhibited greater mobility decline over four years, compared to those living far from city centre. Professor Sugiyama further noted that future research needs to consider how long participants had resided in their address to better understand environmental impacts on middle-to-older adults' mobility decline.

## **Other highlights from AAG's 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference**

AAG released its first communique on the key messages from the conference on 21 November 2017. This communique, focussing on assuring equity of access and quality outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait people, can be found here:

[AAG Conference Communique 1: Assuring Equity of Access and Quality Outcomes for Older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People](#)

A second communique highlighted some of the key talks at AAG's 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, including: the presentations by the AAG 2017 Gary Andrews International Fellow Professor Sube Banerjee from the Centre for Dementia Studies at the University of Sussex on multimorbidity and dementia; the Presidential Symposium hosted by Dr Helen Barrie explored AAG's 2017 Hot Topic "[The economic opportunities of an ageing population – how much do we value the golden goose?](#)"; the perspectives on ageing and aged care from a

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse perspective, and; the AAG Ageing Workforce Education Special Interest Group (AWESIG) inaugural symposium exploring evidence as to how to build health and aged care workforces. The communique can be found here:

[AAG Conference Communique 2: Highlights from the conference](#)

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