



AAG
Australian
Association of
Gerontology

**ADVANCING NOT RETIRING:
ACTIVE PLAYERS,
A FAIR FUTURE**

For immediate release – 4pm, 23 November 2018

Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG)

2018 Conference Communique

Advancing not retiring: Active players, a fair future

The Plenary Sessions

AAG's 51st Annual Conference was held from 21-23 November 2018 in Melbourne, Australia, with pre-conference workshops on 20 November. A record number attended AAG's 51st Annual Conference, with over 700 delegates and over 300 presentations.

[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.

Associate Professor Briony Dow – AAG's 2018 Conference Chair – and Associate Professor Christine Stirling – AAG's President – **opened the conference**. The Keynote opening address was given by Dr Susan Alberti AC who embodies the conference theme "advancing not retiring". Dr Alberti spoke about how her family and catholic school education taught her to give back and think of the needs of the needs of the person sitting next to you.

Professor Sir Michael Marmot sets the scene for the common thread throughout the conference: loneliness and social isolation is the key determinate of health for older people

AAG's 2018 Gary Andrews International Fellow Professor Sir Michael Marmot challenged the audience, asking "why treat people and send them back to the conditions that made them sick?". Professor Marmot stated that social isolation is the key determinate of health for older people. "Government can't spread love and friendliness, but it can promote the conditions where these things can flourish", noted Professor Marmot. This is in line with the [2019 AAG Hot Topic "Intimacy and Ageing"](#) which covers the whole spectrum of social connectedness in later-life, ranging from loving sexual relationships to loneliness and everything in between.

Talking to other social determinants of health across a lifetime, Professor Marmot concluded that a re-distribution of wealth is needed. Professor Marmot invited his colleagues at the 2018 AAG Conference to "come and live in my fantasy land and let's dream of a better world".

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Professor Sir Michael Marmot, Robert Tickner AO, Sally Goldner and Professor Julie Byles continued to explore key themes in ageing with Paul Barclay during the **ABC Radio National's Big Ideas broadcast** which will soon be available on the ABC website.

2018 AAG David Wallace Address focussed on elder abuse

The 2018 AAG David Wallace Address was chaired by UniSuper's Product Manager, Katie Frazer. The session focussed on elder abuse. Katie was joined by Emeritus Professor Rosalind Croucher AM – President of the Australian Human Rights Commission, Gerard Mansour – Commissioner for Senior Victorians and Ambassador for Elder Abuse Prevention, Associate Professor Briony Dow – Director National Ageing Research Institute and The Hon Dr Kay Patterson AO – Age Discrimination Commissioner.

Emeritus Professor Croucher reminded us that “elder abuse is everybody’s business”. Gerard Mansour spoke about how he had found that isolation and loneliness is a key issue for older people. Associate Professor Dow presented the results of her research which found older people want abusers, who may be their children, to receive help and support. Older people see the problems their carers are facing, which may include drug and alcohol abuse, gambling and burnout/stress, as the reason for the abuse, explained Associate Professor Dow. Mr Mansour noted the need to integrate federal, state and territory responses to elder abuse and supports for the abusers. This call was seconded by Dr Patterson, who called for cooperation between the Attorneys General to address elder abuse, the need for a national helpline and a single Australian knowledge hub to increase consistency across the country and share knowledge gained from the many local initiatives.

The President’s Symposium focus on Workforce of the Future

AAG’s President Associate Professor Christine Stirling led a discussion on the aged care workforce of the future together with Adjunct Professor Kylie Ward – CEO of the Australian College of Nursing and Professor Joseph Ibrahim.

Adjunct Professor Ward reflected that a skilled and appropriate aged care workforce, including nurses, is the main challenge we are facing, with leadership qualities being essential to driving a healthy and positive culture. Looking to the future, Professor Ward reminded us to keep asking “Where does technology start and humanity stop?”.

Professor Ibrahim explored how to support the workforce, especially personal care workers, in understanding the complex ethical issues surrounding dignity of risk. Professor Ibrahim asked the audience to consider whether residents in an aged care facility should be allowed to smoke cigarettes if that is what they want to do, even though it is detrimental to their health? What are we doing to support personal care workers who promote dignity of risk, even if it does lead to harm to residents?

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Associate Professor Stirling showed results from her research which highlighted the need to have a relational management approach with volunteers which included acknowledgement of their contributions and reimbursement of their costs. She cautioned that while they make valuable contributions, volunteers should never replace the formal workforce and we must be mindful of this. Associate Professor Stirling noted that many volunteers are “carer dyads” of couples living in reciprocal care relationship. She noted that volunteers can add immense value to the social aspects of care.

Innovative models of care

The Friday morning plenary chaired by the AAG Conference Scientific Committee Chair Associate Professor Danny Hills explored innovative models of care.

Senator Rachel Siewert, Australian Greens Whip and Spokesperson on Ageing focussed on the need to address ageism. Senator Siewert noted that different people have different aspirations and needs as they age and that we shouldn't increase retirement age without considering all factors first. She explored the need to create an aged care system and communities that can meet the varying and individual needs of all Australians, closing with “If we can make a community work for children and the elderly, it will work for everyone.”.

Josephine Boylan, Director Operations at Southern Cross Care noted that “more of the same in aged care will not be good enough”. Josephine Boylan spoke about how her team stopped “waiting for people to die” and started empowering *all people* in the improvement of their physical, mental and social wellbeing. Key features of this model include early-intervention multi-disciplinary team meetings to identify barriers and enablers and fitness programs.

Bryan Lipmann AM spoke about how his frustration with the aged care system and its lack of will and capacity to assist older people experiencing homelessness led him to establish Wintringham specialist aged care services. Bryan Lipmann noted that the aged care system is designed to support middle-class older people who are expectant of services and have children to lobby aggressively on their behalf. In contrast, he experienced that the aged care system is not set up to support Wintringham's clients: working class people who are reluctant to accept services after a lifetime of discrimination and have little or no family support. Wintringham provides a respectful home-like environment with defensible private spaces and opportunities for social engagement and fun.

Colin McDonnell, Dementia Excellence Practice Leader at Scalabrini Villages, spoke about how they have created enabling home-like environments with privacy to promote choice, dignity and respect. Scalabrini's salutogenic approach focusses on factors that support

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health and wellbeing, moving beyond a more traditional, 'pathogenic' focus on risk and problems. Mr McDonnell also noted that social connectedness and intimacy is a key determinate of health- speaking about how their facilities allow couples to remain living together and provide spaces for families to stay connected.

AAG's 52nd Annual Conference will be held in Sydney, Australia from 6-8 November 2019, with pre-conference workshops on 5 November.

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