

# OUR LIVES, OUR FUTURE

## The Forum Report

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On behalf of the Our Lives Our Future forum  
organising committee

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# *OUR LIVES OUR FUTURE FORUM*

designed by and for Older People

Share your experiences and ideas

Plan for a fulfilling old age

Face the future with confidence

Friday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2007

9.30am to 3:00pm

CityGate, 400 Cambridge Rd, Mornington

## **Includes**

**Inspiring Speakers & Entertaining Presentations**

**Luscious Food & Interesting Displays**

For people over 50 plus friends, family, supporters and service providers

*Cost: \$5 over 50 & unsalaried; \$10 salaried*

We're all growing older... Let's Do It Together

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# 1. Summary

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*Our Lives Our Future* was held on September 7<sup>th</sup> 2007, and brought a range of people together to hear speakers and enjoy entertainment, and to discuss their experiences of the challenges and benefits of ageing and to discuss ideas for the future. The emphasis of the forum was on generating ideas for actions that could be taken by individuals, communities and all levels of government. The forum also aimed to contribute to broader community discussions about demographic changes toward an ageing population and positive ageing policy in Tasmania.

The forum was organised and run by people from a number of community and government organisations, as well as individuals who have an interest in issues to do with ageing and planning for the future.

Discussions held at the forum covered the broad topics of where people live, what they do and who they mix with.

## ***The main themes***

### **Where we live**

People wanted to be able to stay living at home, but this requires affordable, suitable housing. In cases where assistance is required this needs to be useful and affordable, in particular, maintenance and gardening assistance is needed. The lack of suitable, flexible and affordable transport in some areas was a major theme.

### **What we do**

People were involved in a range of activities, many of which were reliant on volunteers. There were concerns about a lack of information which excluded people from participating. Costs of activities were also seen as prohibitive, and this was alleviated by low-cost options such as neighbourhood houses. The issue of needing confidence and encouragement to join groups was a theme, as was the desire for assistance with improving technological skills. The importance of being politically active, of speaking out and being involved in government level planning and consultation, and of working collectively using each others skills and knowledge were recurrent themes.

Financial concerns about the difficulty of living on the pension and about navigating various financial options were raised, as was the importance of planning early for financial security.

The physical and psychological health challenges of ageing were also a major theme of discussions, and the importance of comprehensive health promotion programs were raised. Access to medical and community care services was important in enabling people to stay well. Local health centres were also important, as was the provision of flexible services. Concerns about the negative public images of elderly people were raised.

## **Who we mix with**

Loneliness, and its negative consequences, was a common theme discussed by many, and concerns were raised about a general lack of community in some areas. A strong theme that emerged was the need to increase the strength of communities.

## **The actions**

People suggested specific actions that would help to create a positive future, ranging from practical tips to higher level policy changes.

Improvements to the availability of suitable **housing** and of low-cost home maintenance services were recommended. So too were improvements to **transport** availability, suitability, flexibility and affordability. **Social actions** that meet people's needs, are affordable and harness the talents of older people were suggested. Likewise were ways to improve the distribution of **information** about activities to elderly people. **Political actions** that enabled the voices of elderly people to be heard in the political arena and by policy makers were recommended, and actions to ensure **financial** security also. Ensuring maintenance of **health and wellbeing** through individual actions to improve physical and mental wellbeing, improving the flexibility and appropriateness of community care services, and increases in the numbers of general practitioners and medical specialists were also among the suggested actions. Many suggestions were made of ways to actively build and maintain a sense of **community**, bought amongst peers and intergenerationally.

## **The future**

The practical suggestions for housing, transport, activities and health were offered with the intention of creating positive changes for the current population of elderly people in Tasmania, and for future generations also.

The *Our Lives Our Future* forum challenges the notion that demographic change in Tasmania spells doom and gloom. Participants valued the opportunity to join together and discuss their lives and to plan for their future, and the workshop discussions in particular demonstrate the interest amongst many elderly people to not only identify the positives and negatives of their current situation, but also to generate ideas for actions that could be taken to address problems or to prevent negative ageing experiences.

The forum demonstrates that addressing ageing issues is the concern not only of individuals, but also of broader communities, and for all levels of government. The desire to be listened to by decision makers, and to be included in planning processes and policy making through consultation and active involvement is a strong theme of this report.

## 2. Introduction

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On the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 2007, 160 people gathered at the CityGate complex in Southern Tasmania to attend the *Our Lives Our Future* forum. People mainly over the age of 50 came along to share their experiences and ideas about ageing, to hear the experiences of prominent speakers, to enjoy some entertainment and lunch and to look at the displays about services provided by local councils and organisations.

People came from a range of backgrounds and with various interests. They were predominantly people whose personal lives and circumstances have generated an interest in issues to do with ageing, and they were joined by others whose working lives include social planning for ageing, community development and service delivery. So although it was a varied group, all participants shared a common interest: ageing now and in the future.

### ***The aims of the forum***

The forum had multiple aims; firstly, to enable a dialogue between older people, service providers and government representatives, with the agenda and discussion set and led by older people.

Secondly, by placing an emphasis on exploring practical ways that participants can improve their own and their communities' futures, the forum aimed to develop achievable ideas to address issues of ageing now and in the future. It was envisaged that participants would go away with a clearer understanding of what they might do, individually or in groups, to improve their future options

In addition to enabling dialogue and developing practical ideas, it was also envisaged that the forum would have indirect benefits such as:

- the encouragement and strengthening of local seniors action groups;
- improved community attitudes to the contribution by older people toward social planning;
- improved consultation processes between older people and relevant organisations;
- inclusion of the views of people not normally represented in consultation processes; and
- and clarity about which consultation methods work well with older people.

### ***Background***

The original idea for the *Our Lives Our Future* was developed as a joint venture between SAGES Seniors Action Group Eastern Shore (SAGES) and the Kingston Seniors Action Group (KSAG), born out of a desire for older people to have increased opportunities to use their skills and experiences, and to take greater personal responsibility for planning their future in accordance with their own

interests, needs and resources. However the task was too large for these groups alone.

As a result, Jennifer Line from SAGES took on the role of coordinator, and an organising committee was established, consisting of: Cecily Gilson (SAGES); Marie Kennedy, National Disability Services (NDS), Eileen Levett, The Council on the Ageing Tasmania (COTA Tas); Tanzi Lewis, Seniors Bureau, Department of Premier and Cabinet; Pauline Marsh, Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS), Jan Miller, Tasmanians with Disabilities (TWD) and Jean Grosse (National Seniors). These organisations and individuals each work with and on behalf of older Tasmanians. The organising committee met regularly over 6 months.

Funding was provided by grants, donations and in-kind support from the Department of Premier and Cabinet (grant requested by Alison Ritchie), the Education Department (Adult Learners Week), Clarence City Council (community grant), and CityGate (in-kind).

### **Policy Context**

Concerns about the impact of changing demographics in Tasmania and about the level of involvement of older people in the development of positive ageing plans by local and state governments were also drivers behind the development of Our Lives Our Future.

### **Changing demographics**

Much public and political attention has been paid to the rapid rate of the ageing of Tasmania's population, and frequently concerns are raised about the ability of the Tasmanian community to cope with these changes. The organising committee held the belief that it is undesirable for older Tasmanians to be viewed as a burden, or problem that needs addressing by younger persons or governments. Consequently, the forum was in part an attempt to allow older people to come together and develop proactive approaches to an ageing community; to present solutions to existing issues and ideas for avoiding possible future problems.

For information about the Tasmanian State Government  
Demographic Change Advisory Council and published  
discussion papers contact:

[www.dcac.tas.gov.au](http://www.dcac.tas.gov.au);

Ph 1800 116 735,

Or mail:

Executive Officer, Alison Watt

DCAC

GPO Box 147

Hobart, Tas, 7001.

## Positive Ageing Plans

At the time of planning for the forum, many local council groups had developed or were in the process of developing positive ageing plans, which, like the overarching State Government plan, involve consultation with older Tasmanians to develop policy positions on ageing issues and to identify appropriate actions and interventions. *Our Lives Our Future* was intended to compliment these local government plans and also the recently released state plan, *Time to be Living Well* (2007). In particular, the organising committee attempted to involve persons who may not have involved in either state or local government consultation sessions.

Examples of positive ageing plans include:

Tasmanian State Plan:

[www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/seniors/positive\\_ageing/html\\_version/](http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/seniors/positive_ageing/html_version/)

Phone: 1300 13 55 13

Mail: GPO Box 123

Hobart Tas 7001

Clarence City Council:

[www.ccc.tas.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=601](http://www.ccc.tas.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=601)

Phone: 6245 8780

Mail: PO Box 96

Rosny Park Tas 7018

Kingborough Council:

[www.kingborough.tas.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=286](http://www.kingborough.tas.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=286)

Phone: 6211 8130

Mail: Locked Bag 1

Channel Highway

Kingston Tas 7050

Burnie City Council:

[www.burnie.net/html/931\\_964.htm](http://www.burnie.net/html/931_964.htm)

Phone: 6430 5700

Mail: PO Box 973

Burnie Tas 7320

### ***This report***

Following a brief snapshot of the day, this report documents the discussions held in workshop groups and the ideas for actions that emerged from the groups. It then draws some conclusions based on those discussions.

It is envisaged that this information will be a useful record for those who were involved on the day, and document people's concerns and ideas for use by individuals, consumer groups, service providers and governments for use when planning for our future.



Members of the organising committee with MC; from left Pauline Marsh, Cecily Gilson, Jennifer Line, MC Doug Chipman, Marie Kennedy

### 3. Snapshot of the day

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#### **Who came?**

160 people attended the forum and they came from urban, regional and rural areas of Tasmania. Most participants were women, the majority were over 65 years of age and 6 people were under 50 years of age. Some local government areas provided transport, for example, Brighton, West Tamar, Glenorchy and the Huon Valley. There was a mix of both users and providers of services for elderly people, many people indicating they were both (see Appendix B).

Home and Community Care (HACC) services were approached by the organising committee, in a deliberate effort to enable people to attend who might otherwise find it difficult, due to the need for assistance with access and transport. Representatives from a number of HACC day centres attended, and others receiving community care assistance.

#### **What Happened?**

##### **Opening**

The forum was opened by the coordinator Jennifer Line, followed by a welcome to country from Kaye McPherson. MC Clarence Alderman Doug Chipman introduced the speakers.

##### **The speakers**

Adriana Taylor and Jock Campbell, Mayors of Glenorchy and Clarence respectively, offered their support for the forum. Guest speakers Margaret Reynolds, from National Disability Services, and Ron Limb, editor of Prime Times magazine, gave their perspectives on the theme for the forum, our lives and our future.

## **The workshops**

Participants broke into small groups of 8-9 people, and generally moved to tables with people they did not know. Participants discussed their lives and their futures around the general themes of where people live, what they do and who they mix with. Each group briefly reported back to the whole forum, identifying one or two key issues that emerged and ideas for actions.

## **Lunch**

Lunch and morning tea were provided by the Country Women's Association and people took the opportunity to keep chatting while they ate. Lunchtime also offered the opportunity to join organised discussion groups around topics of:

- Computers and Useful Websites (June Hazzlewood);
- Sustainable living (Environment Centre);
- Music Performance and Visual Arts (Maggie McKerracher);
- Third Age Learning; and
- Transport and safe driving (Tony Brown, DIER).

People also perused displays from CareLink, the Seniors Bureau, and Glenorchy, Clarence, Brighton and Hobart City Councils.

## **Entertainment**

After lunch the SAGES theatre group *Act Your (R)age* presented insightful short skits which dealt humorously with issues to do with ageing, and *Sing Australia* led a sing-along.

## **Closing**

Doug Chipman closed the day by offering a neat summary of the day, including the issues that had been raised and the possibilities for future actions. People completed evaluation and comment forms.

## 6. Workshops

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### **Aims**

To achieve the aims of the forum, workshops for small group discussions were held. The aims of the workshops were to enable discussion about how people could sustain three basic human requirements of a happy and healthy life, as ageing brought changes to their lives. The three requirements were determined as appropriate housing, activity and social interaction; or more simply:

- a place to live,
- something to do, and
- people to be with.

The workshops also aimed to energise facilitators by the responses of participants and to assist service providers to discover new approaches to issues, that they could then implement, or hand on to other relevant agencies.

### **Structure**

Discussion groups consisted of 8-10 participants for 1 ½ hours, and people were encouraged to join with people they didn't know. To facilitate this, participants were handed a coloured marker on arrival, and directed to the corresponding table. Discussions were recorded on either on an A4 recording tool, butchers paper, or both. Additional comments were recorded by participants on comment cards.

Groups were facilitated by people chosen intentionally for their interest and skills in not only workshop facilitation, but also due to their involvement in either local government community development, community aged care service provision, or other government or non-government aged planning work area. The purpose of this was to provide an opportunity for conversation between older people and those who work in areas of influence on older people's lives, that is, to improve the

dialogue between providers and consumers, policy makers and the elderly public, and between government and its constituents.

The majority of facilitators attended a pre-forum planning morning to assist with the development of the workshop structure.

Facilitators on the day were:

Sue Chaston	Health Promotion Officer, Department of Health and Human Services
Heather Nichols	Clinical Nurse Consultant, Rehabilitation and Aged Services Liaison Team, Royal Hobart Hospital
Lily Ormerod	Carers Tasmania
Sharon Stewart	Community Development Officer, Sorell Council
David Eddington	Chair, Clarence Council Positive Ageing Committee
Rebecca Essex	Community Development Officer, Glenorchy City Council
Greg Peart	Regional Manager (South East), Adult and Community Learning Services, Dept of Education
John Klug	Community Development Officer, Brighton Council
Kerry McCormick	Community Development Officer, West Tamar Council
Simon Fountain	Project Officer, Migrant Resource Centre
Heather Cuthbertson	Manager, Seniors Bureau, Department of Premier and Cabinet
Peter Orpin	Senior Research Fellow, University of Tasmania Department of Rural Health
Hilary Brown	Advocate, Dementia Rights Advocacy Project, Advocacy Tasmania
Sandi MacKintosh	Senior Policy Officer, Women Tasmania
Lisa Warner	Public Guardian
Julie Hall	Community Development Officer, Kingborough Council
Suna D'Eye	Student Social Worker, TasCOSS
Yvonne Haberfeld	Older Women's Health Worker, Hobart Women's Health Centre

## ***Discussions***

Participants shared their ideas, heard from their peers and discussed practical and creative responses to the changes that time and age brings to people's lives.

People raised issues and problems about their current situations, but also talked about the positive things in their lives. People shared ideas about successful ways of living, activities to do and ways to ensure social contact. As well as talking about their current situations, people discussed ideas for the future.

Group scribes consisted of either a second facilitator, delegated group participant or the principle facilitator. The following feedback comes from workshop summaries recorded by scribes and from comments written by participants.

## **Where we live**

### **Housing**

Generally, people stated they **wanted to stay at home**. The people who were happy with their housing situation were those who lived near family, in a neighbourhood with a good community spirit, in walkable distance to services and in a house that was easy to maintain. Having a choice about housing was important, and being able to live in dwellings that allowed people to be independent with minimal support was highly desirable.

The importance of **suitable housing** was raised. People voiced concerns about poor availability of appropriately sized housing, in particular of smaller, affordable, manageable homes.

*With shortages of accommodation, is it valid that many singles live in 2 or 3 bedroom houses?*

Concerns about the **costs of moving** were raised (including stamp duty, the rental market and bonds), the physical difficulties of packing up and moving house, and the loss of community that occurs when people move. The value of home modifications to avoid moving, and to prolong independence, was discussed. Easily adaptable housing, including adjustments to entrances, was valued:

*10-15 years ago there were a lot of adaptable houses, now having to adapt houses at a higher cost - lighting, bench tops, grab rails, access. It's sad when people have to leave their home and a known area due to a minor issue such as access.*

**Home maintenance** was a recurring issue. People stated they needed houses that were easy to maintain because doing so allowed them to continue to be independent. If maintenance assistance was required, people stated that they had difficulties getting help to clean gutters and change light globes in particular. Tradesmen are difficult to come by, and are expensive, and neighbours and family offer many people the assistance they need. However, other people did not want to burden their families.

*The affordability of maintaining your own home impacts on your capacity to stay there.*

*We need home maintenance services that are preventative, that enable people to stay in their homes hale and hearty.*

*We need people to do practical things, like change light globes, stack wood, change a washer, help with shopping and recharge car batteries.*

Some people were concerned about the mix of elderly and young people that happens in public housing areas, preferring elderly villages. Others were concerned about **no pets** policies that precluded them from keeping animals, as pets were considered invaluable.

**Gardening** was thought important by many, and concerns were raised about the lack of affordable gardening assistance. Some had problems with their **body corporate** and felt they needed support to handle these situations.

People stated that they were not planning to move from their homes, but if they did need to then they would know the right time.

*We need affordable places to live when we are no longer able to care for ourselves.*

## **Transport**

Closely associated with housing, issues about transport for elderly people were raised by many groups. The **suitability** of transport for older people was a concern; people stated that easy access onto buses, assistance from drivers, improved bus shelters in some areas would increase their usage.

*There is an increased reliance on public transport as you age.*

The **flexibility** of services was also raised. People stated they would like to see smaller buses that travelled over greater areas, offering door-to-door services, transport between smaller towns and improved weekend services. In some areas buses were frequent and transport was working well.

*There is not much encouragement to use public transport at present.*

*Community cars work well in our area.*

The **cost** of transport prevented some people from using services. It was suggested that free transport to health centres and other services be provided. Some areas were reportedly already offering low cost community transport services for shopping and some other services. Taxi concessions were used by some people, and others car pooled. Concerns about poor availability of disabled parking were mentioned.

*We used to have a great rail service, it would be great to increase the rail service and integrate it with the buses, especially in the rural areas.*

## **What we do**

### **Social activity**

Participants in the forum were involved in an **enormous range** of social activities (see attachment C for the complete list). The importance of being socially active was a strong theme of workshop groups, and people shared with each other the existing variety of opportunities that are on offer in different areas. People also discussed the activities they would like to do in the future, such as writing books, and studying different topics. People valued keeping busy.

*Schools for Seniors gives real enjoyment, it's brilliant.*

*Experiencing different activities prompts new interests.*

*Thank heavens for U3A!*

*There's always something on the go.*

Concerns were voiced about the reliance on **volunteers** for many activities for older people, a lack of funding to ensure they would continue to operate, and the heavy amount of bureaucracy associated with community based organisations.

*If able, people can volunteer for different things, such as at the local nursery, and teaching skills.*

*We are being strangled by red tape, like police checks for volunteers and public liability insurance.*

People thought that a **lack of information** is a major barrier to social activity for people, and groups talked about this problem and about ways to improve disseminating information.

*Sometimes not knowing what is available is the issue.*

*There needs to be partnerships between groups to provide information, use each other's newsletters.*

*Prime Time magazine is good for information*

*People need to be aware of community resources - through newsletters, 50 and better centre, neighbourhood centres, neighbourhood watch, community lunches.*

**Cost** was stated to be another barrier, and the importance of low cost social options was raised.

*You can't afford Adult Ed on the pension.*

*Low cost gentle exercise classes would be good.*

For people who lived in areas with a community centre or **neighbourhood house**, their experience of these centres was positive. These centres enabled them to get access to a variety of low cost social activities, and people without such centres expressed the desire for similar facilities.

*We need meeting places of all types, not just health centres, we need community drop in centres*

*I would like to see a facility we could use as a living centre, for example, schools not being used after hours with kitchens and facilities, there could be a club membership.*

**Being confident** to meet new people, try new groups and activities was discussed. The importance of audio-loops, age-friendly access to buildings and facilities influenced people's ability to participate in social activities. So too did the availability of activities for singles, not only couples.

*Live life to the fullest while you can.*

*You're never too old to learn.*

*Reaching isolated people is really important - giving them confidence to join community groups, letting them know about activities*

The need for courses to improve **technological skills** for elderly people, including computer and mobile phone use was raised. People felt they were discriminated against if they could not bank or pay bills using a computer. The value of youth and elderly people working together to address this problem was mentioned by a few groups.

*One idea would be to have courses for seniors to become more computer and mobile phone savvy - we could link with schools to do this.*

### **Political activity**

Discussions about being politically active as people age were held in most groups. People were passionate about the communities they lived in and they talked about the importance of **speaking out**, and of being heard by politicians. They also expressed the sentiment that they were not being listened to, and that this was frustrating for people.

*We need to be brave to make our needs known.*

*People are not angry enough because generally things are better than for previous generations.*

*People are opting out who might otherwise be a political voice, for example the grey nomads.*

*The voices of older people are drowned out by others, people are dissipated and overwhelmed.*

People were keen to see **governments** at all levels address the concerns of older people, and to provide **funding** for the projects that they saw as being beneficial.

*Band aid fixes are not good enough.*

*The government needs to consult with people about their needs.*

*We need long term-planning and community consultation that is focussed.*

*Facilities in the community need to be supported by governments.*

*Small government outlays in supporting programs like U3A would have major positive returns.*

Groups discussed the ways that older people, as a diverse group of people, could have more of an **influence on government** ageing policies and on the decisions made that affect them.

*Keep politically aware.*

*Re-establish grey power: organise petitions, join activist groups, form an elder representative group, write submissions to governments.*

*Use the buying power of seniors, money talks.*

*Increase corporate responsibility.*

*Raise issues and discuss what we can do, what we can contribute.*

*Get in and do it, and the pollies will jump on board.*

People were interested in finding ways to **work collectively**, and to make opportunities to join together, and to call upon and use their collective skills and experience.

*Be proactive - find ways that we can move our ideas to actions.*

*We could be utilising the skills and knowledge that older people have in the community.*

*Grey power needs to be as one group, not fragmented.*

*Platinum power! A more collaborative approach, we need unity, to advocate in numbers.*

*It starts with us.*

## **Financial matters**

Issues about the **costs** associated with ageing, and the difficulties of living on the **aged pension**, or on a fixed superannuation income were raised in workshop groups. People stated they felt it was getting progressively difficult to manage on the pension in particular. They also stated that they felt they needed to hold onto money in order to cope with unforeseen circumstances, rather than spending it on quality of life now.

*Everything costs - we have trouble making ends meet.*

*Everyone should be assisted with rebates and concessions, pensioners and self-funded retirees alike.*

*Need concessions not to be linked to assets.*

*They should subsidise veterinarian costs so people can afford to keep pets*

Some groups discussed the **confusion** around dealing with financial institutions and other organisations, particularly when a spouse had died who had previously handled these matters.

*Reverse mortgages are a trap.*

*Centrelink is completely inappropriate for elderly or sick people, there's no public toilets and the information they give you is fast and the forms are complicated.*

People also talked about the importance of **planning** for a secure financial future, and some of the barriers they faced in trying to plan, such as confusion with financial matters and not having generated superannuation or savings during their lifetime.

*Plan for later, earlier.*

*Spend money on yourself not on the inheritance for the children.*

*Organise an enduring Power of Attorney or guardianship.*

*I'd like to get a job so I can retire.*

## Health and wellbeing

People in groups discussed both the **physical and psychological challenges** that come with ageing. The connections between physical and mental health were strong.

*We don't feel old psychologically, but physically it bites to remind us.*

*Small tasks become the hardest.*

*You need to listen to your body.*

*We need to address psycho-social issues as well as the physical ones.*

*If you can't hear you just switch off.*

Suggestions for dealing with health challenges included better **acoustics** in public venues, providing **respite** for when you do become unwell and to use **natural therapies** alongside medical therapies to deal with problems. Services such as **mobile libraries** and mobile groceries for people who were not able to leave their homes were also suggested.

People also suggested a **Health Promotion** campaign would be beneficial, to encourage people to plan for positive ageing. The importance of maintaining independence through good health was a strong theme from groups.

*Stay healthy - stay alive.*

*Stay healthy and independent.*

*Change the ambulance waiting at the bottom of the cliff mentality.*

*Introduce free medical checks every seven years to reveal any previously undiagnosed medical problem. Any preventative guidelines given to that person would be invaluable. In this way each individual could be responsible for maintaining their own health and wellbeing.*

Many groups discussed issues with **General Practitioners and medical specialists**. People stated that GP Care Programs enabled them to manage their health successfully, because they increased their understanding of their medical condition, for example, people with Parkinson's syndrome. The lack of GPs, especially after-hours, was of concern, as were waits of up to 3 weeks for GP appointments.

Waiting for appointments at hospitals for medical specialists caused anguish, and there were also worries about services being moved out of small areas to larger centres, and of bed closures in local hospitals. People were keen to see an accessible and easy to use health system.

*We need more medical specialists, and after-hours Doctors, the government is not listening.*

*Reduce the number of hospitals but improve the transport to them. People in remote areas with health problems are constantly anxious that if they have a heart attack, for example, they will not get treatment in time. More emergency transport is essential.*

Private **medical insurance** was stated to be unaffordable on the pension, but felt necessary owing to the long waiting times to see specialists in public hospitals.

Many issues were raised by groups about **community care services**. People on the whole felt that improvements to community care would assist people to remain independent at home for longer, and have the additional benefits of reducing the demand on acute care services.

*There are not enough HACC services.*

*The local government is expected to fill gaps in community care services.*

*Injury recovery can mean people are taking up hospital beds unnecessarily - increased money for community care services could improve this.*

*In our area we need more community nurses.*

People expressed concerns that **informal supports** from family and friends are not always desirable or available.

*There are generational changes in the willingness to provide support: 25-35 year olds are more self-focussed. There are financial and social influences.*

*People have the right to independence, without the extra imposition on family and friends.*

*Sometimes people are dependent on services, away from family supports.*

**Community Centres** were valued by many, especially in rural areas, as a place where people could access supports and assistance, information and preventative health programs. Some people suggested they would like to have more input into community care services, for example, the Meals on Wheels menu.

Flexibility in the type of community care services available was seen as important in being able to stay independent.

*They need to balance independence with support and to focus on ability, not disability.*

*We need flexible services that meet peoples' needs and requirements.*

*There is a need to develop techniques to minimise work, for example bath cleaning.*

*The kindest thing we can do is understand where people are at.*

*People were not prepared to do what I needed, they were really only surface cleaners. And on several occasions they have just not turned up.*

Issues around home maintenance and gardening are covered under point i) (housing), but have relevance to the flexibility of community care also. A further suggestion was put forward:

*A community work register would be useful - a register of people (for example retired, students, unemployed, casual, people with disabilities) who are willing to do odd jobs at a set rate of pay for people who cannot do the work.*

Concerns about the impact of **negative stereotypes of older people** on general wellbeing were expressed. There was a desire to see positive images in the media.

*There are often negative perceptions of ageing and older people - and prejudice against grey hair.*

*We need to increase the public face of positive ageing - myth-busting images, to change the images of older people on TV.*

*Positive attitudes and positive models are important.*

*It would be good to use acting and media to promote the positive aspects of ageing. Joyce Batchelor, of the Mary's Grange reach out program, has already got a series of images of people exercising and using computers. Maybe these could be used as TV advertisements?*

## **Who we mix with**

### **Isolation and community**

Some participants were troubled by **loneliness** or by a sense of an absence of community where they lived. People discussed the different issues that arose for people who felt isolated from friends and family.

*There are many difficulties for people with no family or other social contacts.*

*Where there is a lack of sense of community there is a lack of identity and connectedness.*

*My family are on the mainland and overseas - people are less likely to see it as their role to look after family now.*

*We need more opportunities, like today [the forum] to mix with other people from different communities.*

Some people expressed that **fears** about their safety were accentuated by their isolation, and by their feelings of poor community spirit.

*Fear is constant – safety and security issues in some communities.*

*There is no one at night when you live alone, that's the worst.*

*Media images are not helping – sensationalised images are not helping communities to feel safe.*

Some people were also concerned that those who were isolated could not be included in **consultation** processes, and could therefore not have a say about what their needs were, nor offer their suggestions for changes.

*Who will ask us what we need – how do we make connections and contacts?*

*Community networking can be difficult*

*How do we approach people about various things like hoons and wandering dogs, without causing ill will?*

For some people who felt isolated, there was a desire to **improve their situation** and the situation for others.

*We need a return of communities, as too many people are isolated and lonely.*

*Unfortunately, I find I live in a neighbourhood and not a community, but I will lend my support needed to change this situation.*

*We need community central points, and we need to decentralise services, bringing them back into smaller areas.*

People who did feel a strong sense of **community and connectedness** with people spoke very positively about the values it brought to their own lives, and to the broader community.

*Community knit together retired, elderly, youth, disabled people, homeless, consumers, tax payers, business, cultural groups, community colleges, schools, churches, libraries, parks, artists, book clubs, hospitals, transport.*

*Every individual brings value to community: Gifts of the head (knowledge), gifts of the heart (values), gifts of the hands (skills).*

*Family and friends are important.*

*A network of friends is important.*

Many **suggestions** were made at the forum about the ways that social connectedness and strong community could be created and maintained.

*Break down the barriers between generations - involve high schools. Build up relationships and respect, it has ripple effects.*

*Make sure no one in your street is lonely.*

*Know your neighbours - utilise and connect with your neighbours.*

*Keep people around you.*

*Invite people to things, make them welcome and wanted.*

*Groups could have a buddy/mentor system, or a bring a friend day.*

*Get involved with Senior Citizen groups*

*I see a big need for every community to have a public place where people can gather for public and social occasions.*

People also spoke about the value of **caring** for others, that is, of being people who looked out for others in the community. For example, people spoke about grandparenting, looking after disabled family members and neighbours, and of the value of volunteering for a range of community organisations.

## 7. Suggestions for actions

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Workshop groups at *Our Lives Our Future* came up with innovative and practical ideas for specific actions that individuals, communities, and local and state governments could implement to address some of the issues that arose from discussions. These suggestions, as recorded in workshops, follow:

### Housing

- *Universally design homes to be age-friendly*
- *Introduce a qualification system for discount tradesman rates for pensioners*
- *Implement a low cost, flexible maintenance system*
- *Join a Home Sharing program*

### Transport

- *Provide smaller buses, with better coverage*
- *Provide assistance with access onto buses*
- *Improve bus shelters*
- *Provide low cost community transport services*

### Social activity

- *Run courses for seniors on computers and mobile phone use, and link in with schools*
- *Capture the existing talent of seniors – such as through peer education classes*
- *Find ways to get information out to the community, especially to isolated people*
- *Be aware of community resources*

### Political activity

- *Work collectively*
- *Be pro-active*
- *Keep politically aware, don't drop out*
- *Write petitions, join groups, join consultations*
- *We need long term planning and community consultation that is focussed*

### Financial matters

- *Plan for later, earlier*
- *Spend money on things that improve your quality of life*

- *Use low cost options*

## **Health and wellbeing**

- *Consider the psychological as well as the physical*
- *Increase the number of GPs and improve the access to specialists in the public system*
- *Reduce the number of hospitals but increase the transport to them*
- *Increase the emphasis on health promotion and initiatives that enable people to manage their own health better, so that they can be independent for longer*
- *Improve the effectiveness of community care by offering more flexibility of services, and more home maintenance services.*
- *Push for positive images of ageing in the media*
- *Low cost gentle exercises would be good*
- *Balance independence with support*
- *Focus on ability not disability*
- *Develop techniques to minimise work*
- *A community work register would be useful*

## **Isolation and community**

- *Keep friends around you*
- *Join in activities in your local community*
- *Involve yourself with you neighbours*
- *Be proactive in getting others involved in community activities*
- *Create opportunities to mix*
- *Break down the barriers between generations*
- *Make sure no one in your street is lonely*
- *Invite people to things*

## 8. Conclusion

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The *Our Lives Our Future* forum challenges the notion that demographic change in Tasmania spells doom and gloom. The workshop discussions in particular demonstrate the interest amongst many elderly people to not only identify the positives and negatives of their current situation, but also to generate ideas for actions that could be taken to address problems or to prevent negative ageing experiences.

The key issues raised by the forum participants were:

- the need for flexible and appropriate housing, transport, services and assistance;
- the need for increased availability, information and access to social options, community care services, health and wellbeing services and medical treatment;
- the need for affordable housing, transport, social activities and health treatment;
- the undesirability of loneliness and the need to create strong communities;
- the value of consultation with policy makers and service providers, and of skill and knowledge recognition;
- financial security; and
- the value of being socially and politically active, both as individuals and collectively.

This report demonstrates that addressing ageing issues is not just the concern of individuals, rather, that positive ageing involves actions by individuals, communities and governments.

**Individuals** can take steps towards a positive future, such as:

- get involved in existing groups;
- keep learning;
- be politically aware, write submissions and join consultations;
- collaborate with others to raise issues and contribute to change;
- plan early for retirement;
- look after your health;
- keep a positive attitude to life;
- take your talents to the community;
- establish relationships with neighbours; and
- care for family and friends.

Practical steps for **communities and local governments** ensure that communities are strengthened, and provide opportunities for people to maintain their general wellbeing, health and independence, and include:

- listen to elderly people about what they would like to see done, and to do, in their communities;
- provide low cost opportunities for social contact with people;
- provide activities that people need, such as computer skills and exercise classes;
- provide facilities and transport which enables people to meet as groups;
- facilitate intergenerational interaction in communities;
- improve the dissemination of information about social options;
- ensure disabilities are accommodated, such as hearing loops;
- facilitate collective action on issues of concern, through consultation and involvement;
- provide assistance that is appropriate to peoples needs; and
- provide services that are locally based.

And finally, at a policy level, **state and federal governments** can also assist people to age well, for example:

- consult with elderly people about policies that concern them;
- provide adequate care for the most vulnerable people and when people are unwell;
- fund community services that more appropriately meet people's needs;
- provide housing that is affordable and appropriate to elderly people's needs;
- provide affordable, flexible, suitable transport;
- provide adequate concessions and rebates for elderly people;
- improve access to public funded medical treatment;
- increase funding for health promotion programs; and
- promote positive public images of elderly people.

## ***Evaluation of OUR LIVES OUR FUTURE FORUM***

### Response rates

- There were 91 responses, which represents more than half of those who registered on the day, and includes answers from some facilitators and presenters.
- The percentages quoted relate to the number of answers for that particular question.
- The answers about services are not reliable because of the constructions of the question.

### About Participants

- Ratio of females to males was about 5 to 1.
- Just over half were over 65 (55%) and only 6 were under 50.
- The number of service providers was similar to the number of service users and 26 indicated they both provided and received services for over 50s.
- 31 people identified as carers, and 23 indicated they were also providers and users of services for over 50s as well.

### Coming to Another Forum?

- Of those who responded 94% said they would come to another forum, and 6% (all female) weren't sure.
- Of those who would come again 64% said next year and 36% said in two years.
- Senior's Week was chosen by 42 respondents, while 17 said any time of year would be acceptable.
- Almost all (88%) thought the venue was excellent or fine, and only one person did not like it.
- Almost as many participants thought the Eastern Shore was a good place to have the Forum, though a few stipulated buses must be provided.) There were also recommendations for holding it in others areas (Glenorchy) and regions (north) and for rotating the locality.

### Words to Describe Forum

- The most commonly used words include informative (37 times), interesting (22 times) and friendly (16 times).
- Other frequently used words (3 to 8 times) were enjoyable, challenging, well organised, stimulating, helpful, useful, good, inspiring, thought provoking, encouraging, entertaining, enlightening, fun, great, positive, sharing, excellent.
- Other positive words were: life altering, spirited, wonderful, rewarding.
- Negative comments were very few: too squashed, noisy, repetitive, hurried.

How do you feel about your future?

Strong: 18 unhappy: 7

happy : 36 confused: 14

#### Other Comments about the Future

- all of below at some time
- at this stage enjoying a healthy and full lifestyle
- bit anxious
- but confused at times
- concerned but optimistic
- confident
- eager
- full of possibilities
- future - don't know what's ahead of us!! Happy now!
- good
- great all the hard work will have been done
- hesitant
- more positive thoughts after today
- now happy future don't know
- optimistic
- positive
- positive but realistic
- ready for change

#### Preferences for time of year

- after winter
- any Friday
- any week day
- anytime
- Autumn
- in six months?
- not winter-I am a grey nomad
- not Seniors Week
- not Seniors Week- too much else on
- October or spring weather encourages us
- October to February
- other
- school holidays-buses easier to book
- September
- spring/summer
- this time
- winter

#### Other Comments

- communications of group-as we age-our needs very important.
- discussion group around tables successful.
- community awareness get to know your neighbours let alone love them.
- collaborative effort of different groups.
- essential needs-transport, socialising (one-stop-shop for anything goes).
- future can be self determined.
- looking at what's needed using one voice.
- grey power to pursue a reliable Health Department hospitals etc.
- looking through the eyes of "platinum power".
- too squashed for workshops.
- more use made of numbers in population to promote above.
- thankful that I don't have some of the problems that others do.
- lucky door prize-example voucher for appropriate service.

**Words used to describe the forum**

accessible	lively
challenging	more
comfortable	noisy
communicative	OK
companionship	open
compassionate	optimistic
creative	organised
direction	people power
discussions	platinum power
diverse	positive
encouraging	promising
enjoyable	realising!
enlightening	relaxed
entertaining	relevant
enthusiasm	repetitive
enthusiastic	rewarding
essential	sharing
excellent	social interaction
exciting	sound!(meaning good)
fascinating	spirited
focused	stimulating
focusing	terrific
friendly	thought provoking
fun	thoughtful
genuine	timely
good	togetherness
good humoured	too squashed
good speakers	useful
gray power	very good
great atmosphere	very good morning
great company	very helpful people
helpful	very informative
helpful and friendly people	vibrant
hope	vocal
hopeful	well conducted
hurried	well organised
illuminative	well presented
incomplete	well run
information sharing	wonderful
informative	worthwhile
informed	
inspirational	
inspiring	
intelligent!	
interesting	
invigorating	
involved	
life altering	

## *Social activities and interests mentioned by participants*

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Schools for Seniors	Walking dog
Personal tours	Music
History tours	Computers
Geography tours	Meals on wheels
Keeping a diary	Neighbourhood centre activities
U3A	Photography
Church	Knitting projects for charities
Volunteering	Baby sitting
Hospice,	Card making
Services for people with disabilities,	Sewing
Cancer council,	Art classes
Print radio station,	Quilting
Probus	Correspondence
Fundraising	Darts
Education	Bus trips
Social activities	Eating with friends program
Street parties	Project wake up with Tas Fire Service
Gardening	TMAG
Reading/writing	Men's sheds
Community centre activities	Historical societies
"helping hands"	Political groups
Line dancing	Environmental groups
Choir	Pensioners Union
Arts and craft	
Shopping	