



COTA NEW SOUTH WALES

Level 6, 280 Pitt Street
Sydney NSW 2000

www.cotansw.com.au
ABN 31 090 328 955

P:(02) 9286 3860
F:(02) 9286 3872

Response to

Draft Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney to 2031

March 2013

Prepared by
Dr Jane Bringolf
Project Manager, Liveable Communities
COTA New South Wales
June 2013.

About COTA NSW

COTA NSW (formerly Council on the Ageing) is the peak organisation for people aged over 50 years. It is an independent, apolitical, consumer-based, non-government organisation. COTA NSW takes the perspective of older Australians and promotes positive responses to our ageing society.

Draft Metropolitan Strategy: A strong global city, a liveable local city

Introduction

COTA NSW welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft Strategy. We focus attention on the issue of population ageing, which is briefly acknowledged within the document. We have also commented on the NSW Planning White Paper similarly.

An ageing population

We note the acknowledgement of an ageing population in the introductory pages of the document, but find much of this aspect is lost in discussions of housing, transport and accessibility. We therefore refer you to the NSW Government Ageing Strategy, which is a whole of government strategy.

Urban environments need to enable 'active ageing' so that as people age they can continue to live independent lives in familiar surroundings which are supportive, and healthy environments.

Stereotypes depict older people as living in secluded specialised housing where they can quietly live out their remaining years. This has resulted in assumptions that retirement villages or specially designed infill developments are all that are needed. However there is a growing body of evidence that shows older people prefer to stay put in their current dwelling, and remain part of their neighbourhood where they can maintain their social networks.

Policies of 'ageing-in-place' are now understood as living in one's own home with perhaps some assistance from community support services. It is less understood that this also means neighbourhoods and public places need to cater for people who are ageing. Indeed, people are not just ageing-in-place, they are ageing-all-over-the-place. Strategies and policies therefore need to be adjusted so that older people are included in decisions for the general community rather than assuming they will all be catered for by a specialised development.

Older people are not alone in needing urban environments that are more sympathetic, both physically and socially. Inclusively designed built environments are usable by everyone including the next generation of children. It should be noted that the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme will also have an impact on the planning and design of built form, as more people with disabilities will begin participating in community and economic life.

Appropriate urban design, transportation systems, street construction and maintenance, and compact settlements close to facilities means that more people can get out and about and remain active and involved in community life. Environments planned and designed with older people in mind are environments suitable for younger people. The reverse is not true.

Our comments refer to the summary document available on the website rather than the full document, which has been difficult to download.

Homes

COTA NSW agrees with the need for more housing and more housing choice to suit the population as it changes over time. We also need more housing choice that accommodates people across their lifespan and that is designed to support intergenerational living.

We note on page 12 that more than half a million homes are to be constructed within twenty years, and that different types of housing is required as the population changes over time.

One factor that is not clearly articulated is that one of those changes will be a greater number of older people who will want housing choice. One of the challenges will be to provide housing that will accommodate an ageing population. True housing choice is not just a case of choosing between one retirement village and another, or entering specialized “aged” or “senior” settings, but to choose to stay put in the family home if this is the preferred option.

This requires the implementation of universal housing design in all new housing so that people have choices in all kinds of settings including their local neighborhood as well as those want to move to another location.

Livable Housing Design Guidelines

The principles of universal design are included in a voluntary housing design code which is supported by the property and construction industry. The *Livable Housing Design Guidelines*¹ are an important step forward in recognising an ageing population. Indeed, these Guidelines are being taken up in retirement village development as a replacement for the outmoded Adaptable Housing Standard (AS4299), which is also a voluntary code.

The argument for implementing these Guidelines in all new housing, which is the main aim of Livable Housing Australia, is that specialised housing in pockets here and there does not solve the problem of equitable access to the homes of friends and family members.

There is a 60% probability that any new home built today will need to accommodate a person with a permanent core disability in its lifespan, and the probability that it will need to accommodate a visitor with a disability is 91%². Clearly we need to create housing stock that addresses this issue. We can no longer keep designing homes as if we are never going to grow old, or believing that all people as they age need or want specialised accommodation. Private housing represents a major portion of our public infrastructure as a dwelling rarely has one owner during its lifespan.

¹ Livable Housing Australia (2012), www.lha.org.au

² Smith, SK., Rayer, S., Smith, EA. (2008). “Ageing and Disability – Implications for the Housing Industry and Housing Policy in the United States”, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 74, no. 3 (2008): 289-306.

COTA NSW recommends the Metropolitan Strategy encourage the recognition and application of *Livable Housing Design Guidelines* across all new housing types.

Livable Housing Design and SEPP Seniors

The advantage of encouraging the application of the *Livable Housing Design Guidelines* (LHDG) is that concern over the SEPP (Housing for Seniors and People with a Disability) can be addressed easily. The key elements of accessibility and adaptability are inherent in the LHDG and therefore if all new housing is designed and constructed to this standard, the need for specialised dwellings is significantly diminished. We recognise however that for people with specific disabilities, further design features are needed, but the LHDG provides a good platform for these features to be included later³.

Jobs

With extended lifespans many older Australians wish to continue working, and some will want to work part time. While part time work is a matter between employers and employees, other factors are impinge on an older person's ability and desire to remain or re-join the workforce.

COTA NSW supports the strategy to create jobs close to where people live and to provide cross city transport connections as this will support older people to remain in the workforce.

Transport

While active ageing includes notions of walking and cycling, not all older people (or younger people for that matter) are able to engage in active travel and use public transport.

Although COTA NSW supports environmentally conscious transport options in general, as mobility decreases, reliance on a car may be the best way to keep people active and involved socially and economically. Suitable and well located parking places should also be considered as part of transport infrastructure.

The design of transport infrastructure should also be age-friendly. This includes the design of buses, trains, light rail, stations, bus stops, timetables, and even footpaths that adjoin and link public transport facilities.

³ This issue is also being addressed currently by the ME64 Committee of Australian Standards where guidelines are being developed for people with specific disabilities in lieu of the Adaptable Housing Standard (AS4299 which will become AS1428.8).

Infrastructure and public spaces

COTA NSW supports the plan to provide better access to public spaces that offer good social, cultural and recreational opportunities.

These spaces, once again need to provide access to parking, toilets, seating, lighting and wayfinding with older people in mind. Such elements are also good for people of all ages. It should be noted that intergenerational activities are more easily accomplished when the environment is suitable for all ages.

Environment

COTA NSW supports strategies that result in energy saving and minimise the effects of climate change. In delivering resilient neighbourhood and building design to be better prepared for the future, thought should be given to the lifespan of homes and their suitability across generational change. Homes that no longer suit people as they age, and therefore need modification, create more waste for landfill. This also results in increased costs for the older home owner. Building to universal design standards minimises the need for later modifications.

In conclusion we refer you to the NSW Government Ageing strategy and the contents therein for more information about the intent of the NSW Government on the impact of ageing on all portfolios.