

## Results of 2014 Community Focus Groups

### Aspects about Darwin that older people find attractive

When asked what they like about living in the NT, participants highlighted the climate, the lifestyle including the many Seniors' events, and in general the services and discounts for Seniors in the NT are better than those in the other areas of Australia.

#### *Transport*

The only public transport option available for Northern Territorians is the public bus service. There were mixed responses about the public bus system but generally the participants were happy with the service of the bus drivers such as courtesy, the accessibility of the buses such as the low steps and the ramps. There were mixed responses regarding priority seating for older people.

Both focus groups discussed favourably \$500 free interstate or overseas flight incentive being available to people who hold valid concession cards as part of the NT Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme (NTPCCS)

[http://health.nt.gov.au/Aged\\_and\\_Disability/Subsidies/NT\\_Pensioner\\_and\\_Carer\\_Concession\\_Scheme\\_NTPCCS/index.aspx](http://health.nt.gov.au/Aged_and_Disability/Subsidies/NT_Pensioner_and_Carer_Concession_Scheme_NTPCCS/index.aspx).

Seniors can also use this travel entitlement to bring a friend or family member living interstate or overseas to visit them in the NT. However, they mentioned that the incentive used to be \$1200 but was dropped to \$500 with the change of Government.

Many of the participants still drive a car and were satisfied with the driver registration concession they receive in the NT and the free driver's licence.

The introduction of Segways to Darwin in early 2014, by a private company, was mentioned with some participants mentioning this would be a good way for the older community members to navigate the city.

#### *Housing*

The groups were happy with the public housing maintenance service and thought the housing was well-located and close to services.

A few participants stressed the importance of living on the ground floor as they feel safer. They expressed a safety fear of being followed into elevators to get to the upper floors and also a slow exit if entering and surprising a burglar on an upper floor.

#### *Social Participation*

The Focus Group were happy with the multitude of Seniors' events on offer in the NT mentioning Seniors Month, and also the affordability of attending activities such as the discounts offered at the races and the cinema.

#### *Respect and Social Inclusion*

The participants discussed that it is easy to meet people in Darwin as people in the community are generally friendly.

#### *Civic Participation and Employment*

The majority of the participants do not want to work and want to enjoy retirement with the exception of a few who enjoyed being employed and volunteering.

#### *Communication*

Printed information in the mail was the most favoured source of receiving information and also the information on community, school and church noticeboards, in the local Sun Newspaper, and Channel Ten television channel's Community Space segment.

The City of Darwin Library was mentioned as a very useful tool with Information Technology (IT) assistance.

The remote residents mentioned that they rely heavily on word-of-mouth communication to receive information.

### ***Community Support and Health Services***

The Indigenous participant was particularly happy with the NT health services, receiving speedy, efficient and affordable care and mentioned Danila Dilba as being particularly helpful.

Telecross, a telephone service provided by the Australian Red Cross in which older community members receive a phone call every morning, is a welcomed service.

D&R Community Services <http://www.drcommunityservices.com.au> and Calvary Silver Circle <http://www.calvarysilvercircle.org.au> which provide Home and Community Care (HACC) such as cleaning and shopping at an affordable price were also highly regarded by the participants.

### ***Outdoor Spaces and Buildings***

There was a general consensus that there were enough green spaces in Darwin city with the Esplanade particularly being age-friendly as it is well lit and patrolled. Another attractive age-friendly outdoor space feature is the mounted police frequently patrolling Darwin city.

### **Issues of concern for older people living in Darwin**

Participants raised many issues of concern to them. The key areas included efficient and accessible transport, affordable and suitable housing, and safety.

#### ***Transport***

The focus groups mentioned issues with safety and the problem of intoxicated commuters and other disturbances on the buses and also at the Cavanagh Street bus station.

The lack of respect on the buses is an issue for some of the participants such as disrespectful children (there was a mixed response as to whether it was younger or older children), bad language, backpackers and tourists being non-courteous and not obeying the priority seating rules.

It was suggested that the buses extend the hours. Currently the service ceases at 10:30pm therefore discouraging Seniors from using the buses for evening activities.

There is an issue with the information received regarding the timetables and maps. It was mentioned the font sizes need to be larger and there is too much information making it confusing.

Regarding the affordability of the public bus service, the three hour time limit placed on one dollar ticket, seems to be ineffective and it was suggested that it would be better if there was a day pass for Seniors.

Bus stops are not conveniently located, often being too far apart and not all of the shelters protect people from the harsh Darwin weather.

None of the participants use taxis as they said the service is too expensive.

There are concerns with the fading paint on the bitumen of the disability parking bays displaying the disability parking only information. It was suggested the disability parking bay notices need to be more visible to deter people from disobeying the rules and parking in these bays.

Parking at the hospital is an issue as the signage is confusing, the handicap parking spots are too far away from the ticket machine and it was also mentioned that the ticket machines are facing the sun making it impossible to see the screen especially for those whom are vision impaired.

Parking fees in the city were also seen as being too expensive.

## ***Housing***

The length of time on the waiting list for aged care housing and public housing is an issue of concern for the focus group participants, mentioning the average waiting time being eight years. This indicates that there is a lack of available aged care accommodation options for older community members. It was mentioned that people with medical issues received first preference and there was a perception of discrimination when it came to the waiting list selection.

Some public housing does not have air conditioning.

Some of the participants mentioned a safety fear with the use of elevators for example being followed into a lift and also living on upper floors as they cannot escape quickly if need be, therefore it is an accessibility issue with the public housing and aged care housing.

It was suggested that future aged care housing should be designed to cater for the older person and their carer, therefore two bedroom dwellings as opposed to the current generic one bedroom dwelling thus encouraging ageing in place. It was suggested that financial incentives were needed for age-friendly designed housing.

A caretaker on premises was also looked upon as a necessity. When discussing multi-generational accommodation options, some participants mentioned that the noise factor was a barrier to this with the younger generations in Darwin and surrounds being noisy due to Darwin being a somewhat “party town” because of its transient nature and the Fly-in/ Fly-out (FIFO) inhabitants.

## ***Social Participation***

Transportation issues for example the bus service finishing every night at 10:30pm and also the locations of activities are sometimes inaccessible for example a Seniors lunch at a Winnellie location is not serviced by a bus route.

It was mentioned that the NT Seniors month in August clashed with the Darwin Festival and that there are too many events concentrated around July and August and not the rest of the year.

## ***Respect and Social Inclusion***

As mentioned above regarding respect on the buses, the participants expressed that there is an “unhealthy” younger generation in the NT describing them as rude, disrespectful, “waiting for handouts” and often fight in public.

They also mentioned Darwin as being perceived as a “party town” and the unhealthy culture of the FIFOs, particularly in the Darwin CBD therefore inhibiting enriching intergenerational interactions.

Remote community members mentioned there was an issue of isolation.

## ***Civic Participation and Employment***

There are a few barriers to older people working including the Centrelink cut off limit in which one can only earn a certain amount of income until their pension and other forms of income support is reduced.

It was also discussed that there are compensation issues for older workers in which they are discriminated against if they have a heart or back problem.

Many seniors are volunteering as bus drivers however there is a need for volunteers transport to and from volunteering activities to be subsidised or be reimbursed for their travel expenses.

### ***Communication***

The focus group participants were generally “anti-computers” and prefer to receive or read information via hard copy.

### ***Community Support and Health Services***

There is an issue with the utilities services in which a private company recently took over the electricity service and did not apply the Seniors concession which indicated that the service is not administratively coordinated efficiently and that perhaps the service professionals do not have appropriate skills and training to communicate effectively with older people.

It was suggested that the Community needs a multi “one-stop shop” for essential services in Darwin and Palmerston so making these services more accessible.

### ***Outdoor Spaces and Buildings***

More public seating around the city was a suggestion by the participants and signage and way finding is a concern to older community members.

Footpaths are perceived as not being wide enough and there are often obstructions. There is a concern with the increasing use of segways around the city in terms of safety, and the regulation and policies relating to the use of these vehicles such as parking and the use on footpaths.

Limited cycle paths are also a safety issue for the focus group participants as is the safety issue in public parks.