

# A Check List for setting up a new OM:NI Group

1. Promotion of the **value of OM:NI** with a focus on:
  - Men over 55 years of age
  - Talking/discussion
  - Sharing experiences
  - Supporting one another
  - Laughing together
  
2. **Seek Advice** in the initial set up of an OM:NI group through:
  - COTA
  - Reps. from OM:NI Advisory Committee
  - Nearby current OM:NI groups (note there are 20+ OM:NI groups in Melbourne)
  - Local Council departments responsible for seniors/ageing
  
3. Developing a flyer for an **information session** on setting up a new OM:NI group which would include details on:
  - Where the meeting venue will be
  - Time/date/duration
  - Determination of who are the presenters and their assistants
  - Catering arrangements and details
  - Expression of interest forms for prospective new OM:NI members to be on hand
  - Publicity in local area of the meeting through local groups e.g.  
Probus Lions Rotary Senior Citizens Council Neighbourhood Houses Local papers
  
4. Investigating **potential venues** for new OM:NI group which includes consideration of :
  - Cost
  - Capacity
  - Ambience
  - Local Council information
  - Community centres / neighbourhood houses
  - Bendigo Bank
  - Churches
  - Retirement Villages
  - Local men's sporting clubs
  - Other .....
  
5. **Decisions** for the newly established group
  - Frequency of the meetings
  - Duration of each meeting
  - Cost
  - Agreed format of new OM:NI group's meetings according to COTA principles
  - Initial group size viability
  - Suggested successful topics as used by other groups

6. **Publicity (and ongoing promotion)** of the newly established group through:
  - the use of already developed brochures/flyers from COTA and existing OM:NI groups
  - availability of “business cards”
  - information literature placed in:
    - shop windows
    - supermarkets
    - post offices
    - waiting rooms
  - articles/ads in local papers / radio
  - Council material
  - Senior Week publications
  - Men’s Health Week brochures
  - Council Festivals
  - COTA publications
  - Personal presentations of the new OMNI group at local organisations
  
7. **Stabilization** and increase of membership through continued local groups and literature measures

## Detailed instructions for starting a men's OM:NI discussion group

To start a Group you need some older men, a venue, someone to act as a Facilitator and an agreement to adopt the OM:NI model. The essence of the model is contained in two pages of documentation; one covers the simple **guidelines** and the other the suggested meeting **format**. These can be found on the OM:NI website below the link for this starter kit.

Facilitating a meeting is best learned experientially by attending a meeting. Leadership experience can be a help. Documentation and training for **Facilitators** is available. Similarly, this material can be found below the link for this starter kit. It is not rocket science.

Organising the first meeting can take some effort, particularly publicity. Traditionally first meetings have been open public forums to inform the whole community about OM:NI to obtain expressions of interest from men and to announce the time and date of the inaugural meeting. Alternatively the meeting invites men only to a one-off discussion session with a decision to proceed at the end of this session. Many methods have been used to set up new groups. To help you decide how to proceed, here are some suggestions from experience. The following is a Table of Contents. Simply click on the topic listed and it will take you to that subject. To return to this page, simply use **CONTROL + HOME**.

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## Publicity

To make older men aware of the opportunity to be part of a group will generally require a co-ordinated publicity campaign in the local area. The focus of the publicity is the first meeting. There are 2 very different approaches to this first meeting, both successful in their own right. These are:

(1) A public meeting, allowing women to attend and provide support for the new group. Women are often very aware of the value of this social need and are often our best recruiters. Also men sometimes need a prompt from their partners to undertake this sort of activity.

(2) By using a 'Men Where Are You?' approach of inviting men to a "morning of discussion" (promoted as a once off event). This helps to "break the ice", and to instil the aspects of confidentiality and mutual trust within the group.

The men then decide at the conclusion of this event as to whether they wish to proceed with the concept of a men's discussion group (this promotes group ownership). A video clip of a group in action can be shown at this introductory meeting.

Various methods of publicity to achieving the above-mentioned first meeting are as follows:

1. A promotion within the Local Government Authority (LGA) newsletter/s that are distributed to the LGA's community on a regular basis.
2. Promotion through community "house" programmes and newsletters.
3. Mail box distribution (this is very effective when run in conjunction with the methods of publicity in Para's 1 and 2 above).
4. The use of community radio.
5. Use of the Local Press, specifically with editorial content.
6. Use of local businesses to distribute information on the upcoming initial meeting including advertising on Community Notice Boards.
7. Promotion through local interest and activity groups (e.g. RSL, Probus, Rotary, Golf and bowling clubs, business support groups (progress associations), gyms, pharmacies, medical centres, U3A's, libraries, women's interest groups, etc etc, the list is endless).
8. Word of mouth.

Ideally groups are local community groups but can also attract men from nearby communities where no group is established.

The location of all Victorian groups is published on this web site so that men can find their nearest group. This publicity often leads to an interest in commencing a new group.

There are many methods of reaching men who could be interested in attending a group. The concept of a men's discussion group generally appeals to those men who enjoy a chat, like a friendly atmosphere and want a minimum of commitment and formality.

Brochures in current use are available for distribution. Just request them at COTA Victoria, alternately you can print your own. Follow the link to download the pdf.

[https://cotavic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/COTA\\_OMNI\\_DL\\_trifold\\_web.pdf](https://cotavic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/COTA_OMNI_DL_trifold_web.pdf)

## **COTA Victoria**

Council on the Ageing Victoria (COTA Vic) can link you to men who will be able to assist you in setting up a new group. These men have "been there, done that" and are very willing to share knowledge and experience.

COTA Vic provides an umbrella for all groups in Victoria enabling them to operate with a minimum of fuss. By registering a liaison man from each group as a COTA volunteer the group is automatically covered by COTA's public liability insurance policy.

### **From the OM:NI Information Manual: Insurance**

An OM:NI volunteer is a person who has registered as a COTA/OM:NI Liaison Person using the OM:NI Liaison Registration Form. All OM:NI volunteers are covered by COTA's Personal Accident and Voluntary Workers' insurance. This insurance covers volunteers while they are on COTA business, from the time they leave home until they return, provided the journey is uninterrupted. COTA business includes facilitating OM:NI meetings and being a designated COTA volunteer at promotional events such as a local fete, Gala Day or Expo. This insurance does not cover:

- participants who attend an OM:NI meeting; they are covered by the venue's insurance
- facilitators if they socialise with an OM:NI group after their regular meeting.

This insurance coverage significantly reduces costs for participants and protects those providing support for the group. COTA also provides groups with publicity, on their web site, and support generally.

## **Community Support**

It may be useful to develop a temporary working group of interested people to assist with setting up a group. Local community support is very valuable for acceptance of the model as a legitimate and desirable community based activity for older men. Getting men to attend requires awareness of the value and safe friendly nature of an OM:NI group.

Connection with local organisations, particularly Local Councils, RSLs, Rotary Clubs and other community minded groups and businesses can be very valuable in obtaining publicity, finding a suitable venue, identifying leadership potential and, most importantly, it raises the groups credibility and profile.

## **Sustainability**

After the initial campaign, ongoing publicity will ensure the viability of the group. Existing participants can be encouraged to use word of mouth. While initial numbers may be high it is most likely there will be some drop off in numbers. Against this there will be others who will bring friends along. If numbers get too high consideration needs to be given to forming an additional group.

## **Group Size**

The ideal size of a group is between six and twelve men, although larger numbers can be managed if there is time to ensure everyone has an opportunity to contribute and get to know each other. Numbers will vary from meeting to meeting depending on a number of factors so a list of fifteen to twenty may be appropriate. Men need to feel free of any obligation to attend. However if they are enjoying the experience it will be hard to keep them away.

## **Finding a Venue**

The ideal venue will provide privacy and comfort with access to tea and coffee making facilities and toilets. Cost is also an issue and it is important that this be as low as possible to encourage attendance. Some groups manage to have free accommodation with tea and coffee included from community minded organisations like RSLs. Others require a small payment per head per meeting. As already mentioned community support can be very valuable in this regard. Meetings in private homes are discouraged to ensure independence and confidentiality.

## **Management**

Whilst the aim is to keep formalities to a minimum some activities have to be managed by the group on a voluntary basis. The Facilitator is an example of this, as is the COTA Liaison man in each group. Other activities might include setting up and tidying up the venue each meeting, collecting money, organising morning/afternoon tea, sending out a newsletter/notice of meeting, printing name tags, etc. While it may be possible for one man to do all these things, it is a good idea to spread these tasks around.

## **Costs**

Keeping contributions to a minimum to cover costs makes the job of keeping money management simple and again without formalities. This task can then generally be undertaken on trust because of the very small risk involved rather than appointing a Treasurer or requiring formal accounts to be maintained. A simple regular report of income, expenditure and cash on hand should be sufficient.

## **The Tea Break**

The tea break is an important part of the meeting and provides an additional opportunity to socialise between the two main discussion sessions. Sometimes this break becomes an extended feature of the meeting. Providing morning or afternoon tea may be an additional cost and may need a volunteer to make it happen.

## **Facilitator Selection and Training**

It is recommended that the nominated Facilitator of the new group attend at least two existing group meetings as training before starting with a new group. Alternatively an experienced Facilitator may be available to assist in the early stages of the formation of the group until a suitable Facilitator from within the group is identified. Some groups rotate the role of Facilitator.

Some have difficulty in comprehending the role of the Facilitator and are more used to the role of a Chairman. Group meetings are unlike ordinary meetings. They are generally smaller and much more intimate. There are no minutes or motions and formalities are kept to a minimum.

The main difference between a Chairman and a Facilitator is that the Facilitator is one member of the group charged with keeping the meeting on track and ensuring the agreed guidelines are adhered to. Time management is important. The whole group needs to know that the guidelines are in place and that they will each be given a fair go. They need to know what to expect if the group is to be effective. They all share the responsibility of making it a successful meeting.

While each group is autonomous and can have their own interpretation of the guidelines and meeting format, this has to be accepted by consensus. This is the reason for the Housekeeping and the Whip Around items in the meeting format. These give participants the opportunity to express concerns about how the meetings are going and propose changes. Any changes need to be based on a consensus of views.

## **Difficult People.**

Some men have difficulty in participating in a group in a positive manner and can be very disruptive. If the meeting is not able to progress in accord with the model then the group needs to support the Facilitator in dealing with the situation. Otherwise participants are likely to leave the group and cause it to collapse.

OM:NI is not all things for all men. Nothing can be that. It is not a therapy group, nor is it a medical or mental support group. (There are suitably qualified avenues within the community to professionally support those needs). All men within the community who are willing to positively contribute to the group's success are encouraged to participate. The important principles are acceptance and respect as detailed in the guidelines.

## **Local Councils**

Local Councils have a responsibility to deliver community health services and will generally be supportive of any project that contributes positively towards the health and wellbeing of older men. Council Officers likely to be most interested are those responsible for the Ageing Positively program, Health services, and Volunteer programs. Local Councils may be able to provide low cost accommodation for groups, sometimes in conjunction with Community Houses. They can also assist with the initial launch.

## **This Web Site**

This document is published on the COTA Vic web site at <https://cotavic.org.au/programs-events/omni/>

If you are not already there you can access the OM:NI page under 'PROGRAMS & EVENTS' and click on the link 'Starting a Men's Discussion Group-OM:NI' to see the latest update of this document.

## **The OM:NI Manual**

There is a complete 'OM:NI information and Resource Manual' on the COTA Vic web site. The Manual contains the all-important guidelines and meeting format as well as the notes for Facilitators.

<https://cotavic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/20181217-OMNI-Manual.pdf>

## **OM:NI New South Wales**

The original concept of OM:NI was developed in NSW and launched there in 1999 under the auspice of COTA NSW. OM:NI was launched in Victoria in 2004. The New South Wales OM:NI groups now operate within an independent incorporated body and they have a web site at

<https://omninsw.waggamatters.com>

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