



## **COTA VICTORIA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024 online via Zoom and in-person**  
At Australian Nurses Memorial Centre, Fawkner Towers, Suite 11 / 431 St Kilda Road, Melbourne  
VIC 3004 from 10.00am to 11.25am

**Our Vision:** *Ageing in Australia is a time of possibility, opportunity, and influence*  
**Our Mission:** *COTA advances the rights, interests and futures of Australians as we age*

**Apologies:** Nil

The meeting opened at 10.00 am.

### **1. Welcome**

The CEO, Ben Rogers welcomed everyone present at the Council On The Ageing Victoria (COTA Victoria) meeting both in-person and on-line.

The CEO acknowledged the past President and Board Members present, Mike Lescai and Graeme Bird.

The CEO acknowledged the Honorary Life Member, John Douch.

The CEO also acknowledged the presence of representatives from Age Concern Auckland, U3A, Department of Families Fairness and Housing and Victoria Legal Aid.

### **2. Acknowledgement of Country**

The CEO read the acknowledgement of Country.

### **3. Presidents Report**

Annual General Meeting (AGM) Chair and President, Robert Caulfield, welcomed attendees to the AGM.

He stated that COTA Victoria and Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV) have continued to deliver impact and outcomes for older Victorians across the last year. COTA Victoria has improved its financial position, leadership, and connections as the peak body for ageing in Victoria and is the leading voice against elder abuse.

COTA Victoria continues to be in a strong financial position despite a tough fiscal environment, reporting a \$203k surplus for the 2023/2024 financial year and building on the financial performance from the previous year. This puts COTA Victoria in a strong position to handle future economic headwinds in a constrained funding environment that is unlikely to change in the near future. COTA Victoria also managed to secure new funding for projects this year, including from the Transport Accident Commission and AusNet.



He said that this is all underpinned by the successful delivery of programs and services. In particular, SRV continues to play a key role in the state's response to, and prevention of, elder abuse. COTA Victoria is proud to deliver this essential service and it is vital that elder abuse continues to be on the agenda, especially as the state faces an ageing population and increasing demand for elder abuse support.

He stated that COTA Victoria and SRV's great work requires the support of a significant number of funders, supporters and corporate partners and he formally thanked all of them their support of COTA Victoria and SRV stating that a comprehensive list is available on the website.

He also stated that to consolidate our leading position, changes have been made to our membership model and constitution earlier this year and was deeply appreciative of the support of the members that enabled this, particularly the constitution which was approved by the members at a Special General Meeting in April 2024.

Elaborating further, he stated that the changes especially the provision of free individual membership have resulted in a dramatic increase in membership and will put COTA Victoria in a stronger position to leverage our position and to deliver members services for older Victorians. He stated that the members will see further benefits in the next year.

As President, he expressed his gratitude to the Board, who are all volunteers, and to the dedicated team of 30 staff at COTA Victoria and SRV for the successes achieved over the last 12 months.

Appreciating the skill, knowledge, and dedication over the past 3 years, he extended his gratitude to Board Member Peter Condliffe, who is not seeking re-election as a director, as he played a key role in leading and positioning the organisation as the peak body for older Victorians, including as Deputy President.

He also welcomed two new members to the Board this year: Gerard Mansour and Ray Cummings who have taken on key roles in supporting COTA Victoria and SRV.

He also thanked the remaining board members, Kathryn Brown, Mary Downie, Mark Stokes, Hayley Hunter and Tanya O'Connor for their voluntary work and the huge amount of time they put in to ensure COTA Victoria continues to run smoothly.

Acknowledging the profound change during the tenure of the previous CEO, Chris Potaris, the President wished Chris Potaris well and thanked him for his efforts and leadership. He further acknowledged Ben Rogers, who stepped in as the Acting CEO and now as CEO in the latter part of 2023/24, as a leader who has ensured that COTA Victoria and SRV continues to provide premium services, assistance, support



and a voice for those we represent reflecting the high standards expected by our community.

The President stated that the Board was excited to work with our new CEO and staff in the coming year to cement our leading position, continue to lead the sector and refine our strategy and approach in 2025.

Finally, the President thanked all the members of COTA Victoria for their ongoing support with the hope of continuing to engage with them and to experiencing even greater successes over the coming years.

#### **4. CEO Report**

Expressing that it was an honour to speak as the CEO of COTA Victoria and SRV, Ben Rogers stated that it enables him to celebrate and highlight the hard work, dedication and outcomes of his colleagues from across the past year, and acknowledge the contributions of our partners, members, volunteers, staff and Board. He affirmed that COTA Victoria continues to play a leading role in the sector and deliver a range of vital supports and programs, with an impact and reputation that dwarfs its size and funding.

While the members of the management team focussed and presented on the activities and achievements of each business unit, the CEO, Ben Rogers articulated COTA Victoria's strategic direction and vision underpinned by the Strategic Plan and its four key pillars - Influence, Partnership, Empowerment, and Sustainability.

**Influence:** He said that COTA Victoria continued to build relationships and connections with and across the Victorian Government, and tirelessly advocated for the interests of older Victorians. He expressed appreciation for the relationship built with the Minister for Ageing, with whom he engages regularly and who launched the WEAAD exhibition. He said that ageing is everyone's responsibility, and it cannot be restricted to one portfolio, or within one team in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. As such COTA Victoria have engaged all three levels of Government and developed resources and submissions across a range of issues, including health issues, aged care, and disability. COTA Victoria and SRV have taken every opportunity to ensure ageing and elder abuse are not forgotten about, especially in the context of family violence. Stating that our advocacy is impactful, is evident from the extension of funding for the Planning Ahead program in the 2024-2025 Victorian State Budget.

**Partnership:** The CEO emphasised that efforts to deliver outcomes for older people continues unabated through our various programs such as Care Finders, Women Working Together, COTAWise and our community education sessions. Thousands of



people including some facing increased vulnerability and isolation, have been assisted, to ensure they get the help, information, or opportunity access they need. The case studies in our annual report, and on our website, capture some of our work. This success meant COTA Victoria became a registered supplier of the Transport Accident Commission, and successfully tendered to support the development of their Older Road Users Hub.

**Empowerment:** The CEO, Ben Rogers stated that this pillar of our strategy relates to maintaining the position of SRV, as the only dedicated, state-wide, specialist Community Legal Centre, providing information, legal and social work advice, and casework, to help prevent elder abuse. Despite a constrained funding environment, SRV continues to be the leading sector voice and support for older people experiencing, or at risk of, elder abuse, engaging over 2,500 people in our community education efforts, receiving over 12,000 calls and opening over 100 new cases. As COTA Victoria and SRV has been impacted by funding cuts, particularly in relation to our Helpline, and increasing case acuity, affecting our legal service provision, SRV has had to focus directly on engagement with older Victorians. The work of advocates, educator and lawyers is tireless and incredible.

**Sustainability:** The CEO reiterated that this is the key pillar to ensuring that COTA Victoria remains the voice and support of older Victorians for another 73 years. For this, COTA Victoria continues to demonstrate strong fiscal management, recording a surplus of over \$200k, building on the surplus for the last year and putting us in a better position to manage a constrained funding environment. COTA Victoria and SRV continued to build our brand and relationship with media, including a series of interviews on ABC radio and a strong public presence on key issues such as older drivers and the announcement of the Senior Victorians Advisory Committee. But the key change has been the launch of our new membership framework under our updated constitution, passed via a Special General Meeting in April 2024. By once again prioritising membership and making it free for older Victorians potentially facing cost of living pressures, COTA Victoria hopes to ensure that we cement our connection with our cohort.

Stating that while he cannot take credit for the incredible things done in 2023-2024 as he took over the role of the CEO in May 2024, he attested to the effort that was involved and how COTA Victoria's approach will continue as we make considered efforts to represent and support older Victorians. He acknowledged the role and efforts of his predecessor, Chris Potaris, in COTA Victoria's success over the last year.

Stating that while COTA Victoria has achieved significant successes in 2023-2024 such as a financial surplus despite funding going backwards, finding new ways and program to increase our revenue base, leading work of SRV, increase in membership by over 500 members, wider reach in regard to media and communications, a



leading example of how to deliver our programs, including CareFinders in the City of Kingston, better connectedness into the Victorian Government, building relationships with key stakeholders and having a seat at the table on a number of reference groups, COTA Victoria cannot rest on its laurels.

He stated that COTA Victoria needs to keep going, getting better and stronger, to support a better vision and outcome for ageing, diversifying and solidifying revenue streams, strengthening and growing our vital programs such as Seniors Rights Victoria, and expanding our connection and offering to members.

As COTA Victoria is nearly halfway through 2024-25, this process has already begun evidenced by a newly secured philanthropic funding to SRV following the launch of our Health Justice Partnership with Better Health Network, 12 member events across the month of October as part of the Seniors Festival, and direct information to our members on COTA Victoria's recent budget submission. For the latter half of the year COTA Victoria looks forward to launching the organisational component of our membership changes and the tender process for the CareFinder program which is expected to be launched.

The CEO, expressed hope and excitement at the prospects for COTA Victoria for the coming years ahead and thanked the staff and volunteers for their remarkable effort, support and contribution during the past year. The CEO finally thanked the President Rob Caulfield and the COTA Victoria Board for their ongoing support and confidence.

## **5. Snapshot of COTA Victoria Achievements (Managers' Presentations)**

Updates were provided by the Managers of the business units.

- a) Marshida Kolthoff – Policy and Advocacy Manager
- b) Frankie Freeman – Education and Engagement Manager
- c) Angus Kerr – CareFinder Manager
- d) Steve Wright – Marketing and Communications Manager
- e) Ben Rogers for Avital Kamil – Principal Lawyer and Manager

## **6. Minutes of Annual General Meeting 2023 and Special General Meeting held on 18 April 2024**

No questions were raised and the following motions were passed:

That the minutes of the 2023 Annual General Meeting be accepted as a true and accurate record of the proceedings.

Moved Mark Stokes                      Seconded Mike Lescai                      Carried.

That the minutes of the Special General Meeting be accepted as a true and accurate record of the proceedings.

Moved Mark Stokes                      Seconded Hayley Hunter                      Carried.

## 7. Treasurers Report

The Treasurer, Kathryn Brown presented the audited financial statements for the year ended 30 June 2024 highlighting the following:

- The Financial Statements for the financial year, show a net surplus of \$203,246, compared to a net surplus of \$168,295 in the prior year. This increase is due to decrease in payroll, contractor, and consultancy expenses. This is a pleasing result for the organisation for the year.
- Total income for the year of \$3.7m has decreased by 3% compared to \$3.8m in the prior year due to decrease in funding. The State and Federal Government funding represent 96% of total revenue.
- Total expenses for the year of \$3.5m have decreased, compared to the prior year of \$3.7m for reasons mentioned above. Payroll and other employment expenses continue to represent 82% of total expenses.
- Total current assets are approximately \$1.5m, up by 27% from the prior year due to timing and the receipt of receivables. Cash assets represent 99% of this balance. There is approximately \$0.6m in Current Liabilities which includes lease liabilities and grant income received in advance. Overall, the net asset position of \$868,354 remains healthy and has increased compared to the prior year by 30%.
- There has been no significant change in accounting standards during the financial year.

Subsequent to the year end, there does not appear to be any significant uncertainties with respect to events or conditions which may impact unfavourably on the organisation in future years.

Management will continue to assess and implement the decisions necessary to keep the organisation in a healthy financial position and provide a solid base for the next 12 months.

The auditors have issued an unqualified audit opinion on the financial statements. There were no uncorrected errors at year end or significant management, or internal controls issues noted.

The Audit, Finance and Risk Committee and the Board thanked the auditor for their service and ongoing support.

The Treasurer thanked the members of the Audit and Risk Committee for their continued commitment and support during the year. The Treasurer also thanked the CEO, Ben Rogers and Finance Manager, Janet Zhang for their support.

On an enquiry from a member of the nature of funding provided by Victoria Legal Aid, the Treasurer noted that this information was part of note 3a of the Annual Financial Statements and the CEO stated that the funding was to support the integrated service program delivery by SRV, management of legal cases and advice to clients.

That the Annual Financial Statements for the FY 2023-2024 be accepted.

Moved Tanya O'Connor

Seconded Mark Stokes

Carried.

## 8. **Appointment of Auditor**

It was agreed that The Banks Group be appointed as Auditor for the 2025 financial year.

Moved Kathryn Brown

Seconded Phillip Hodges

Carried.

## 9. **Announcement of Board Positions**

In his role as CEO and Reporting Officer, Ben Rogers declared the following:

- Directors Robert Caulfield and Peter Condliffe were eligible for re-election.
- Robert Caulfield filed for re-election and has been re-elected, pursuant to rule 52.7 of the Constitution for one more 3-year term to serve the organisation.
- The CEO, Ben Rogers thanked Peter Condliffe, who is a Barrister and mediator, and acknowledged the immense work and his contribution to the Board during his tenure.
- The CEO and Reporting Officer, Ben Rogers confirmed that there is a casual vacancy on the Board, as per rule 54.1(a) of the constitution. The Board can continue to act, as set out in rule 54.3. The Board may choose to fill that position, pursuant to the terms of rule 54.2.

## 10. **Questions from the members**

- A member commented on the incredible work of volunteers and enquired of the volunteer acknowledgement at COTA Victoria and asked about the various governance committees and their membership. The President, Robert Caulfield responded that COTA Victoria currently has ~110 volunteers and a volunteer recognition program is under development. With regards to the board committees and their membership, the President stated
  - Audit Finance and Risk Committee: Kathryn Brown, Tanya O'Connor, Mark Stokes, and Ray Cummings
  - Governance Committee: Ray Cummings and Mary Downie
  - Executive Committee: Robert Caulfield, Peter Condliffe, Kathryn Brown, and Tanya O'Connor
  - There are also the working groups that report to the CEO for policy, SRV, OM:NI and Business Development that are being instituted.
- A member commended the work of the organisation and raised concerns of issues faced by non-English speaking CALD communities such as social isolation, difficulties to navigate the systems and access to services and enquired how can space be made for their participation. The Manager Education & Engagement provided information on education programs that work closely with CALD communities using interpreter services, resources in non-English languages, informed of call tracking from CALD communities to the COTAWISE helpline and future plans to talk to community leaders from CALD backgrounds to obtain information on services required and unfulfilled needs.
- A member shared the difficult experience in getting my aged care services in Dandenong. The CareFinder Manager acknowledged that the government's My Aged





Care portal was difficult to navigate and explained that while COTA Victoria manages clients in the Kingston area, there are CareFinder organisations that provide intense support in the Dandenong area and help to link into them can be provided by his team.

- A member commented that for digital issues faced by senior citizens, it is advisable to go to the grandchildren or the local library for support as they are more knowledgeable.
- A member enquired about the work overlap of COTA Victoria and another organisation, National Seniors. The President, Robert Caulfield, responded that like-minded organisations in the same sector collaborate, merge, amalgamate and work together as needed. However, at times the work is driven by commitments outlined in the funding agreements. COTA Victoria will continue to work in partnership with organisations that serve the vulnerable older people of Victoria.
- A member commented that the baby boomers get sensitive about elder abuse as they have supported their children and grandchildren the best they can. The question was on the work COTA Victoria does about this. The CEO, Ben Rogers responded that COTA Victoria recognises ageism and its demonization faced by many and stated that COTA Victoria is not supportive of it. The baby boomers are recognised as the sandwich generation being both carers for the older generation and support for the younger generation. He said that COTA Victoria has acted and continues to act in a few ways – raising awareness on what is elder abuse thorough various education programs and engagement in the health care sector, participating in the government's Carer's Strategy, social and legal supports for older Victorians through SRV.

## **11. Other Business**

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 11.25 am.

---

Robert Caulfield  
AGM Chair & President