

Annual report

2025-2026



Table of contents

About us	2
Board of Governance 2025-2026	2
Acknowledgement of Country	2
Message from our President and CEO	3
Policy and advocacy	5
Our programs and services	6
Lived Experience of Ageing Program (LEAP)	6
Volunteering	6
Community education	6
COTA WISE information service	6
Care Finder	7
Membership	7
Marketing and communications	7
Seniors Rights Victoria	8
Helpline	8
Advice and casework	8
Housing options as we age	8
Education and engagement	9
World Elder Abuse Awareness Day and Beyond Age	9

Image, cover: Attendees of our 75th anniversary event, surrounded by guest of honour Care Finder Team Leader Karen Ivanka (holding flowers).

Images, page 1 (L-R): Courtesy Centre for Ageing Better's age-positive image library (<https://www.agewithoutlimits.org/image-library>).

Images, page 6 (L-R): Education Coordinator Gary Ferguson and a Beyond Age workshop participant, guests at our 75th anniversary event, more guests at our 75th anniversary event.

Images, page 9 (L-R): CEO Ben Rogers speaking at our World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) event, a WEAAD billboard shown in the Melbourne CBD, Peer Educator Sharon Butler speaking at our WEAAD event.



About us

Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria

is the leading not-for-profit organisation representing the interests and rights of people aged over 50 in Victoria. Celebrating 75 years of service in 2026, we have led government, corporate, and community thinking about the positive aspects of ageing in the state.

Today, our focus is on promoting opportunities for and protecting the legal rights of people 50+. We value ageing and embrace its opportunities. This belief drives benefits throughout the nation alongside communities, families, and individuals.

Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV) is the key state-wide service dedicated to advancing the rights of older people and the early intervention into, or prevention of, elder abuse in our community. It is the only Community Legal Centre dedicated to preventing and responding to elder abuse within Victoria.

SRV has a team of experienced advocates, lawyers, and social workers who provide free information, advice, referral, legal advice, legal casework, and support to older people who are either at risk of or are experiencing elder abuse. SRV supports and empowers older people through the provision of legal advice directly to the older person.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which we work and pay our respects to Indigenous Elders past, present, and emerging. Sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.

We thank our government, philanthropic, and corporate funders and supporters:
<https://cotavic.org.au/supporters>



Board of Governance 2025-2026

The COTA Victoria Board's dedicated members have diverse backgrounds and skills, and bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to our work.

Robert Caulfield

President

Kathryn Brown

Treasurer

Hayley Hunter

Director

Gerard Mansour PSM

Director

Sue Roff

Director

Tanya O'Connor

Deputy President

Mary Downie

Director

Mark Stokes PhD

Director

Bianca Brijnath

Director



Topmost image: Participants enjoying morning tea at our Beyond Age World Elder Abuse Awareness Day event.

Directly above: Max Primmer, Beyond Age World Elder Abuse Awareness Day event Master of Ceremonies, and winner of the 2023 Victorian Senior of the Year Awards Ageing Aell Award.

Message from our President and CEO

We are pleased to present the COTA Victoria and Seniors Rights Victoria Annual Report 2025-2026 in this, our 75th year of service to older Victorians.

Seventy-five years ago, our organisation began its journey under a very different name – the Old People’s Welfare Council of Victoria. In time, that evolved into the Victorian Council on the Ageing; today, we are proudly known as COTA Victoria – the Council on the Ageing Victoria.

While our name has changed, our core purpose has not.

For three-quarters of a century, we have stood for one simple but powerful idea: older people deserve to be heard, respected, protected, and empowered.

COTA Victoria has helped redefine ageing – not as decline, but as a time of contribution, growth, and opportunity. Through Seniors Rights Victoria, and starting back in 2008, we have built a service that is now the only state-wide Community Legal Centre dedicated to protecting older people from elder abuse.

Our recent work shows how deeply embedded this role is – we continue to play a leading part in shaping statewide planning and ensuring older Victorians are not overlooked. We are not just a service provider, but a trusted advocate, a policy leader, and a catalyst for change.

Our work proves that we are strong and resilient. Even in challenging environments, we have maintained strong financial performance, adapted to shifting funding landscapes, and continue to grow our programs and services.

This leadership has continued in 2025-26. We lead the sector, engage older Victorians, and make sure that they are not forgotten.

One of the highlights of this year was the launch of Australia’s first Age-Inclusive Emergency Preparedness Guidelines, making

sure that older Victorians are considered and engaged as part of community preparedness for emergencies. We launched our new Lived Experience of Ageing Program to create a community of older Victorians ready, able, and supported to share their insights. We launched a new Older Men: New Ideas Advisory Group to ensure the continued success of such an all-important volunteer program. We continued to work to improve our services and offerings, including moving to a live call model for older people experiencing, or at risk of, elder abuse.

There are many other great examples of work captured in the rest of this report, and we encourage you to read through them all.

We are the key conduit to the community, in understanding their experiences, and either supporting older Victorians or amplifying their experience. We do this as follows:

- We engaged 1,500+ older Victorians as part of our advocacy.
- We had 2,000+ enquiries through our COTA Wise information line.



Above, from left to right: President Rob Caulfield, COTA Victoria Senior Achiever award winner Nola Radiotis, and Governor of Victoria Her Excellency the Honorable Margaret Gardner AC at the Victorian Senior of the Year awards, held on 22 October 2026 at Government House.

Message from our President and CEO

- We received nearly 15,000 calls on our elder abuse helpline.

Sadly, following a competitive tender process, this year saw the cessation of our Care Finder program delivery in the City of Kingston. We remain extremely proud of the impact of the program and the long-serving staff that delivered it. The organisation will continue to advocate for, and look for opportunities to support, older Victorians navigating the aged care system – including a number of resources released this year.

Despite this, we continue to be in a strong financial position, although we face a constrained funding environment. We are reporting a \$400,000+ surplus for the 2025-26 financial year, building on our great financial performance from the previous year. But our goal is to not make money – it's to make sure we are still delivering impact in another 75 years. These reserves will be vital as we face economic headwinds, political uncertainty, and a projected deficit in 2026-27. We remain in a strong position to handle a complex funding environment.

This stability matters, because it means we are here not just for today – as Victoria continues to age, we will be here for continued generations as they grow older.

No organisation reaches 75 years without extraordinary people, and this year has been no different. We acknowledge our dedicated staff, our passionate volunteers, our committed board members, our partners across government, community, and industry, and – most importantly – our valued members and supporters. We recognise that our achievements are collective ones. It is your commitment that has sustained this organisation and amplified its impact.

Stories from those we're connected to remind us that older Victorians are not defined by their needs, but by their strengths, wisdom, and contributions.

Seventy-five years ago, a small group of people came together with a vision: to improve the lives of older Victorians. Today, that vision lives on in everything we do.

We are also extremely pleased to say that it is also captured in our strategic vision. The last year also saw us release [our new Strategic Plan](#), which sets our direction for the next few years. This will see us focussing on how we can influence, empower, and amplify in order to deliver the impact we are aiming for, now and into the future.

While our language has certainly changed since our inception, our intent has not. We will champion the rights, dignity, and wellbeing of older Victorians – and encourage ageing in place where possible, and ageing well above all else.

We look forward to continue delivering on this in 2026-2027. Thank you all for your ongoing support.



Above, from left to right: CEO Ben Rogers, Care Finder Team Leader Karen Ivanka, and President Rob Caulfield attending our 75th anniversary event at the Melbourne Town Hall on 11 June 2026.

Robert Caulfield
President

Ben Rogers
Chief Executive Officer

Policy and advocacy

During 2025–26, our work was grounded in the lived experience of older people, **engaging with more than 1,500 older Victorians** to inform our ministerial and sector engagement, submissions, research, briefings, and recommendations to decision-makers. In doing so, we **published 19 total publications** and **11 total submissions**.

We advocated for ageing to be considered across government policy, contributing to government consultations, parliamentary inquiries, and advisory groups. We also produced research and resources to strengthen our understanding of older Victorians' diverse experiences and contributions.

Our advocacy highlighted the financial pressures facing older Victorians – from housing, to rising health and living costs, and persistent barriers to accessing concessions and support.

We continued to advocate for action to mitigate the growing prevalence of age discrimination, and housing supports that reflect the changing housing needs of older Victorians. We also encouraged more accessible service navigation and information – highlighting the need for non-digital options and coordinated service systems – and increased opportunities to have the voices of older Victorians heard to support the development of policies and programs.

Engagement with older women informed recommendations for stronger financial equity outcomes. Our work on energy and retirement housing sought stronger consumer protections and greater affordability.

We advocated for accessible, affordable, and person-centred health and aged care. Our work on Support at Home highlighted concerns about affordability, access to services, and hardship support, breaking down new aged care reforms



Above: Advocacy and Elder Abuse Policy Advisor Jean-Marc Kurban, taking part in our Beyond Age World Elder Abuse Awareness Day event.

to educate those on their rights and choices.

We continued to advocate for stronger recognition and prevention of elder abuse as a form of family violence. We called for sustained investment in prevention, early intervention, community education, and workforce capability, and contributed to the development of the second National Plan to end the abuse and mistreatment of older people and Victoria's Elder Abuse Primary Prevention Framework.

We developed a number of guidelines on intersectionality in elder abuse, submissions into financial elder abuse, guidance for aged care providers in identifying and responding to elder abuse, and the continued as chair of the Victorian Elder Abuse Strategic Alliance.

We also developed **Australia's first Age-Inclusive Emergency Preparedness Guidelines**, informed by more than 300 older Victorians and carers. The guidelines recognise older people as active contributors to community resilience, while acknowledging the need to ensure planning and response activities take into account the needs of older people who are disproportionately represented in extreme weather fatalities.

Learn more about our policy positions and access all publications and submissions:
<https://cotavic.org.au/policy/>



Our programs and services

Lived Experience of Ageing Program

The **Lived Experience of Ageing Program (LEAP)** is our mechanism to support older Victorians to engage with various opportunities in which their experience can be utilised to effect change.

LEAP is a training and support initiative that helps older Victorians share their lived experience and knowledge with industry, government, academia, and media. As part of the launch of our new pilot program, we have gathered a small, yet extremely diverse group of older Victorians who will be able to speak across a broad variety of topics.

Training is underway.

Volunteering

We've continued to onboard and support new volunteers in the 2025-26 financial year.

Our **Older Men: New Ideas (OM:NI)** groups continue to thrive, as do **Peer Educators** who help us deliver important information sessions. We've also established a new **Policy Working Group** that is dependent on volunteers, as too is LEAP.

We thank our volunteers for their generous donation of both time and energy and took the time to celebrate them and their work as part of our 75th anniversary celebrations, held on 11 June 2026 at the Melbourne Town Hall Portico Balcony.

Community education

We're pleased to provide information and education sessions to the community through our Information Lifelong Learning program, funded by the Victorian Government.

This year, we provided **31 information sessions** to approximately **1,560 older Victorians** in their local communities, with a continued focus on reaching culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disability, and LGBTIQ+ older people.

COTA WISE information service

Our COTA WISE — Welcome, Included, Supported, and Empowered — information service received approximately **2,104 calls and emails** from older Victorians looking for assistance.

Key topics of interest to COTA WISE users included the cost of living, concessions, COTA programs and services, health, and social isolation. Emerging issues are relayed to our policy team to support Victorians as they age.

If you need assistance finding information, please **call 1300 135 090** or **email askcota@cotavic.org.au**.

We encourage you to read case studies from all of our programs on our website: <https://cotavic.org.au/case-studies/>



Our programs and services

Care Finder

Unfortunately, our Care Finder services ceased operations as of 31 March 2026.

We farewell the hardworking staff behind our Care Finder and Aged Care Navigation programs: Angus Kerr, Karen Ivanka, Gemma Neve, and Melissa Annear.

Our Care Finder team consistently exceeded targets and KPIs, and received overwhelmingly positive feedback as a result of their efforts. Beyond delivering a vital service, our Care Finder team informed our understanding of the new aged care system and helped drive our response to it. Our Care Finders were a key part of our team and identity, and more importantly, incredible colleagues.

Membership

Our membership base continues to grow. We have welcomed **299 new members this year**, with **2,024 total members** at the time of writing this report.

This new financial year will see a continued push to recruit new members, alongside work to better highlight the value proposition offered to our members.

If you're not a member of COTA Victoria and Seniors Rights Victoria, we encourage you to take advantage of our offer of free individual membership to those who wish to support and enhance our work.

Those who join us will have the opportunity to give back to the community, help inform our work, receive a subscription to our monthly COTA Connects email newsletter, gain access to exclusive events, and much more.

Learn more and apply for free individual membership:
<https://cotavic.org.au/membership/>



Above: Participants at one of our Beyond Age workshops.

Marketing and communications

We've continued our work placing COTA Victoria and Seniors Rights Victoria at the front-of-mind with local and national media organisations, with a dedication to protect the rights and interests of Victorians as they age.

We distributed **11 media releases** in this period, securing **over 150 identified media mentions**.

Key topics included the national plan to end elder abuse, a decision to stop using physical bills and coins in Geelong City parking meters, financial elder abuse, tax reforms, our 2026 state election campaign platform, and COTA Victoria's 75th anniversary.

Our collection of websites received **273,865 total pageviews**, bolstered by **62,098 impressions** on social media. Our most-viewed pages include [those detailing elder abuse on Seniors Rights Victoria](#), and [COTA Victoria's newly refreshed information hub](#).

We continued our partnership with Golden Days Radio to produce our fortnightly COTA Conversations program, live and as an on-demand podcast.





Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV) is a state-wide Community Legal Centre dedicated to advocating for the rights and wellbeing of older Victorians.

SRV staff include specialist lawyers, advocates, and educators who provide information, legal, non-legal support, and resources to help older people, friends, family, and professionals navigate challenges related to elder abuse.

SRV operates a multidisciplinary model where lawyers and advocates work together to provide ongoing support to those who are experiencing or at risk of elder abuse.

Many clients who receive advice from SRV want to know about their options but do not wish to start legal proceedings.

Helpline

Our Helpline – **1300 368 821** – provides advice, information, and referrals to older people and professionals.

This year, **our Helpline advocates received 14,488 calls**, another increase compared to last year. Of these, we were able to **respond to 5,398 contacts** with a total of **2,526 discreet issues**.

Advice and casework

This year, SRV had **advice appointments with 375 clients**. Of those, 53% of advice clients indicated they are living with a disability, and 17% identified as having more than one disability.

This year, **SRV opened 128 new cases**. A total of **73 cases were closed** during this same period. This financial year, **we recovered \$3,791,745 in money, property, and personal belongings** for our clients.

SRV data this year indicates that **54% of alleged perpetrators of elder abuse are the adult children** of the victim survivor.

SRV also continued a partnership with Better Health Network, funded by a Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner grant, bringing health and the law together.

Housing options as we age

This year, **SRV expanded its services** with a grant from the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety to support older Victorians to remain in their homes through education and legal assistance.

We delivered **31 education sessions** about housing options **to 515 older Victorians**, with **320 of those living in regional Victoria**. Participants felt they had an overall better understanding of housing options available to them, how to protect their assets, and be able to remain in their homes.

A total of **317 housing-related enquiries** were received by the SRV Helpline. We provided **legal advice to 76 people** and assisted 31 with ongoing legal assistance.



We encourage you to read Seniors Rights Victoria case studies on our website:
<https://seniorsrights.org.au/case-studies/>

Education and engagement

SRV works to empower older people through leading the prevention of, and response to, elder abuse. We run education sessions focussed on recognising and responding to elder abuse, and protecting one's rights and interests as they get older.

Our community education stream delivered a total of **63 talks and presentations** to **1,829 attendees**. Of those, **5 presentations** were in regional Victoria, and **16 presentations** were delivered in languages other than English to CALD groups.

In these streams, presentations took the form of Beyond Age World Elder Abuse Awareness Day workshops, talks at support groups and forums, and as part of an ongoing collaboration with the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria.

Finally, our paid professional education stream delivered **18 sessions** to **468 total participants**. Of these sessions, 6 presentations were conducted in regional Victoria, and 2 presentations were delivered in languages other than English to CALD groups.

Learn more about our community and professional education programs:
<https://seniorsrights.org.au/education>

WEAAD and Beyond Age

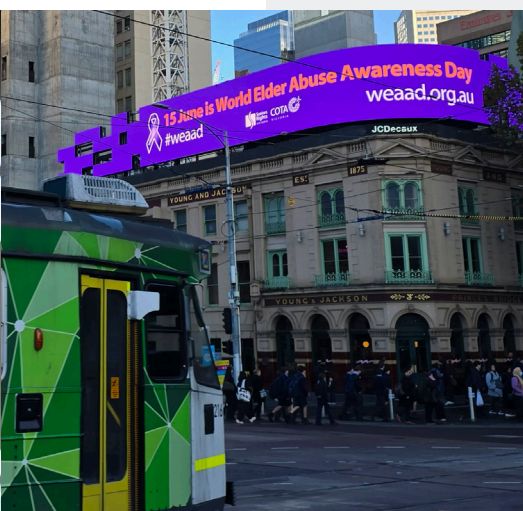
World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) takes place annually on 15 June and shines a spotlight on the critical issue of elder abuse, fostering global recognition and action. This year, we continued our two-year Beyond Age project to target one of the main drivers of elder abuse: ageism.

As part of the project, community members attended workshops and coupled photo of their past and present, then provided advice about getting older to their younger self. Participants were encouraged to have conversations about preserving the dignity of older people, and to speak out against ageism.

This year, we engaged with **11 Councils across Victoria** and held **7 project workshops** in the 2025-26 financial year. Four further project workshops have been scheduled in later 2026 or early 2027.

In total, **12 workshops** were held in this financial year, engaging with **204 total participants**. Of these, **2 workshops were intergenerational**, with local high school students attending and taking the photos of the older members of the community for the exhibition. Many more participants took part in our online exhibition as well.

Our own showcase WEAAD Beyond Age event took place on 11 June at the Melbourne Town Hall.





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