

Seniors Peak Body Consumers Reference Group Friday, 8 May 2026

Meeting Communique

Members Present: Amina Schipp (Chair), Margaret Walsh, Stephen Kobelke, Michael Pemberton, and Suresh Rajan.

Also in Attendance: Bobby Kidd (Commonwealth Council of Elders Member), Dr Barbara Buzzard (Commonwealth Council of Elders Member), Rebecca McIlroy (Director, Commonwealth Department of Health, Disability and Ageing), Bianca Marson Whait (Seniors Peak Body Manager, Advocare) and Mark Kinsela (Secretariat, COTA WA).

Presentation by Council of Elders

The Group welcomed Bobby Kidd and Dr Barbara Buzzard from the Commonwealth Council of Elders. Members received an overview of the role of the Council, its engagement activities and the importance of ensuring older Australians have a direct voice into national aged care reform and policy discussions.

Members discussed the value of having clear and transparent representation for Western Australia and welcomed the opportunity to establish stronger two-way communication between the Council of Elders and the WA Seniors Peak Body Consumers Reference Group.

Members noted the importance of ensuring older Western Australians are aware of who represents them nationally and supported ongoing engagement with WA representatives.

Seniors Peak Body Overview

Bianca Marson Whait provided an update on the work of the WA Seniors Peak Body, including current advocacy priorities, engagement activities and work associated with the National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People.

Advocare is currently monitoring calls regarding concerns around fuel and rising cost of living pressures associated with the conflict in the Middle East. This information is used to inform conversations in a Government convened Community Leaders Fuel Supply forum.

Members discussed the importance of ensuring the voices and lived experiences of older Western Australians continue to inform advocacy and policy development across housing, ageing, elder abuse prevention and community services.

Emerging Issues in WA

WA State Budget and Housing

Members discussed the 2026 WA State Budget and welcomed measures aimed at supporting cost of living pressures, including fuel subsidy initiatives.

Discussion focused heavily on housing affordability and the barriers older people face when attempting to downsize. Members noted that current housing policy settings remain largely focused on increasing housing supply and supporting first home buyers, with insufficient attention given to older people seeking to transition into smaller, more suitable housing.

Members welcomed the involvement of a McCusker Intern within Advocare to support work on seniors housing issues and future recommendations to Government. Members agreed there is a need for stronger incentives and practical support to assist older people to make housing decisions earlier and avoid housing insecurity later in life.

Carers and Recognition

Members discussed the challenges carers face navigating multiple systems, forms and processes across different government departments and services. Members noted the difficulty many carers experience in having their role formally recognised.

Carers WA had been advocating for a Carers Passport model to provide clearer recognition and reduce administrative burden for carers interacting with services and agencies.

Regional and Rural Issues

Members emphasised that regional and rural communities continue to experience significant disadvantage and that many policy decisions are made from a metropolitan perspective without fully considering regional impacts.

Housing insecurity and homelessness for older people were identified as growing concerns in regional WA, particularly where family and domestic violence is also a contributing factor. Members noted that ageing demographics in regional communities are often more pronounced than in metropolitan Perth and require targeted responses.

Transport, Identification and Banking

Members discussed barriers experienced by older people who lose access to a driver's licence and subsequently face challenges obtaining alternative forms of identification.

Members also raised concerns regarding banking practices and the difficulties older people face obtaining credit cards, despite credit cards often providing stronger fraud and scam protections than debit cards.

Older Adult Hubs

Mark Kinsela provided an update on the Older Adult Health Hubs Consumer Forum and the key themes emerging from consultation with consumers, carers and stakeholders. Members strongly supported the hubs and reinforced the importance of ensuring they provide holistic, community-connected support, not simply clinical care. Key themes raised included the need for a single navigation point, stronger local partnerships, earlier support before crisis, improved transport access and greater recognition of carers.

Key recommendations presented to the Department included establishing non-clinical Navigator roles within hubs, embedding aged care access and assessment pathways onsite, strengthening local referral networks, improving access to practical supports such as advocacy and advance care planning, and addressing broader system barriers including transport and information sharing. Future expansion into growth corridors and regional WA was also highlighted.

Secretariat Arrangements and Next Meeting

Members were advised that the current MoU between COTA WA and Advocare is coming to an end and the Secretariat function for the CRG will transition to Advocare.