# Achievements

The International Year of Older Persons was successful due to the spotlight which played on all levels of community and government on issues relating to ageing. It is estimated that over six million people were exposed to IYOP through the work of Australian NGOs. The national non-government processes that were employed provided useful foundations for advancement of the UN Principles and were complementary to the work achieved through state and territory AC '99s and Commonwealth and state governments.

## Successful community outcomes

The International Year of Older Persons can be deemed a success in the community due to:

- the **ownership** of the Year by older people themselves
- the **increased recognition of older people** through community initiatives and ongoing IYOP presence in a wide range of media
- the **diversity** of the ways in which older people themselves were directly engaged in IYOP
- the **generation of new liaisons**, collaborative relationships and partnerships between individuals, non-government organisations (both for-profit and not-for-profit) and government, many of which have a strong promise of being sustained into the future
- the ways IYOP was used as a stimulus to develop a vast range of plans, policies and strategies to achieve **different goals**
- a year of unprecedented mutually beneficial **intergenerational** exchanges
- IYOP being used to motivate plans and action well into future years **beyond 1999**, with considerable evidence of likely success

## The partnership concept

The role of AC '99 was to facilitate communication and partnerships around the issues of ageing and older people. The unique concept of partnerships was pivotal to the work of the Coalition and, accordingly, member organisations were named 'partners'. AC '99 promoted partnerships between organisations which were often not previously aware of each other's existence. The engagement of organisations which had not been involved with older people or the issue of ageing in the past led to a number of viable and innovative initiatives.

The development of a partnership was assumed likely to assist an organisation to maintain its good ideas and work. Effective partnerships seemed more likely to develop between organisations at state rather than national organisational level (for obvious reasons: proximity, familiarity of personnel, opportunity to meet at low cost, shared target populations, etc.) In fact, there is evidence of some very unexpected and apparently active partnerships having been established. Many of these developments were often dependent on the personalities of key people in the decision making personal chains really 'clicking', and of their personal commitment. Acknowledgement of idiosyncrasies, and of the integrity of the different organisations developing mutually beneficial relationships, was important.

Partner organisations demonstrated and shared their different styles and methods of promoting positive ageing and sustainable age-related developments. Partners wanted to break down stereotypes of older people and dispel the myths of ageing. AC '99 created a collaborative team-spirited network. Most partner organisations made an enthusiastic and real contribution to IYOP regardless of resources, member bases and geographic reach.

The benefits of establishing partnerships between organisations, even at a national level, requires that there be much more dedicated time to support the processes needed.

## Effective processes employed

As the national secretariat, the role of AC '99 has been to stimulate and coordinate rather than finance or manage specific projects. AC '99 was initially funded to create a communication network between non-government organisations.

Effective and efficient AC '99 communication processes led to direct and indirect achievements by national non-government organisations and state and territory partners through the AC '99 secretariats. This resulted in a high level of integration of government and non-government activities.

AC '99 was successfully auspiced by Council on the Ageing, a national non-government organisation. The secretariat worked within the existing NGO infrastructure and thus maximised the funding for IYOP. Further, the recognition by the Commonwealth Government of Australia of the crucial role that non-government organisations play in the well-being of older people through its funding of Council on the Ageing is indicative of the potential for strong outcomes of government – NGO collaboration.

## Key outcome areas assisted by the Commonwealth Government of Australia Grant

AC '99's achievements have been broadly grouped according to four key outcome areas for which AC '99 was funded, namely, communication, coordination, media and marketing, business and community partnerships.

The successful communication infrastructure implemented by AC '99 resulted in the secretariat providing IYOP information services to the wider community at large.

### Communication and Coordination

Regular, effective communication was imperative in the lead up and throughout 1999 to ensure that ideas and developments were shared, opportunities acted upon and resources maximised.

Major outcomes within these areas included the development and maintenance of a website, publication and distribution of newsletters, hosting of a series of National Coordinating Committee meetings and networking forums for national partners.

Effective coordination and engagement required a high level of communication between and with many different stakeholders including:

- state and territory AC '99 secretariats and coordinating committees
- national non-government organisations: existing and potential partners
- Commonwealth Government of Australia
- interested individuals in the community
- state jurisdictions
- local government
- tertiary, secondary and primary education sectors
- national and major state media
- business sector
- international NGOs and the United Nations

The *Update* newsletter was produced by the Secretariat in the lead up and throughout 1999. There were 15 editions produced from March 1998 to December 1999, with between 4,000 – 7,500 copies circulated each edition. The newsletter was valued by many organisations and individuals across the country as well as government. There is evidence that the publication facilitated the introduction to each other of many parties with shared interests and initiatives at different times throughout the International Year. As the Year progressed many more interested organisations and individuals, both within Australia and overseas, requested copies of the free publication. Furthermore, many of the partner organisations distributed copies and extracts from *Update* to their own constituencies.

A national non-government IYOP website was established by AC '99 to increase the efficiency in communication with IYOP stakeholders in Australian and international communities. The site was established in 1997 and substantially expanded when funding was received in 1998. The presence of the *Update* newsletter on the website was also an efficient means of distributing information to organisations who did not require the printed version of the newsletter.

Hotlinks to state AC '99 secretariats, national partners, Commonwealth Government and international sites increased communication of IYOP developments and increased the relevance of the site to a greater number of Internet users.

During the peak time of September – October 1999 (1st October being the International Day of Older Persons), the site received an average of 4,000 hits per week. In the last week of January 2000 an impressive 2,000 hits were logged. The calendar of international events and events of national significance was housed on this site in the lead up and for the duration of the Year. The guest book also provided an alternative means for visitors to share opinions and request further information.

Australian Coalition '99

National UPDATE

A Year of Beginnings

A special letter from the Editor

In September 1999, the website was archived by the National Library of Australia (http://www.pandora.nla.gov.au/nph-arch/1999/Z1999-Sep-29 http://home.vicnet.net.au/ac99).

Part of the AC '99 site will be merged with the COTA (Australia) website, and managed by COTA (Australia) from May 2000.

It is likely that the site will be a valuable resource on ageing and older persons' issues for schools and community groups in the future.

## Media and Marketing

The AC '99 Secretariat developed media strategies for the Year and built relationships with national and key state media representatives. The contracting of a senior journalist, Helen Elliott, to implement these strategies was pivotal to the success of this key area.

## Older People in the Media

The older people are, the less likely we are to see them in the media.

Throughout the media, unwritten rules are developed about how age groups are supposed to behave, which social roles and functions they are supposed to fulfil, and how they are supposed to be treated. These are constantly affirmed and reproduced in the media, which partly determines the standards and values in society. This inevitably influences the attitudes, behaviour and self-image of older people.

Many groups in the community hold unrealistic, prejudicial attitudes towards ageing that are fuelled by the media. This includes older people themselves who are often responsible for asserting a stereotypical experience of ageing – in some situations this may be a reaction to the 'conformist mirror' that the media creates.

When the media refers to older people, it is primarily regarding problems that accompany older age, like the description of an ageing population as an explosive financial burden. Older people are often approached on the grounds of their age, and how they don't match in some way with stereotypes of how they 'should be or look'. Interviews with older people frequently deal with older age and its accompanying problems.

There is also the issue of the differences in gender portrayal. If older people are shown on the screen, as a rule, they are male. In addition, older men are much more likely to be presented as experts or spokesmen. In sharp contrast, older women are much less visible and appear more often in the role of grandmother, patient or victim, or as extraordinary women who do not 'look their age'.

The media – including advertising – is mostly held to blame for the perceived negative values of older people and the nonsensical equation that only youth can equal beauty. Perhaps the time is well overdue for image makers themselves to challenge the mostly homogenous and negative way in which they cast older persons' values, attitudes and experiences.

AC '99's strategy of working with individual journalists and media representatives suggests that this is a successful way to bring about image change. Further, there will always be individuals within the media, as in all industries, who will be more receptive to certain ideas and suggestions than others. AC '99's experience also suggests that when some journalists start tackling an issue, there is a 'drip-feed' effect resulting in other journalists addressing the issue from a new and more informed perspective.

Throughout 1999, the media needed to be informed so that spokespersons, journalists and producers could take a more objective and critical appraisal of their own contributions to the way in which older people were depicted.

Consumers should consider the best approach for getting their stories across to the media, and the role they can play in future action. Non-government organisations can also make a positive step by encouraging active collaboration with the media.

Throughout 1999, there seemed to be an increasing number of examples of older people portrayed as vital and active individuals. However it is not yet known whether the media's heightened awareness that ensued from the International Year theme will be sustained into the future.

One worthwhile initiative to enlighten further groups in the media and the wider community would be a longitudinal qualitative and quantitative research project into the type and frequency of images of older people in the media. It is likely that a project such as this would create a legacy for substantial and long-awaited change in the media.