

OLDER AND WISER: Funding challenges similar for seniors Down Under

[Margaret Coates](#) / North Shore News

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Margaret Coates



While in Australia for a family visit, I checked out a seniors' centre to get a first-hand look at programming and services for the older person.

The centre, called the Metro Community Hub, located in Woolloongabba, near the central core in Brisbane, is not a drop-in facility but instead runs specific programming on regular days.

Much like you would find at seniors' centres and organizations that provide programs and services on the North Shore, the usual array of activities are provided. These include exercise programs like gentle yoga, tai chi, aqua aerobics and other, more general programs like broadband for seniors, special event parties, quilting and arts and crafts. The centre also has trips out for lunch, shopping and swimming. Swimming is a very welcome diversion in the Queensland heat.

Seniors' centres in Brisbane operate to bring seniors together to make friends, have fun, learn new skills and participate in low-cost activities. The coordinator of the Metro Community Hub said: "Just because you are a senior doesn't mean you should stop making new friends and enjoying life."

Like seniors programmers on the North Shore, the Metro Community Hub coordinator felt that creating an age-friendly community that supports seniors programs and services is extremely important in order to encourage older persons to stay independent longer. As seniors age, this strategy reduces the burden on community resources, such as utilizing expensive health-care resources.

The staff of the Metro Community Hub provided me with an overview of some of the issues facing seniors there, including elder abuse, isolation and loneliness, aged care complaints, inadequate housing, safety and health concerns and retirement difficulties.

These were much like issues facing seniors on the North Shore. But what stood out for me was an issue the coordinator raised around funding for their centre.

The funding model for the centre was changing from program funding through Commonwealth Home Support Program, a federal initiative to support programs for seniors, to a client-centered funding model. The coordinator felt this would present new challenges and uncertainties about the core budget for the centre.

In my experience, funding for seniors programs and services in British Columbia can be challenging as well. Unlike Australia, there is no federal or provincial funding source, either for centres' overall budgets or for individual clients, so fundraising for operating and core funds can be extremely challenging. Some money for seniors programs is available federally and provincially but these funds are generally based on time-limited projects for specific programs and services.

The amount of funds provided doesn't seem to grow with the increased need for senior programming, which means organizations are competing for thinner slices of the pie. This funding challenge will likely worsen as the older-person demographic grows in the future.

On the North Shore, seniors' centres and organizations who offer seniors programs are fortunate to receive funding from the three municipalities for operating and core funds. Much of their other funding comes from foundations, grants from non-senior-targeted funding sources or donations from individuals. One seniors' centre on the North Shore has been successful in raising some extra money through donations from many of its members.

In this gift-giving season and nearing the end of the tax year, perhaps you, too, could think about supporting your local seniors' program or centre with a tax-deductible donation. You can find a list of seniors' centres and programs run for seniors in the community in the Seniors Directory, produced in partnership by the *North Shore News* and North Shore Community Services.

Happy holidays from Down Under – cheers for the new year.

Margaret Coates is co-ordinator of Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. She has lived on the North Shore for 47 years and worked with and for seniors for 20 of those. Ideas for future columns are welcome. Email: lions_view@telus.net. Info: lionsviewseniorsplanning.com (<http://lionsviewseniorsplanning.com>).

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