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**COTA ACT Submission**

**on**

**Better Suburbs Play Spaces in the ACT**

**July 2018**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to TCCS, Better Suburbs Play Spaces.

COTA ACT is the peak organisation in the Australian Capital Territory concerned with all issues related to ageing. It is an independent, non-party political organisation working to promote and protect the well-being, rights and interests of all older people in the ACT irrespective of socio-economic, ethnic, religious or cultural background.

COTA ACT is a member of an Australian wide organization – COTA Australia – and also contributes to the development of national policies and agendas.

**What COTA Does**

COTA ACT talks to Governments, the media and the community about issues of direct concern to all older people in the ACT. COTA ACT also provides services – some on behalf of government – for older Canberra citizens.

**The Ageing Population in the ACT**

The ACT Population is projected to reach 400,000 by 2017 and 500,000 by 2033.

Canberra is expected to continue population ageing during this time with those aged 65 and over increasing from 11 per cent of the population in 2012 to 22.5 per cent in 2062.

With a diverse, ageing population and its continuing bourgeoning numbers, city-makers are challenged to plan, design and deliver a 21st century city for all ages. The needs and preferences for ‘soft and hard’ urban infrastructure for seniors are unique as they progress through their lifecycle. O’Brien states that when planning for an ageing population, a key priority “is ensuring enabling and supportive communities” and “meeting essential needs of mobility, social connection, and active, healthy ageing” (2014, p.220).

Exercise is key to a long, healthy life. While exercise and proper diet are components of preventative medicine, it is never too late for ageing Canberrans to exercise.

A playground designed with elements for senior citizens offers a chance to enjoy more exercise than simply walking back and forth. A variety of equipment encourages activity and mobility without risking boredom. Using different equipment also tones different muscle groups. Even though the equipment is designed to be less strenuous, it is still possible to overexert yourself. By exercising at a senior citizen playground, older Canberrans will be in full control of how much they do.

There is another benefit to using the space and equipment designed for seniors that is often overlooked: the social aspect. Seniors can become isolated and lonely, causing them to fall into depression. By visiting a playground with a significant amount of equipment and seating designed with older Canberrans in mind, they can interact with others who understand and relate to their situation. Building friendships can be easier on the playground. Some equipment is designed for more than one person, and this fosters socialization, working together, and building friendships in a fun atmosphere. Simply getting outside and having fun while making new friends is just as healthy as exercising muscles, building stamina, and increasing flexibility.

Play facilities that are located adjacent or close to shopping centres or other community services allow for convenience and encourage a mix of activities. They would also allow older Canberrans to socialise. Adjacent parking, safe, level and well lit pathways to and from these facilities is also essential.

The play space at Franklin in the ACT has some of the elements that should be considered in future planning. <https://www.weekendnotes.com/franklin-recreational-park/>https://www.playgroundfinder.com/playgrounds/3840

It is fundamental that age-friendly built environments are provided to address population ageing and to help improve the quality of life of older people (O’Brien 2014). Having an ageing population is described by the WHO (2002, p.6) as one of “humanity’s greatest triumphs…[and] greatest challenges” due to the economic and social pressures it places on government agencies to provide better, more appropriate infrastructure that facilitates independent living for individuals 65+ years. In order to address the opportunities and challenges of ageing populations, the WHO adopted a policy framework for ‘active ageing’ in 2002, and ‘age-friendly cities’ in 2007 both of which apply in Canberra.

Active ageing in age-friendly cities is described as a “process of optimising health, participation and security” to encourage independent living in supportive physical and social environments that cater to all ages and physical abilities (WHO 2002, p.12, WHO 2007).

The World Health Organisation (2007) and many other scholars and practitioners urge built environment professionals and city-makers to facilitate ‘active ageing’ in ‘age-friendly’ cities, conceptually and in practice. As part of this, open spaces and parks have been critiqued over many years to determine whether they “offer the right framework, the right extent and complexity for modern and future needs” (Ward Thompson 2002, p.60). When considering the ageing population, it would be inappropriate to continue to design parks and playgrounds as has traditionally been done in the past.

**Conclusion**

This submission has put forward some guiding principles and planning considerations for a newer type of play space – the seniors’ playground. COTA ACT trusts that planners will consider these when working with landscape architects and other city-makers to deliver seniors’ playgrounds. Of course, each play space will have unique site challenges and opportunities, sociocultural contexts, community profiles, resources and political support or challenges.

Collectively though, they will make Canberra more green, sociable, accessible, inclusive and healthy. As new sociocultural and health trends emerge, the concept of seniors’ playgrounds develop, and what is important to seniors changes, further research must occur in order to ensure planners respond to the health and social well-being of seniors and their city of Canberra.

O’Brien, E. (2014), ‘Planning for population ageing: Ensuring enabling and supportive physical-social environments – Local Infrastructure challenges’, Planning Theory and Practice 15 (2): 220-234.

World Health Organisation [WHO]. (2002), Active Ageing: A Policy Framework, World Health Organisation, Available at: <http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/active\_ageing/en/.pdf>.

World Health Organisation [WHO]. (2007), Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide, Available at: <http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Global\_age\_friendly\_cities\_Guide\_English.pdf>.