

SUBMISSION NO. 39

COTA



COTA NSW
Submission to the
Joint Select Committee

*Inquiry into
Cybersafety
for Senior
Australians
2012*

Introduction

COTA NSW welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Joint Select Committee on Cyber- Safety, Inquiry into Cybersafety for Senior Australians.

COTA NSW (Council on the Ageing [NSW] Inc.) is a not for profit peak body and consumer organisation representing people in NSW aged over 50 years of age. COTA NSW works with individuals, the community, services providers, other NGO's and various levels of government, providing information, advice and advocacy to help achieve a just, equitable and humane society of older people in NSW

Consultation with key stakeholders and our constituents have found that issues around Cybersafety are contributing to the inter-generational digital divide ¹ by generating a fear factor for older people when using the internet.

COTA NSW has commenced an initiative in partnership with The Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy to address the issue by developing a Cybersecurity Peer Education Program for older Australians. The purpose of the program is to reduce the fear factor around internet use and to help older people feel more comfortable using the internet.

The three major objectives of our initiative are to collect older people's ideas and concerns in relation to cybersecurity, generate discussion to address any barriers and myths and to then introduce the older people to practices that increase security.

Cyber challenges for older Australians

Though some seniors are competent and regular users of the internet, the majority have limited knowledge about how computers and the internet operate. In the last thirty years cyber technology has developed rapidly and dramatically, infiltrating aspects of the lives of older people that they could never have expected, from communicating to shopping and banking.

Most people aged 60 and over have learnt about computers through usage in the work place or at home, rather than through structured studies. Further, even where older people have acquired computer literacy, the ever-changing nature of the digital world means that their knowledge dates at an alarming rate. As a result, older people tend to have knowledge-gaps in the application of cyber security, and are particularly vulnerable to myths and scams.

There are many examples of the vulnerability of older people to scams and false representations made by cynical individuals and organisations. Older people – given their tendency to respect authority - are more vulnerable to “phishers” and imitation websites and emails from those purporting to be from charities and banks.

¹ Older Australians and the internet bridging: digital divide, National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre 2011

² Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (21:34): House of Representatives Monday, 13 February 2012

Although there are plenty of strategies to reach and engage with younger groups within the community, few strategies have been developed around engaging people over the age of 50. As a result, there is an increased danger of many people in older age groups being left behind, becoming disenfranchised and unable to interact with what are now the main communications mediums.

Not having the ability to access the digital world will be like trying to communicate in today's society by surface mail only.

Barriers of the digital arena for older Australians

A review of the research indicates that those over the age of 55 who do not engage in the digital world do so because of two main barriers;

1. Cost
2. Knowledge

The cost factor diminishes as access point's increase and demand and production reduces cost for the hardware and provider costs. Knowledge includes education and application. Before this barrier can be addressed the fear factor needs to be addressed. If the fear factor is not acknowledged and the benefits outlined, older Australians will avoid the technology and justify why they should not engage in the digital world.

COTA NSW initiative

A project concept was developed as a result of COTA NSW and The Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (DBCDE) jointly discussing how best to disseminate information about Cyber security to older people in the community.

It was agreed that the Peer Education model was ideally suited to communicate cybersecurity information to older people. This model of education is a speciality of COTA NSW. We developed the model in 2000, and have continued to develop new programs and our portfolio of education subjects.

Development of a cybersecurity program utilising the Peer Education model will be done in three stages:

Stage one: COTA NSW Education Team leads the development of an evidenced based education program developed on the foundations of research and focus group outcomes in partnership with COTA TAS

Stage two: Pilot the Peer Education program in NSW and TAS with 170 sessions over one year, concluding with collation of data, evaluation of outcomes and preparation of a pilot final report.

Stage three: Roll out the project nationally across the COTA network. (Three years).

The COTA NSW Education team has the expertise required to successfully prepare Peer Education training resources and develop a volunteer program to deliver the education. COTA NSW has the established framework and ability to pilot the program. The national network of COTAs in Australia has the experience and internal structure to coordinate and administer a national roll-out of the program.

Purpose

The overall purpose of the project is to provide relevant and reliable information about cybersecurity in a model that provides a safe learning environment and respects adult learning principles as they apply to this age group. Specifically, the program aims to:

Improve older peoples' awareness of the possible dangers with engaging and participating in cyber communications and surfing the net.

1. Explore the myths of cyber communication and provide links to reliable information on scams and safe practices.
2. Provide strategies and methods to reduce the risks associated with internet use.
3. Implement safety steps to protect children when they using older peoples computers.
4. Identify the key components of strong passwords.

Project Scope

The project aims to increase the number of older people applying cybersecurity strategies to cyber practices.

It is anticipated that the project will:

1. Provide sustainable outcomes / outputs beyond the span of the pilot
2. Create enduring partnerships between organisations and services
3. Ensure that positive ageing strategies are embedded into social infrastructures and
4. Ensure that priorities around the Better Practice and Adult Learning Principles are supported.

The Senior Peer Education Model of Health Promotion was established by COTA NSW in 2000 in partnership with Balmain Hospital. At this point, our aim was to convey information about medication management to older people.

This model of peer education was rolled out nationally in 2005, with COTAs across Australia offering sessions in relation to falls prevention (*Moving right along and Sweet Dreams*) and on medication (*Quality use of Medicines and Generic Medicines*).

Currently at a national level COTAs are using the peer education approach to promote two health education programs to seniors:

Medicines and You (conducted in partnership with NPS better choices, better health) and

beyond maturityblues (conducted in partnership with *beyondblue*; the national depression initiative)

Why is peer education so successful?

Peer education is an effective method of distributing messages because it recognises that people place a high value on the information they get from their peers – friends, family, colleagues. The efficacy of this model has been well researched in relation to different groups, especially in relation to young people. We have found that this model is equally applicable to older peoples’ needs and preferences when it comes to the way they receive information.

Above all, the purpose of peer education is to help people to effect a change in their behaviour or attitude in relation to a particular issue or area. It aims to do this by providing accurate, up-to-date and credible information relevant to the target group by a peer of that group; that is, someone who broadly shares the same social characteristics, in this case, someone who is a member of the same age group.

The benefits of peer education

- Peers tend to be regarded as a credible source of information
- Peer information sessions typically involve the presentation of information in a group setting familiar to participants, which raises comfort levels and promotes learning
- Information presented by peers may be more acceptable when other styles may not be; the focus of peer education is on sharing practical information that participants can immediately act upon
- Peer education promotes the presentation of information in plain language that is easy to understand
- Participants’ tendency to identify with their peers builds trust with peer educators and gives them credibility
- Peer education is cost effective
- Peer education tends to have a ‘ripple effect’ – participants share the information they receive in peer education session with members of their social peers. Education can reach people who are resistant to formal education and therefore hard to reach using more conventional educational methods

COTA NSW - Education Expertise

In response to positive feedback from participants at our previous peer education sessions, in 2009 COTA NSW expanded our model to include information on wellbeing, launching a new program to address concerns within the community about rising energy costs and the impacts this could have on people on fixed incomes. A partnership was formed with Energy Australia, Austgrid and TruEnergy and the ***Energy Efficiency - the power to change*** program was subsequently developed and piloted. This program's success was such that the partners extended the number of sessions to 150, after the first pilot program of 10 sessions.

In 2010 the portfolio was expanded again, with COTA NSW's expertise in developing and piloting peer education programs resulting in collaboration with the Men's Health Information Resource Centre of the University of Western Sydney in order to pilot ***Mate to Mate; Connecting Older Men and HACC services***. Building on the study "*Older men and HACC services: barriers to access and effective models of care*" has two streams:

1. capacity building tools for Home and Community Care Services (HACC) with the development of a training template
2. development of a peer education program with the creation of train the trainer manuals for volunteer educators. COTA NSW will recruit and train volunteers to discuss information with older men's groups and networks to improve their connectivity to HACC services.

We strongly believe that COTA NSW programs gain depth and relevance through the experience and skills of Volunteer Peer Educators. As a result, we have not only developed the skills to recruit and train volunteer peer educators, but to monitor and support them. Currently, there are 50 volunteers working in our programs across NSW, with plans to recruit another twenty in 2012.

Targeted information delivered in a social setting

All of the peer education sessions delivered by COTA NSW are free. They are designed to be interactive, with our peer educators trained to encourage discussion amongst the participants. Additionally, all our sessions are targeted exclusively at members of the public aged 50 and over, and their carers.

Sessions are presented to groups that are already established, such as seniors groups, clubs and services, including those catering for people who may not have English as a first language. By delivering information sessions to existing groups, we are able to reach people who feel they are in a 'safe' learning environment where the group dynamics and venue surroundings are known and understood. Additionally, learning is enhanced by the fact that participants have ongoing contact with one another and can remind each other of the content of sessions long after they have concluded.

We believe that the power of our peer education programs to enrich and build capacity within the community is well recognised. As a result, our sessions are often sought by community organisations. For example, a Seniors Citizens or Probus Club's may book a

session as a guest speaker. Similarly, council-based aged care workers may book a session to form a new group or activity for a community centre.

Relevant information and resources

Information sessions delivered by our peer educators last between 45 and 60 minutes.

Peer educators are familiar with the topics they cover and well-prepared to deliver them. The majority of sessions are allocated to a volunteer one month before the session is scheduled. (For requests outside metropolitan Sydney, we require a longer period. In more isolated areas we will try and find additional sessions with other groups, clubs and services around the date initially requested, to make the travel more cost-effective).

All of our peer educators are well-trained and they receive ongoing professional development and support. While peer educators are encouraged to involve participants in the sessions by drawing on their own life experiences, they understand that their role is a limited one. All our peer educators are permitted to provide information only - not formal advice or technical information - during the education sessions they deliver.

Quality Assurance

COTA NSW has developed a sound approach to quality assurance (QA) with respect to our peer education program. This process involves several component streams, ranging from a paper-based evaluation process of the participants and a self- and group- evaluation form for the peer educators. The process is also supported with individual mentoring and professional development in support meetings to build on the skill base of volunteers. In 2012 an extra layer of QA will be implemented with surveying of organisations and community workers requesting sessions.

Conclusion

Creating equity for older Australians in relation to the digital community requires a multi-stage approach. Firstly, a community awareness program that reduces the fear and showcases the benefits of digital communication is required. Which is currently a program that is been piloted in NSW and TAS this program needs to be extended into a national program in 2013.

The second stage is to provide support for older Australians accessing computers and the internet through initiatives such as Seniors Computer Kiosks.

Thirdly, other education programs that are specifically developed to increase the knowledge and skill of older Australians need to be supported and promoted. The Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Network is an excellent example of a cost effective and sustainable model of continuing Education.

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