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### Positive ageing on our mind - an initiative called AFIA (Age Friendly Illawarra Alliance)

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## Positive ageing on our mind - an initiative called AFIA (Age Friendly Illawarra Alliance)

### Abstract

Ageing is everyone's business, after all, none of us are getting younger. This assertion is reflected in the nursing workforce with the Department of Health telling us that the overall ageing workforce is reflected in both the increasing average age of nurses from 44.3 years in 2009 to 44.6 years in 2012 and the increasing percentage of those aged 55 years and over from 19.8% in 2009 to 23.1% in 2012.

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Ageing is everyone’s business, after all, none of us are getting younger. This assertion is reflected in the nursing workforce with the Department of Health telling us that the overall ageing workforce is reflected in both the increasing average age of nurses from 44.3 years in 2009 to 44.6 years in 2012 and the increasing percentage of those aged 55 years and over from 19.8 percent in 2009 to 23.1 percent in 2012.

|                  | <b>2013</b>           | <b>2016</b>           |
|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Age group</b> | <b>Total employed</b> | <b>Total employed</b> |
| 0-19             | 116                   | 100                   |
| 20-34            | 72,162                | 85,760                |
| 35-44            | 68,362                | 68,182                |
| 45-54            | 83,922                | 80,751                |
| 55-64            | 61,499                | 68,891                |
| 65-74            | 8,843                 | 11,109                |
| 75-99            | 273                   | 344                   |

Source: NHWDS 2016 Fact Sheet - <http://data.hwa.gov.au>

Given the statistics above, if we care about our own profession we need to start taking a closer interest in caring about older people and not from deficit model but rather from a strengths perspective. Despite the fact that we are all getting older, ageism and social beliefs about older people being ‘unhealthy’ and ‘unable’ appears to be rife. To combat ageism and to illustrate the important role that older people have in society, AFIA was established in the Illawarra region of NSW. AFIA is made up of education, business, government and community organisations working to drive improvements to social, civic and employment participation and access to transport, housing and support services by Illawarra seniors (defined as those  $\geq$  55 years of age).

AFIA members are the University of Wollongong, the IRT Foundation, Edmiston Jones GBB, Illawarra Pilot Joint Organisation, Healthy Cities Illawarra and NSW Family and Community Services. The Age-Friendly Illawarra Alliance is governed by a steering committee of representatives from each of the member organisations which is inclusive of a nurse academic.

Nurses are aware that working with and for older people needs to involve more than a focus on medical issues and should also include proactive social and cultural projects. To achieve this holistic approach the role of the individual members of the Age-Friendly Alliance Steering Committee includes:

1. Advocating for the vision, mission and strategic objectives of AFIA, their organisation, industry sector and the broader community.
2. Playing an active role in achieving the strategic objectives of AFIA.
3. Having a broad understanding of the barriers to and opportunities for active ageing in their local government area or industry sector.
4. Representing the interests of their member organisation / sector and its stakeholders.

In its aim to present older people as worthwhile contributors to society, AFIA's vision is for people aged over 55 years to be enabled to lead active, engaged lives and contribute positively to Illawarra Shoalhaven communities. This focuses on active ageing which the World Health Organization defines active ageing as: “the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age” allowing people to “realize their potential for physical, social and mental well-being throughout the life course”. AFIA's mission then, is for the people of the Illawarra to prosper socially and economically in an age-friendly region. To do this, AFIA is committed to driving region wide age-friendly initiatives across the focus areas of:

- Communication, Connection and Collaboration
- Older Perspectives and Perceptions
- Government and Regulatory

A three year delivery plan will see AFIA:

Year 1: Develop infrastructure and make connections

Year 2: Leverage resources and deliver events

Year 3: Influence and Advocate

A focus on health ageing will change social perceptions and create opportunities that maximise the quality of life of older people, make the most their contribution to society and minimise costs to health and care providers including family members.

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