

# National Healthy Ageing Day

Keep doing what matters

March 2026



Healthy Ageing Day



# Contents

▼ Rethink ageing - our philosophy	4	▼ The case for a National Healthy Ageing Day	8
▼ The lifespan vs healthspan reality	4	Community barriers	
▼ Inaugural theme	5	Sector barriers	
▼ The national challenge	6	What a National Healthy Ageing Day could do	
▼ A way forward	6	▼ Our commitment	10
▼ The digital bridge	7	▼ References	11
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LiveUp			
Keep Able			

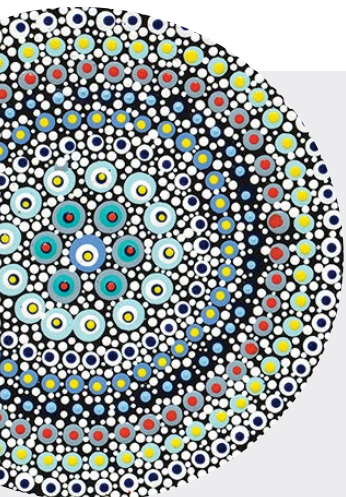
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**iLA acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands, skies and waters throughout Australia and the Torres Strait, where we live and work.**

We specifically acknowledge the Whadjuk Noongar people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which our head office sits, in Boorloo/Perth, Western Australia (Noongar Boodja). We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities across Australia, and their Elders past and present.

We are committed to walking together to develop culturally safe information and initiatives that enable people to make informed choices and connections, and support strong, self-determining communities.

**Artwork Credit:** Eulalia Martin (Bunuba/Gija), 'Growth' for iLA by Eulalia Martin Nawajjarri Designs 2022. @eulalia\_nawajjarri\_designs





**Australia is ageing rapidly, and this change affects all of us – families, communities, workplaces, and the systems that support our health and wellbeing. As people live longer, we need to rethink what those extra years look like.**

Healthy ageing is not just about preventing disease. It is about maintaining the functional ability, confidence, and independence that allow people to keep doing what they need and love to do, throughout life.

This is where wellness and reablement comes in. These approaches offer practical, evidence-backed ways to help people stay strong, connected, and capable – so they can continue living the life they value.

A National Healthy Ageing Day will shine a national spotlight on this message. It will celebrate purpose, independence, social connection, and everyday capability. It will turn healthy ageing from an abstract idea into real, practical action. iLA is ready to lead this effort through NowNext, LiveUp (for the community) and Keep Able (for the sector), creating a digital bridge that brings healthy ageing to life for all people living in Australia.



National Healthy Ageing Day is an opportunity to rethink what growing older can mean in Australia.

It's a chance to celebrate participation, connection, and the everyday choices that help people stay engaged and living well at every stage of life.

**Andrea Morris**  
COO, iLA





## Rethink ageing – our philosophy

**For iLA, healthy ageing is a lifelong journey, not a milestone you reach at a certain age. It focuses on:**

- ▶ Capability over chronology: because how you function matters far more than how old you are
- ▶ It's never too early or too late: taking small actions at any stage of life can reshape your ageing journey
- ▶ Self-efficacy: building the confidence to act, adapt to challenges, and plan for the future
- ▶ Holistic wellbeing: supporting physical, mental, social, brain, and nutritional health
- ▶ Functional ability: being able to keep doing what matters (iLA 2024).

This philosophy aligns with the World Health Organization's definition of healthy ageing as "the process of developing and maintaining functional ability that enables wellbeing in older age" and echoes global momentum from the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030) (World Health Organization, 2020; UN Decade of Healthy Ageing Platform, n.d.).

The core message is simple: improvement is possible at any age. Staying active, connected, curious, and engaged keeps people strong.

## The lifespan vs healthspan reality

**As people in Australia live longer, we must recognise an important difference:**

- ▶ Lifespan is how long you live.
- ▶ Healthspan is how many of those years you live in good health.

You might reach 100 years old, but our abilities and support needs naturally change. If age-related functional changes begin around 85, this marks a transition point where a person may need different strategies to stay well and active (Anstey 2025).

Healthy ageing is about maximising the years in which people can live with strength, independence, and purpose; and aims to minimise the length of time people spend managing more intensive health or support needs. The difference between healthspan and lifespan often determines whether people spend their later years in independence or dependence, capability or decline, participation or withdrawal (Jugran 2025).

The importance of healthspan underpins our proposed National Healthy Ageing Day inaugural theme: "Keep doing what matters."

# Inaugural theme

“Keep doing what matters” reflects four principles that apply to everyone:



Healthy ageing is about more than living longer, it's about living well.

National Healthy Ageing Day recognises the importance of supporting people to stay independent and keep doing what they love.

COTA Australia is proud to support the inaugural National Healthy Ageing Day and the message behind it: that everyone should have the opportunity to age with strength, independence and dignity.

**Pat Sparrow**  
CEO, COTA Australia

## 1. Continuity

Ageing should not mean stopping what you love. With the right support, people can keep doing what brings joy, meaning, and connection (iLA, 2024).

## 2. Agency

Healthy ageing is active. People make choices every day that strengthen their healthspan – staying socially engaged, learning new skills, or moving their bodies (Brouillard et al., 2024).

## 3. Relationality

Healthy ageing is shaped by relationships and resources. Our everyday choices are supported, encouraged, and sustained by the people, places, and communities we belong to (Meaningful Ageing Australia, 2021).

## 4. Inclusion

Healthy ageing belongs to everyone – of every gender, in every community, culture, and circumstance. Every person living in Australia deserves the opportunity to have choice and control over their care, and to remain capable and independent for as long as possible. (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2025; Jean Hailes, 2025; Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing, 2024; Department of Health and Aged Care, 2024).



# The national challenge

**Today, about 4.2 million people living in Australia – around 16% of the population – are aged 65 or older. By 2050, that number will nearly double, and the population aged 85+ will more than double (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024).**

This shift will:

- ▶ Increase demand for independence-focused, home-based care (Alaseed et al., 2025).
- ▶ Add pressure on families, communities, health, and workforce systems (Aged & Community Care Providers Association (Ageing Australia), 2024).
- ▶ Require stronger investments in prevention, restoration, and capability-building (National Ageing Research Institute, 2025).

Aged & Community Care Providers Association (Ageing Australia)'s State of the Sector 2024 report found that 70% of providers were concerned about the nation's readiness to support a growing ageing population (Ageing Australia, 2024).

People living in Australia are living longer, but they are spending more of those years in poor health. More people now manage two or more chronic conditions, and the years lived with disability continue to rise (Tawiah et al., 2022).

Frailty, once considered an issue limited to advanced age, is becoming more common and carries huge impact. Each person living with frailty costs the health system thousands of additional dollars every year, largely due to preventable hospitalisations and increased service use (Tosen et al., 2024). But frailty does not appear suddenly: evidence shows that pre-frailty commonly starts in mid-life, sometimes as early as 40 years old (Gordan et al., 2020).

There is increasing emphasis on intrinsic capacity – the physical and mental capacities that people can draw on throughout life as a core measure of healthy ageing (Pilot et al., 2025; World Health Organization 2020).

Declines in intrinsic capacity can begin long before frailty appears, but they can also be improved (Numbers et al., 2025). Small, proactive changes early and throughout life can prevent progression to frailty and meaningfully improve a person's ageing trajectory. When it comes to ageing well, it is never too early or too late to act.

These trends are also mirrored in how older people living in Australia feel about their own ageing.

The COTA State of the Older Nation 2025 survey shows:

- ▶ 48% believe things are worsening for people aged 50+, the highest level recorded
- ▶ Only 40% feel valued as older individuals
- ▶ Yet an overwhelming 72% believe people their age have much to offer society (COTA Australia, 2025).

These findings reflect both uncertainty and untapped potential. Longer lives should bring greater vitality, connection, and contribution – not more limitations. Without meaningful investment in healthy ageing, Australia risks adding years without adding life.

## A way forward

**Wellness and reablement provide a proven path to help people stay strong and independent.**

- ▶ Wellness strengthens health domains so that people can function well holistically.
- ▶ Reablement helps people regain function after setbacks and restore confidence and capability.

Wellness and reablement build the reserves and skills people need to remain independent, and delay higher levels of care (Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, 2025)

# The digital bridge: NowNext, LiveUp, and Keep Able

Healthy ageing is most effective when support begins early and continues across every stage of life, and in every setting (World Health Organization, 2025).

## NowNext (45+)

### Establishing early, sustainable habits

NowNext encourages people aged 45 – 65 to build healthy, micro-habits that support long-term physical, mental, cognitive, and nutritional wellbeing. The app acts as an early prevention tool and helps people build a strong foundation through daily habit formations that will benefit them now, and as they transition into older age.

## LiveUp (65+)

### Enhancing functional ability in older age

LiveUp supports people aged 65+ to maintain or improve their functional ability across physical, mental, cognitive, and nutritional health through:

- ▶ Daily strength and balance activities to prevent falls and maintain mobility.
- ▶ Opportunities for social connection and purpose to reduce isolation.
- ▶ Early, low-risk exploration of low-cost assistive technology to support independence.
- ▶ Cognitive activities and skill-building to promote brain health.
- ▶ Positive nutritional habits to strengthen overall wellbeing.

## Keep Able

### Embedding healthy ageing in the aged care sector

Keep Able ensures care providers continue this support for those requiring aged care services. It focuses on the workforce and service providers by equipping them with training, tools, and resources centered on wellness and reablement, and aligned with current aged care quality standards.

Together, NowNext, LiveUp and Keep Able create an effective wellness and reablement pathway – supporting people to build good habits early, stay strong and independent as they age, and receive care that champions their abilities.

From mid-life to older age, and across community and aged care settings, these programs empower every person with free, clinically backed knowledge so they can shape their own healthy ageing journey.



# The case for a National Healthy Ageing Day

Australia's major health and aged care frameworks increasingly emphasise prevention, independence, and reablement. A National Healthy Ageing Day, powered by NowNext, LiveUp and Keep Able, would amplify these priorities and give them national visibility.

- ▶ State-based ageing-well strategies – coherence with local priorities for healthy ageing.
- ▶ National Preventive Health Strategy (2021-30) – strengthens lifelong prevention approaches.
- ▶ New Aged Care Act (2024) – embeds wellness and reablement as a core principle.
- ▶ Commonwealth Home Support Program and Support at Home – describes wellness and reablement as fundamental pillars.
- ▶ Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards – requires evidence of independence.
- ▶ Australia's Disability Strategy (2021-2031) – alignment on inclusion and capability.

Despite strong policy support, there remains significant opportunity to better embed wellness and reablement in everyday practice (Australian Association of Gerontology 2025, A).

A National Healthy Ageing Day offers a timely, action-oriented platform to bring the community and the sector together to embrace healthy ageing in a shared, practical way.

## Community barriers

**Low engagement:** Many older people and families do not understand what reablement looks like within and outside the aged care system, and low awareness leads to low acceptance (Mulquiny and Oakman, 2022).

**System navigation complexity:** Complex reforms and fragmented services make it difficult for families to access short-term, goal-focused support (Australian Association of Gerontology, 2025, B).

**Ageism and environment gaps:** Stereotypes about ageing and non-inclusive spaces undermine confidence and discourage participation in reablement activities and support (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2025).

**Access and equity:** Many communities – including multicultural groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and rural and remote regions – face additional barriers (iLA 2025).

## Sector Barriers

**Fragmented understanding of reablement:** Services use inconsistent definitions and delivery models, which hinders effective implementation and weakens outcomes (Keep Able, n.,d.)

**Workforce pressure:** Rising demand continues to outpace the availability of allied health professionals and trained support workers. Limited training in person-centered goal setting and reablement frameworks further constrains delivery (O'Connor et al., 2020; Prior et al., 2025).

**Funding disincentives:** Task-based funding structures encourage task completion rather than independence-building, which can unintentionally promote dependency (Gough et al., 2025).

**Sector ageism:** Ageist assumptions within services – such as believing older people cannot regain function or that decline is inevitable – reduce the uptake of reablement approaches and lead providers to under-offer capability-building support (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2025).



## What a National Healthy Ageing Day could do

**As Australia's population ages, supporting older people to stay healthy, independent, and active becomes not just a policy priority – it becomes a community responsibility.**

A National Healthy Ageing Day offers a practical, inspiring way to bring people, services, and communities together around a simple idea: helping every person living in Australia stay stronger for longer.

Here's what a National Healthy Ageing Day could unlock:

**Community empowerment:** A National Healthy Ageing Day can provide an easy and welcoming entry point into healthy ageing. It can encourage simple, achievable micro-actions – small steps that make reablement real in everyday life. These actions are free or low-cost, and they're accessible whether or not someone receives formal aged care support. A National Healthy Ageing Day gives people the confidence to start where they are, with what they can do.

**Multisector collaboration:** A National Healthy Ageing Day can create a national rhythm each year – bringing together community events, campaigns, sector forums, policy conversations, data releases, and lived-experience stories. By linking these moments, a National Healthy Ageing Day builds a unified message, strengthens continuity, and keeps momentum growing across the country.

**Policy alignment:** Wellness and reablement principles sit at the heart of national reforms. A National Healthy Ageing Day can help people understand what these changes mean in practice and how they can engage with them. It turns policy intentions into something tangible and relatable for everyday people living in Australia.

**Workforce recognition:** A National Healthy Ageing Day can shine a light on the health and aged care professionals who enable independence every day. It offers a chance to celebrate their skills, build sector pride, and strengthen capability in person-centered, reablement-focused care.

**Global connection:** A National Healthy Ageing Day can align Australia with the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing, positioning Australia as a leader and opening opportunities for shared learning across cultures and communities worldwide.



Healthy ageing is about staying able, connected and confident as we grow older. On this inaugural National Healthy Ageing Day, let's build awareness and momentum for evidence based actions that support Australians to age well, now and into the future

**Renu Borst**  
CEO, Australian Association  
of Gerontology

# Our commitment

As Australia's population ages, our national focus must shift from responding to decline toward supporting people to live well, stay independent, and maintain purpose throughout life. A National Healthy Ageing Day, grounded in the theme "Keep doing what matters", offers a powerful way to bring communities, families, and services together around this shared goal.

With NowNext, LiveUp and Keep Able as the digital bridge, National Healthy Ageing Day can translate healthy ageing principles into everyday action – strengthening confidence, building functional ability, and helping people stay capable in their own homes and communities. It offers a simple, accessible pathway for people to take small steps that support independence, whether or not they receive formal aged care support.

By highlighting the difference between lifespan and healthspan, the day helps shift the national conversation from merely living longer to living well. It reinforces a hopeful message: ageing isn't passive. People have choice and control, and can take action to support a longer, healthier, more fulfilling life – with more years that genuinely feel like living.

## The day invites every person to see what's possible

- ▶ Your ageing journey is yours to shape – you can start wherever you are, at any stage of life.
- ▶ There is a wide range of free support available to help you take the next step, no matter your goals or starting point.
- ▶ You can build strength, confidence, and independence through small, low-cost actions.
- ▶ You can keep doing what matters to you, for as long as possible.



National Healthy Ageing Day offers a timely reminder that ageing, like the seasons, deepens us. Healthy ageing can be a slow ripening of the self – where we grow steadier, kinder, and more deeply present.

Through the richness of our experiences and the roads we have travelled, clarity deepens, compassion widens, and we can come home to ourselves.

**Rachael Wass**  
CEO, Meaningful Ageing Australia

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