

COMMUNITY

Chat



Winter
ISSUE 10, 2023



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Living and ageing *well!*

In good company

Public sentiment is always a good measure of whether an organisation is delivering on its core promise and values. I am pleased to report Uniting AgeWell continues to earn strong consumer trust and confidence, after it was voted as one of Australia’s most trusted brands in the highly competitive Home Care Vic/Tas category in the 2023 annual Reader’s Digest Trusted Brands Australia Awards.



Trust and confidence in our services is certainly reflected in our service growth and the decision by the Department of Health to transition more Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) services to Uniting AgeWell. Over the past 12 months, around 5,000 CHSP customers have transitioned to Uniting AgeWell – most recently from the Cities of Whitehorse, and Greater Bendigo and from Golden City Support Services. I extend a very warm welcome to all of our new customers and also to the new staff recruited to help deliver these expanded services. Rest assured we are absolutely committed to delivering services that enable you to live well at home and stay connected in your community.

Volunteers have always played an important role across our services and communities and I am particularly delighted to welcome the many volunteers who have joined Uniting AgeWell in recent months. Whether it’s one-on-one visits, contributing to social group activities, providing community transport, or being a regular tele-friend, the difference our volunteers make in people’s lives is enormous. You can read more about their incredible impact in this edition of Community Chat.

We also want to ensure you receive information that assists you to stay healthy and safe. Drawing on the expertise of our staff and professional networks, we have some excellent tips and advice on how to stay warm and well in the colder months, looking after your oral health and how to get the most from a Home Care Package.

Social connection is incredibly important for our mental health and wellbeing. A strong theme running through our work, our services, and our research and innovation initiatives is creating opportunities for meaningful social connection – whether at home, at a centre, by phone or by video call, we’re working to ensure you are in good company.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition of Community Chat.

Best wishes

Andrew Kinnersly
Chief Executive Officer
Uniting AgeWell



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If you do not wish to receive future issues of Community Chat email: mcr@unitingagewell.org or call 1300 783 435.

A Trusted Brand

Uniting AgeWell was voted by Australian consumers as a Trusted Brand for 2023, achieving Highly Commended status in the Home Care Vic/Tas category – great recognition for the work our home care teams do.



For the 24th year, Reader's Digest has approached consumers to ask their opinions on which brands of products and services are important to them. This highly regarded independent brand survey of more than 2,800 Australians, provides assurance to consumers they are choosing a reputable brand.

The survey results place Uniting AgeWell among Australia's top three most trusted brands in the highly competitive Home Care Vic/Tas category. The accolade reflects the growth in reach and reputation of our home care services, particularly over the past five years, and builds on our Silver Quality Service Award, won for the same category last year.

Uniting AgeWell services have grown considerably in recent years, with customer numbers increasing by 39% in 2022 for in-home care, allied health and therapy services, respite and carer support and social connections programs. Even with this rapid growth, customers have remained at the heart of everything the organisation does.

Uniting AgeWell CEO Andrew Kinnersly says, "Supporting an individual's ageing journey, providing them with access to high quality services to support their goals, respecting their choices and enabling them to get the most out of life, are key to us building customer trust." He adds, "We truly listen to our customers and actively pursue opportunities for improvement."

Quality gets a tick



The quality of our services was on show recently when the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission came to audit our Home Care Package and Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) services in the North West Metro and Barwon regions. These services, which extend to over 3,000 customers, were assessed as fully compliant.

While our community services and programs consistently receive glowing praise from auditors, Uniting AgeWell constantly looks at new ways we can improve and enhance our standards of care and service delivery. If you have any feedback, please email us at

feedback@unitingagewell.org or call 1300 783 435.

A quality workforce

The quality of our services is also reflected in our workforce, and Uniting AgeWell has been busy investing in initiatives that support staff onboarding, training and personal development.

- We are currently trialling a new Mentor Program in the West Metro region to provide a consistent onboarding experience for new Home Care Workers.
- Over 200 nurses from across our residential and community care services in Vic/Tas have taken part in our Nurse Professional Development Program (Nurse PDP) to build on their clinical skills and competencies, with more sessions scheduled for this year.
- Eighteen Senior Managers selected from across Uniting AgeWell services have graduated from our BEST Strategic Leaders Program for 2023. The program is designed to build leadership skills and nurture talent.



Learn more: visit www.trustedbrands.com.au

Home is where
the heart is





A warm welcome to our new Commonwealth Home Support Programme customers who joined us on 1 July, following the transition of their services from council providers. We're here for all our customers – just like we're here for Mary and Liz – every step of the way.

Mary Graca (pictured left) packs an enormous amount of joy into her days. From going on bus outings to doing arts and crafts, playing bingo and having a cuppa in the sunshine with her friends, the 93-year-old Bendigo resident is busy and purposeful.

Mary, who has lived with dementia for the last ten years, attends Uniting AgeWell's Seven Hills Cottage Respite House in White Hills three days a week and enjoys weekend respite stays every 4-6 weeks, which affords her daughter Liz a much-needed break.

Liz finds that juggling her full-time nursing career with a carer's role is exhausting. And her medical training also means she knows what lies ahead.

Mary, who accesses Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) services, loves attending but can't recall what activities they do. "That's the way it is," she says cheerfully. "There's no point worrying about what I can't remember. I'm really happy right now."

And Liz, whose Mum lives in a unit behind her Bendigo home, has peace of mind too. "Mum also gets nutritious lunches at the Cottage," says Liz. "Her dementia has reached the stage that she has to be prompted to eat, otherwise she forgets she has not had a meal."

Uniting AgeWell also runs the "You're Not Alone" support group for carers in the Bendigo region at the Cottage. Sometimes there are educational chats – but mostly there's the shared camaraderie that carers appreciate so much. Where talking – often interspersed with laughter and tears – provides comfort like no other.

Mary is now moving to a Home Care Package through Uniting AgeWell to meet her more specialised needs, but Liz knows there will be a continuum of care for her mum no matter what happens. And she says it's comforting to know Uniting AgeWell is not just behind them, but walking alongside them, every step of the way.

Uniting AgeWell Deputy Chief Executive Fonda Voukelatos, who has organisational responsibility for home care and community services, is confident that Mary's sentiments will be echoed by the 800 plus customers who recently joined Uniting AgeWell from the Cities of Whitehorse and Greater Bendigo and also from Golden City Support Services.

"We are proud to have been selected by the Department of Health to take over these CHSP services and also proud of our local teams who have been working tirelessly with the councils and customers to ensure a smooth transition," says Fonda.

CHSP customers can access a range of services from domestic assistance and personal care, to flexible in-home respite and individual support services.



To find out more about the services available in your area, phone our friendly team on 1300 783 435.



Dr Miller talks teeth

Dr Greg Miller is Chairperson and Clinical Ambassador of the Australian Dental Foundation. A renowned expert in his field, he knows all too well the importance of maintaining good oral health in later life and shares his top tips for a healthy smile.

Good oral health is important throughout life, but particularly in later years. As people age, there are several common health problems that can arise. These include tooth decay, gum disease, tooth loss or wear, dry mouth, oral infections, changes in gum and bone structure, and an increased risk of oral cancer.

Dr Miller says regular dental check-ups play a vital role in early detection and treatment of age-related concerns. "A quick visit to a dental professional can improve comfort and oral function as well as reduce the risks of systemic conditions like cardiovascular disease and diabetes."

He adds, "Having healthy teeth, mouth and gums is important for your general health, and a healthy smile enhances self-esteem and social interaction."

Uniting AgeWell has a long-standing association with the Australian Dental Foundation, which provides convenient outreach dental services to our residential facilities in both Victoria and Tasmania. The Foundation's services have improved oral health outcomes for many aged care residents, who would otherwise find it difficult to access dental care.

Dr Miller's top teeth tips:

Maintain a thorough oral hygiene routine

Brush your teeth at least twice a day with a soft-bristle toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. Don't forget to clean your tongue and floss daily to remove plaque and food particles.

Attend regular dental check-ups

Visit your dentist regularly for check-ups and professional cleanings.

Manage dry mouth

If you experience dry mouth, drink plenty of water, avoid tobacco and alcohol, and consider using saliva substitutes or sugar-free gum to stimulate saliva flow. Consult with your dentist or healthcare provider for additional guidance.

Choose a balanced diet

Maintain a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains. Limit sugary and acidic foods and beverages, as they can contribute to tooth decay.

Avoid harmful habits

Smoking and excessive alcohol consumption not only increases the risk of oral health problems but also negatively impacts overall health.

Stay hydrated

Drinking enough water throughout the day helps maintain oral health and prevents dry mouth. It also aids in the production of saliva, which helps wash away food particles and neutralize acids.

Dealing with dentures

Clean dentures daily

Remove and clean your dentures every day to eliminate food particles, plaque, and bacteria. Use a soft-bristle brush and non-abrasive denture cleanser or mild soap to gently brush all surfaces of your dentures.

Brush your gums, tongue, and palate

Even if you have full dentures, it's important to clean your gums, tongue, and palate every day using a soft-bristle brush or a damp cloth. This helps remove plaque and stimulate blood circulation in the oral tissues.

Soak dentures overnight

Place your dentures in a denture-soaking solution or plain water overnight to keep them moist. This prevents them from drying out, warping, or losing their shape.

Attend regular dental check-ups

Regular dental visits are essential, even if you have dentures. Your dentist can examine your oral tissues, check the fit of your dentures, and make any necessary adjustments or repairs.

Be mindful of denture adhesive use

If you use denture adhesive, follow the instructions carefully and use it sparingly. Excessive use of adhesive may indicate that your dentures need adjustment or relining.

Avoid using harmful cleaning agents

Steer clear of bleach, abrasive cleaners, or hot water, as they can damage your dentures. Stick to denture-specific cleaning products recommended by your dentist.

Handle denture repairs professionally

If your dentures become damaged, broken, or lose their fit, resist the temptation to fix them yourself. Instead, schedule an appointment with your dentist for proper repairs or adjustments.

Give your mouth a break

Whenever possible, remove your dentures for a few hours each day to give your oral tissue a chance to rest and recover.

Keep up with oral hygiene for natural teeth

If you have natural teeth remaining, continue to brush and floss them daily to maintain their health and prevent gum disease.



Telehealth gets a top up



Uniting AgeWell was awarded funding through the Second Round of the Aged Care Research and Industry Innovation Australia (ARIIA) Grants Program for our Telehealth Top Up project, which will add a whole new dimension to telehealth services this year.

Uniting AgeWell has partnered with the Institute for Musculoskeletal Health, the University of Sydney and the Sydney Local Health District, on an innovative program to encourage and support older people to exercise at home.

With this program, physiotherapists provide sessions via telehealth to home care customers using iPad devices provided by Uniting AgeWell.

Home Care Workers are also trained as 'Exercise Coaches' and attend the online physiotherapy sessions and additional exercise sessions at the customer's home, to motivate, support and assist them with undertaking their individualised exercise program.

The research aims to determine whether this model of in-person support, as well as Zoom sessions, works far more effectively than the usual telehealth services on offer for improving mobility, reducing falls and hospitalisation and improving quality of life.



"If this new approach results in significant physical improvements in our customers, then we could look at incorporating this into our suite of allied health care services," says Nina Bowes, Uniting AgeWell Director Strategy and Innovation.

"And we are proud that Uniting AgeWell, as a learning organisation, is the only aged care provider in Victoria involved in this research."

Nina says the reality is that some people prefer to have someone with them as they do their exercises. By having their Home Care Worker attend the sessions, they feel motivated and empowered to keep up the program. They also benefit from hands-on help to show them how the exercises are done.

The program has already been trialled in the Loddon Mallee area, with encouraging results. The program is especially useful in rural areas where it may be difficult to have in-person appointments with a physiotherapist.

This next round of Telehealth Top Up, made possible by the grant funding, saw the program further extended to South Melbourne Metro and West Melbourne Metro regions. This means the study is more far-reaching – both geographically and with participant numbers – making the research more robust.

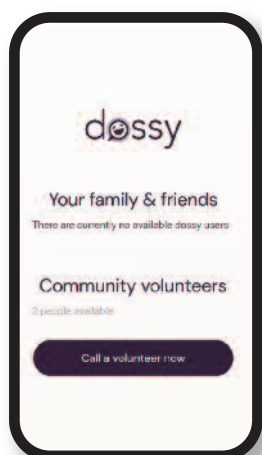
We look forward to sharing the results of this trial shortly.

Living and ageing *well!*

Keeping families connected

Soon-to-be-centenarian, Alex Reid, can't speak highly enough of the Dossy app. He uses it daily to connect with his favourite people, including his eldest daughter Patricia who lives in country Victoria and his younger brother Colin, in Bundaberg, Queensland. In fact, he's got five generations of family at the touch of a button.

In collaboration with our research partners, and with grant funding from the second round of the ARIIA Grants Program, Uniting AgeWell is trialling Dossy, an easy-to-use video calling app, with Alex and nearly 30 other Home Care customers. All participants in the trial receive a video-enabled device (iPad), internet connectivity and the app for free.



Dossy has been designed specifically for low vision, low tech and hearing-impaired users with features like hearing aid connect, guided access, larger fonts and optimised sound. Alex has certainly found the app very easy to use, and so has his daughter and great granddaughter who regularly use it to check in on him.

The Dossy App also includes Community Connect, a function that enables the user to connect to a volunteer who is available for a chat. Topics of conversation might be general interests, family, holidays, career or working life, pets, hobbies, news and events, movies, cooking, TV shows and more.

"The program aims to reduce social isolation and loneliness by helping connect Uniting AgeWell clients with their families, loved ones and a dedicated team of Dossy volunteers, in an intuitive and meaningful way."

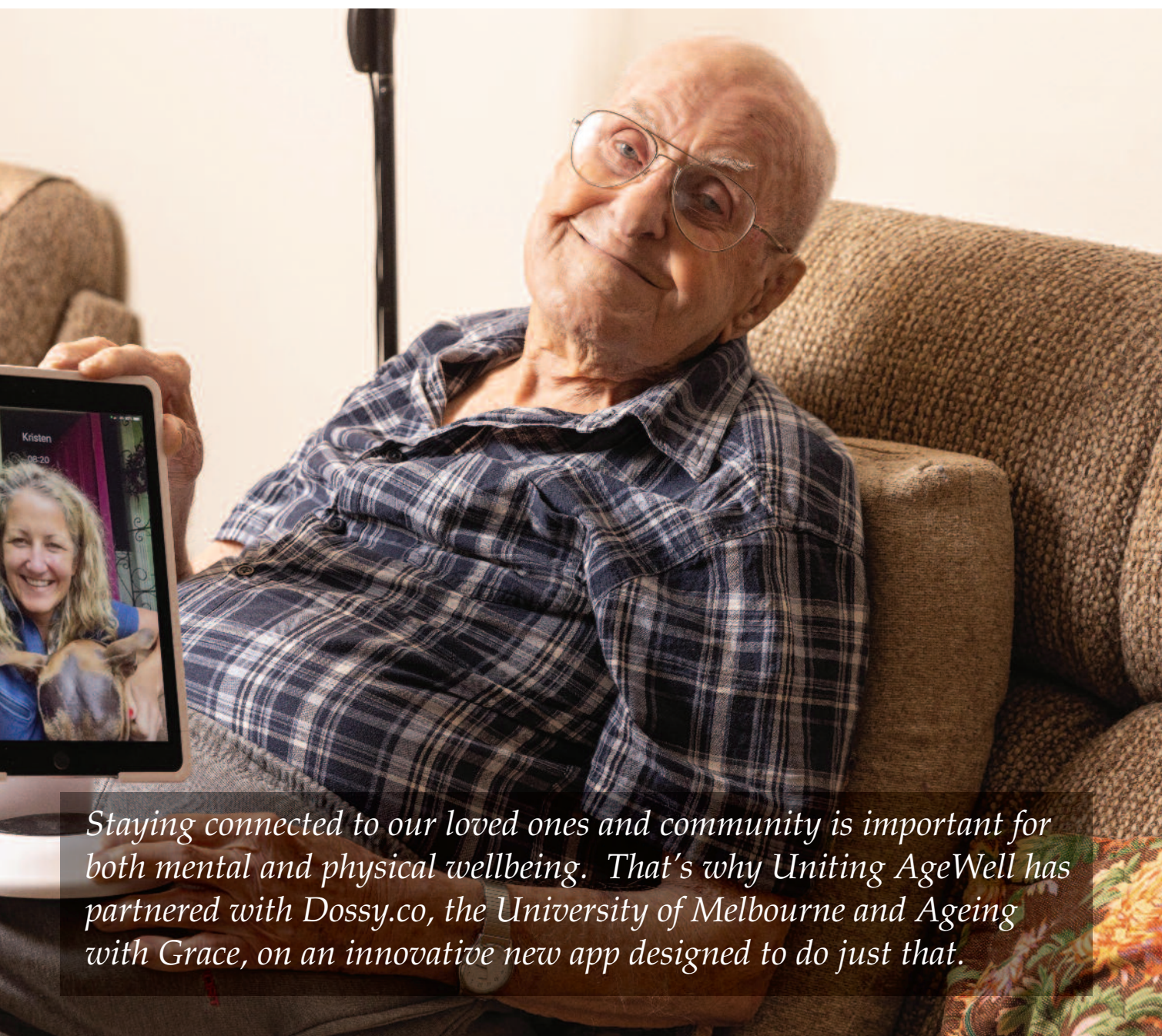
There couldn't be anyone more fitting for the trial than Alex, who has spent a lifetime perfecting his gift of the gab as a bus driver and cabby. "Day and night I would pick up passengers and talk to them," he says. And there was never a dull conversation, with stories of his time in the occupation forces in Hiroshima Japan following the atom bomb and how he earned the nickname, The Great AL (Alexander Lawrence) for his sporting prowess.



One of his favourite stories is how he met his late wife Betty at the skating rink. "I had my eye on her all night, then I decided it was time to sweep her off her feet - literally," he says. "I got my mate to knock her off her skates and then I helped her up like the hero. We got married three weeks later."

Alex says he finally told his wife that story on their 50th wedding anniversary. "She had half a glass of water in her hand and she threw it at me. She was so angry. Later she came and gave me a kiss and we had a good chuckle."

Alex couldn't be happier with Dossy, and feels confident initiating video calls from the comfort of his own home in Braybrook, where he has lived for the past 75 years. "The more you laugh, the happier you make everybody," he says. "And I just love a good chat and a laugh."



Staying connected to our loved ones and community is important for both mental and physical wellbeing. That's why Uniting AgeWell has partnered with Dossy.co, the University of Melbourne and Ageing with Grace, on an innovative new app designed to do just that.

Early positive results

Participants taking part in the Dossy trial have reported:

- An increase in social connectedness through regular video calls with family and close friends
- A sense of increased involvement in family life
- Reduced feelings of loneliness and social isolation

The joy of giving



Being a volunteer at Uniting AgeWell enriches the lives of older people – and your own! Just ask Connie, who was first a volunteer and is now a participant in one of our Social Connections programs. Whatever your age, background and interests, there are opportunities for everyone to make a difference.

"I love talking to my friends and eating pizza and pasta and drinking coffee. And of course, talking some more!" laughs Connie Natoli (pictured centre). "After all, I'm a Great-Nonna!"

And it's Italian-born Connie's infectious enthusiasm and love of life that has been burnished over the years, thanks to her involvement with Uniting AgeWell's Social Connections program at the Linlithgow Centre in Ivanhoe. First as a founding member and volunteer, and now as a client.

The 86-year-old loves attending the multi-cultural day at the Centre on Thursdays, and after the activities and lunch, she and a group of women head out for more coffee. And of course, more laughter and talking.

"We are so supportive of each other," Connie says. "If you're feeling a bit down, someone will always cheer you up. You don't stay feeling sorry for yourself for long!"

Connie's involvement with the Centre stems back to when she was approached by a member of the Uniting Church, to

help set up the group after it was noticed that a lot of older Italians moving into the Banyule area were socially isolated.

Connie, who is fluent in Italian, did just that, and also started volunteering, helping with meals and running activities. And she is quick to admit that while volunteering may have enriched the lives of others – it has certainly enriched her life too.

"The friendships I've made through my 20-year association with this Centre are lifelong," she says. "They are a great bunch of people. I always got more out than I put in as a volunteer."

It is this joy in giving joy that is echoed by Uniting AgeWell's 400 volunteers, who are as culturally diverse as the older people they help. They range in age from students in their teens to those in their 80s. And although they have widely different interests, the vast range of volunteering opportunities means there's something for everyone. Sometimes volunteering even opens the door to career paths at Uniting AgeWell.

While there's no one-size-fits-all when it comes to volunteers, what they share is kindness and finding purpose in volunteering. It can fill their need to give back. It can also help fill the lonely void sometimes felt in retirement. Or when a partner passes away, or when someone finds themselves living apart from their loved one who has moved into residential care.

Whatever the reasons for volunteering, Uniting AgeWell is grateful to each and every one of them for the difference they make to the lives of older people.

Opportunities in the community

- **One-on-one visiting:** Spending time with people at home – playing board games or listening to music or chatting.
- **Chat-A-Ring:** Chatting one-on-one with people on weekly or fortnightly calls.
- **Telelinks:** Group chats with up to 6 – 8 people who share similar interests. Topics include trivial pursuit, armchair travel and more.
- **Outings:** Taking people out for meals or to the movies, or other outings established around people's needs and preferences.
- **Volunteer driver:** If you live in country Victoria and driving is your thing, you can volunteer at Grampians Community Transport which provides local transport for older people in Ararat or Ballarat, with trips made further afield for medical appointments.
- **Centres of joy:** Or you can volunteer at many of our community centres. Just like Connie! We now have five additional centres in Victoria: Chadstone, Healesville, East Burwood, Ivanhoe and Toorak.



Former limousine chauffeur and Grampians resident Jamie Bessell enjoys volunteering behind the wheel, taking people to social outings and appointments. He says volunteering keeps him on top of his game!



71-year-old Tracy Barron loves a good chinwag on the phone, which makes her an ideal volunteer for our Chat-A-Ring program.



Husband and wife volunteer duo Graeme and Joy Thompson love ladling out hot meals – and happiness – to customers attending our Ivanhoe centre.



If you have a big heart and a little bit of spare time on your hands, you may like to consider enriching the lives of others – and your own – by becoming a volunteer. Uniting AgeWell would love to hear from you! **Call 13 93 75** or visit unitingagewell.org/get-involved/volunteering

Keeping warm and well



There's a lot to love about the cooler weather – frosty mornings, knitting winter warmers or cozying up in your favourite fluffy blanket on the couch with a cup of tea. But it can be a tough time too. Here's how you can make the most of the cooler months, by staying warm, healthy and connected.

Colder weather brings with it the usual challenges of staying warm. As you get older, the body is more susceptible to the cold and has to work harder to maintain a normal internal temperature. We spoke with our experts in allied health and took advice from national peak body COTA (Council on the Ageing) to provide these handy cold weather survival tips.

Staying warm

- › Dress with several light layers of warm clothes (rather than one chunky layer). A hat, socks or slippers, scarf, thermals and gloves can also help retain body heat.
- › Enjoy hot beverages regularly like a cup of tea, coffee, or hot chocolate.
- › Consider heating devices like hot water bottles, electric blankets, hand warmers or heated throws, but follow the safety instructions carefully.
- › Keep curtains drawn and doors closed to minimise cold air. Door snakes or even rolled up towels can be used as draft stoppers.

Staying healthy

- › Eat nutritious meals as your body needs more calories to stay warm. Porridges and hearty soups packed with vegetables are perfect foods.
- › Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water. Dry air temperatures, both inside and outside, can lead to dehydration.
- › Protect yourself and others from colds and flu. Make sure you get your annual flu jab and check you're up to date with your COVID-19 vaccinations.





It is especially important to stay active when it's cold. Uniting AgeWell Exercise Physiologist Emily Tahiri recommends 15 minutes of mindful movement a day.

She says going for a brisk walk, or doing gentle exercise like yoga or stretching can warm up the body, help avoid winter illnesses and ward off those winter blues. "We even have Zoom exercise sessions that make it easy to log on and get moving from the comfort of your own home," she says. "Anyone interested should get in touch with their local AgeWell Centre."



*AgeWell Centres offer a range of programs and activities to keep you fit and healthy all year round, like exercise classes, physio and social support groups including via telehealth. Find your local centre by calling **1300 783 435**.*

Staying connected

- › Enjoy the social warmth of family and friends. Chilly weather puts many people off their usual activities, but this is a time when interaction is important. Staying connected can help minimise seasonal sadness and bring more warmth – both physical and emotional – into your life.
- › Don't forget the companionship that pets offer too. Cats make great snuggle companions, and lap warmers!



Keep your spirits up in winter by joining one of our Chat-A-Ring or Telelinks programs – all from the comfort of your couch – and be connected with one of our volunteers.

Find out more by phoning 13 93 75.

i For more cold weather survival tips, visit the COTA (Council on the Ageing) website:
cota.com.au/winter-survival-tips

Making your package work for you



When it comes to getting the most out of a Home Care Package, the message is clear – spend it, don't save it for a rainy day.

Cheryl and Rob Hicks have lived in their beloved Echuca family home for over 30 years and can't imagine being anywhere else. They love listening to the birds, Rob is busy with his veggie patch and they're currently enjoying following the cricket!

Cheryl, 73, has macular degeneration which means her vision is significantly impaired, both have arthritis and use walkers. Rob, 78, is still a bit wobbly on his pins following a stroke.

But working with their Care Advisor Deb Jones, the couple gets the most out of their government-funded Home Care Package through Uniting AgeWell to ensure they can live well and safely at home for as long as possible.

Deb worked with an Occupational Therapist to assess their needs. To enable them to be more mobile and safe, a ramp was installed at the front door and a balcony deck replaced the uneven tripping-hazard pavers at the back door. So now they can access their garden and the street confidently. Their shower was also modified so it's level with the bathroom floor and they now also use special shower stools.

Deb recently organised for their gravel driveway to be concreted so that Cheryl can walk to her post box. "The Council has installed a brand-new footpath to the shops nearby, and Cheryl's aim is to be able to walk to the store by herself," explains Deb. "It's good for a client to have goals to work towards."

Cheryl also gets social support each week, and they get help around the house and garden and go on escorted shopping trips as neither of them drive anymore. She has also had physiotherapy for her legs and Rob gets a bit of personal care.

"I can't praise Uniting AgeWell enough," says Cheryl. "Deb gets a bit embarrassed when I keep on telling her how wonderful she is – but it's true!"

Act sooner rather than later

It's heart-warming stories like this that have prompted one of Uniting AgeWell's Home Care Directors Sherry-Ann Bailey to advise clients "not to save their packages for a rainy day."

"Don't wait to have a fall before you act," she says. "If you discuss your needs with your Care Advisor, they can take proactive rather than reactive steps when it comes to living safely and well at home."

Sherry-Ann has more advice. "There is a huge range of products on offer to keep you mobile and safe – walkers, scooters, special beds and chairs, gadgets like a smart watch with a tracker for those with dementia on offer. iPads to reduce social isolation...the list is endless."

There are also a vast range of Allied Health services available to keep your mobility levels up.

"You don't know what you don't know," explains Sherry-Ann. "You need the expert advice of your Care Advisor to find out what's available, what will help you, what you are eligible for and how to get it."



Talk to your local Uniting AgeWell Care Advisor or home care team member today. They're here to assist you to live well with choice and peace of mind. Call **1300 783 435**.

We are here to help. Contact your local Uniting AgeWell team for service information and support.



1300 783 435



info@unitingagewell.org



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