



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
VICTORIA

## **NARI INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY LUNCHEON**

**Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

**Associate Professor Michael Murray**, President, National Ageing Research Institute

**Associate Professor Briony Dow**, Director, National Ageing Research Institute

**Distinguished guests**

**Ladies and gentlemen**

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their Elders past and present and to any Elders here with us this afternoon.

As NARI's Patron-in-Chief, I am delighted to join you here at Coombe Cottage to celebrate the achievements of NARI. And given our proximity to International Women's Day, I am inspired to say a word or two – or perhaps a few more – about women as well.

Just three short years ago we were pleased to celebrate NARI's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday at Government House. Now you are 43. In the prime of life.

Although, given NARI's role in advice, research and statistics relating to ageing, I suspect many of you in this room can recalibrate my assessment of what now constitutes 'prime of life'.

You know well that Australia's population is ageing, thanks to the significant advances in health care, rises in living standards, and declining fertility rates.

In fact last year, there were almost 4,000 centenarians across Australia. But if I am lucky enough to reach my 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, it is estimated that I will be one of 40,000.

We are seeing the impact of our ageing population, at Government House, and as we travel around our State.

Each year, we host the Seniors' Awards – to thank and acknowledge those aged 60 and above – for all that they contribute to our State.

And it is an immense contribution.

In every field of endeavour, in every region and in every diverse way possible. Age is so obviously no barrier at all. And we see that the time, skills and wisdom of our senior Victorians lie at the heart of so much of what is achieved in our State.

Each year as well, Tony and I host a morning tea for the year's newest Centenarians. And each year, I find myself in awe of the energy and positivity in the room.

A year ago, we truly marvelled at the guest who, at 99, had ordered a new sports car. Moreover, he was unperturbed that, once ordered, it would not arrive for another 6 months!

I would like to reach 100 years of age, just so I can be invited back to Government House, to that heart-warming event!

But as well as observing the many pleasures of ageing, we also see the many challenges too.

That almost one in 10 people aged over 65 live with dementia, and that the figure rises to 3 in 10 for those over 85. Or that around half of all Australians aged 65 and over are living with a disability.

And so, we understand the importance of NARI's research in more than 50 different projects, including research into a wide range of topics including elder abuse, mental health and physical activity, and the impact of ageing for those with culturally and linguistic diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, or for LGBTI communities.

Considering that today's occasion marks International Women's Day, we must recognise that – although the impact of ageing affects both men and women – there are many ways in which it specifically affects women more.

We know that almost 65% of older primary carers in Australia are female. And that family carers often provide this care at a cost to their own health and wellbeing.

We also know that around 87% of those working in the aged care sector are women.

So, I would like to acknowledge the women in this room and beyond, who are doing so much of the work when it comes to this large and growing part of our population.

As we approach International Women's Day, I think there is much for us to be optimistic about when it comes to gender equality. I am conscious, however, that there is still a long way to go.

Just last year, the World Economic Forum predicted that women would have to wait another 108 years for gender equality. And Australia is ranked only 39<sup>th</sup> out of 144 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index.

Despite that, here in Victoria, we have had many wonderful women to celebrate. Many strong women, and women who have made very significant contributions in their senior years.

I would like to use this combined NARI/IWD celebration to briefly reflect on just a few of them.

Standing here at Coombe Cottage – and with the prospect of opera ringing in our ears - I immediately think of the impressive, irrepressible Dame Nellie Melba.

It is not only her beautiful voice and music making that we admire.

She was always renowned for her generosity, but it was as a mature woman that she was particularly effective in using her standing to contribute to the community.

During the First World War, she raised some £100,000 for the war effort.

And one of her final acts before she died was the bequest of a significant sum to establish a singing scholarship – in her words – with the hope that another Melba may arise. What a legacy.

Reflecting on the contribution of some of our senior women brings me to one of our nation's other Dames – Dame Elisabeth Murdoch AC DBC.

She may have been a diminutive woman, but she left a huge legacy in Victoria.

Dame Elisabeth dedicated her life to philanthropic activity. And age was no barrier to her contributions.

She helped to establish The Australian National Piano Award, and was recognised as the Senior Australian of the Year for Victoria, all when she was in her mid-90s.

Turning towards a more recent example of greatness within Victoria, I'd like to share with you a little about 89-year-old, Ms Alison Harcourt – the current Victorian Senior Australian of the Year.

Alison has had an outstanding career in mathematics and statistics. A truly pioneering woman, working in male dominated fields, she has managed to rail against orthodoxy to assert her ideas and intellect.

Her research and work, for example, on the poverty line, and the randomisation of ballot papers, led to reforms that helped to make our society and our democratic system stronger and fairer.

She has been an important voice and champion for women and girls studying and working within STEM fields.

Our nation is, quite simply, all the better for her determination and courage.

And finally, I would like to draw your attention to another remarkable Victorian woman. This one not so senior, (in the sense of her age), but sufficiently close to the heart of our subject today that I do want to mention her. She will be well known to many of you.

Associate Professor Dina LoGiudice has spent the past 20 years contributing to the field of ageing and dementia, through both research and clinical practice.

Like the other women I have spoken about, her work and expertise has challenged and disrupted the way 'things have always been done'. She has pioneered new approaches and new ways of looking at some of our community's long-standing challenges.

Associate Professor LoGiudice has received prestigious NHMRC grants to develop appropriate screening tools for Indigenous populations, in order to identify dementia, and develop an appropriate model of care and ensure access to services.

And she was one of the first researchers to recognise the significance and challenges facing Australia's various CALD communities.

Her work has led to the creation of more culturally appropriate interventions that cater to the unique needs of Australians from different backgrounds.

Professor Lo Giudice is just one example of the many talented women who work with or support NARI. We thank them all for their ground breaking research and the tenacity in their advocacy, and in their commitment to improving the quality of life and health of older Victorians.

Indeed, as we travel across our State, and meet different women from different backgrounds and on different paths, I am heartened by how so many women exemplify this same combination of tenacity and hard work.

We thank them all and wish everyone a happy International Women's Day for tomorrow.

And we thank all those associated with NARI – men and women- researchers, staff, volunteers and supporters. You make the prospect of our ageing significantly brighter. We are grateful.