

# CREATIVE AGEING AND RESILIENCE IN CHALLENGING TIMES



International Federation on Ageing 13<sup>th</sup> Global Conference, Brisbane QLD  
21 to 23 June 2016

Presentation by NSW Ministerial Advisory Committee on Ageing

[www.maca.nsw.gov.au](http://www.maca.nsw.gov.au)

Chair: Kathryn Greiner AO

MACA members: Prof Tracey McDonald AM, Valerie Pratt AO, Adj Prof Michael  
Fine

Presentation prepared by MACA member Margret Meagher

Director, Australian Centre for Arts and Health ([info@artsandhealth.org](mailto:info@artsandhealth.org))

*Art is like chocolate for the brain*

Dr Gene Cohen

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The NSW Ministerial Advisory Committee on Ageing (MACA) advises the NSW Minister for Ageing, the Hon. John Ajaka on matters affecting the needs, interests and wellbeing of older people in NSW, and on the impact of the ageing of the population.

2016 NSW Seniors  
Week Festival  
Ambassadors  
Maha Abdo OAM  
Kumar Pereira  
Robina Beard OAM



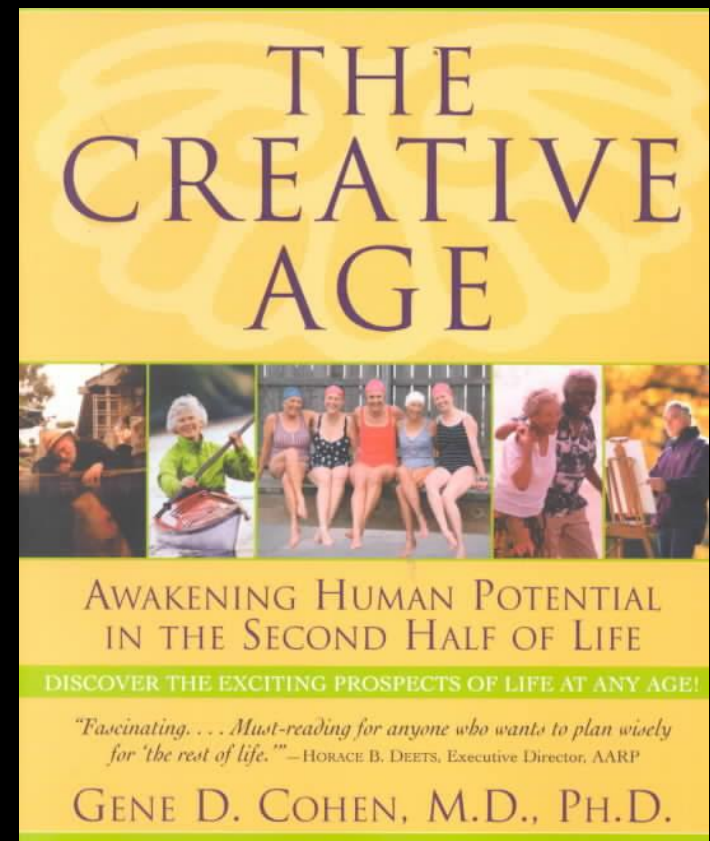
People are born creative. Research shows that the level of people's creativity often increases with age. Access to the arts for older people is a key to quality of life.

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## The Age of Creativity

The utilisation of the arts to excite imagination and support older people to age well is known internationally as “creative ageing” – a phrase coined by prominent US psychiatrist and gerontologist Dr Gene Cohen (1944 – 2009)



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## NSW Government's Leadership Role

Recognising the value and impact of creative engagement for health and wellbeing, the NSW Government has included "creative ageing" within the NSW Ageing Strategy and its focus on social inclusion and participation.

Since 2013, the NSW Government has actively supported creative ageing initiatives including conferences, forums, and creative ageing festivals inspired by similar festivals in Ireland (Bealtaine), Wales (Gwanwyn) and Scotland (Luminate).

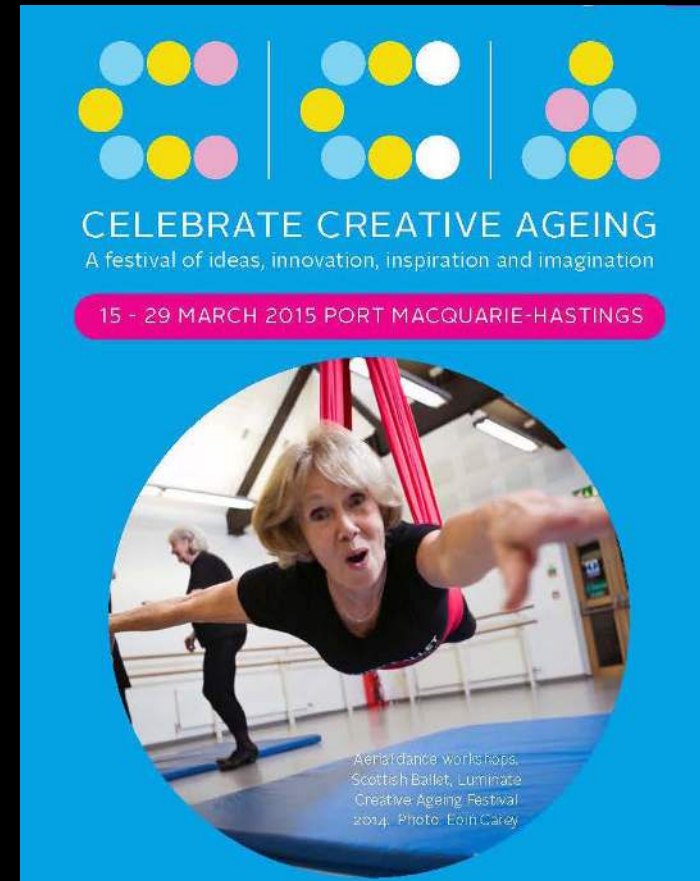


Image: 2015 Celebrate Creative Ageing Festival Program Port Macquarie NSW

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## Arts and Ageing Well

Creative ageing programs, professionally delivered by trained artists in various disciplines, encompass the visual arts, music, singing, theatre, dance, circus arts, comedy, creative and narrative writing, storytelling, film, digital media, environmental design.

The arts bring people together in a welcoming, non-intimidating and creative environment, combating social isolation and forging essential links for people with their broader community.

Image: 2015 Celebrate Creative Ageing Festival, Port Macquarie NSW



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## The Arts supporting Older People

Creating safe, secure and enjoyable environments for social connection

Breaking down language, cultural and socio-economic barriers

Inviting ways to be imaginative, innovative and playful

Enabling people to feel valued within their community

Encouraging the sharing of wisdom and lifelong learning

Image: Carnival of the Here and Now, Creative Tales. Photo Stephanie Finn



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## The Arts supporting Older People

Tackling negative perceptions of older age, ageism and stigma

Achieving a sense of mastery through engaging in creative activities such as choral singing, drawing on an iPad, learning a musical instrument, participating in a theatre group, digitally recording life stories

Building self-esteem, self-confidence and improving overall wellbeing and social connection

Fostering ways to connect older people with younger people to share knowledge, skills and experiences



Image: Bealtaine Creative Ageing Festival, Ireland

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## The Arts supporting Older People

Dance improves mobility and balance, combats obesity and counters social isolation

Clay modelling and sculpting maintains dexterity and nimbleness

Playing the trumpet and singing in a choir enhances respiratory function

Arts programs facilitate intergenerational exchange in a friendly environment



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## Case Study: Creative Ageing - Music and Singing

*There are now more community choirs in the UK than fish and chip shops.*  
The Independent UK, January 2010

Singing is energising, relaxing, stress relieving, mood enhancing and cognitively stimulating.

Singing maintains and improves cardiovascular and lung function; and can restore voice facility for stroke victims

Singing enhances self-confidence, self esteem, gives a sense of purpose and of achievement. Socially, it provides social support, friendship and a sense of community and belonging.



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## Loneliness and Social Exclusion

*Autonomy and full social participation are so important for health that their lack leads to deterioration in health* Sir Michael Marmot, *Status Syndrome* 2004

*Lacking social connections is a comparable risk for early death as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and has a worse impact than obesity and lack of exercise.*

Janet Morrison, CEO, Independent Age and Chair, The Baring Foundation, principal funding body for creative ageing programs and resources in the UK

*What kind of 'old' do we want to be?*

Dominic Campbell, Creative Ageing  
International

[www.ageofcreativity.co.uk](http://www.ageofcreativity.co.uk)



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## Creative Ageing – Exciting the Imagination

1 million people in Australia will experience dementia by 2050. Art and Dementia programs at the Art Gallery of NSW and many NSW regional galleries offer invaluable support to people living with chronic conditions and their carers.

Similar visual and performing arts programs are offered for people with Parkinson's, visual impairment and other disabilities.



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## Landmark Creative Ageing Research

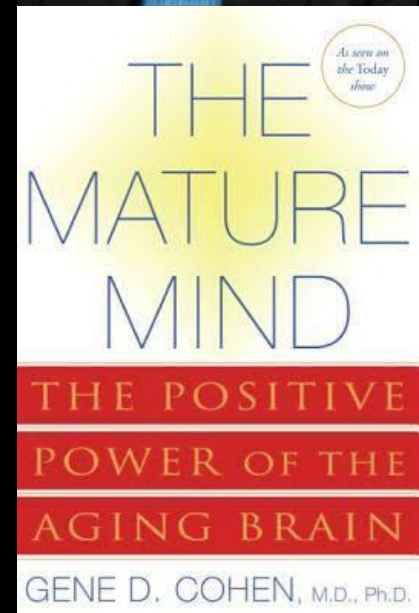
Dr Gene Cohen was the Director, Center on Aging, Health & Humanities, Professor of Health Care Sciences & Professor of Psychiatry & Behavioural Sciences, George Washington University, Washington DC

Author

*The Creative Age: Awakening Human Potential  
in the Second Half of Life* (2000)

*The Mature Mind : The Positive Power of the Aging Brain*  
(2006)

Co-founder: National Center for Creative Aging (NCCA)  
Washington DC [www.creativeaging.org](http://www.creativeaging.org)



# CREATIVE AGEING AND RESILIENCE IN CHALLENGING TIMES



## **Creativity and Aging Study: The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on Older Adults**

Dr Gene Cohen completed this landmark study on the impact of professionally conducted, participatory cultural programs on older adults, 2001 – 2005, across 3 sites in Washington DC, New York City and San Francisco, with 300 people participants.

Average age of participants was 80, with an age range of 65 – 103 years

Impressive results for participants in the intervention group:

- Maintained greater independence
- Higher morale
- Less medication than control group
- Shorter hospital stays
- Fewer falls
- Expanded outlook - interests and activities
- Greater sense of control and mastery
- Increased social engagement



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## A Final Word about Creative Ageing

In challenging times - when natural disasters strike, such as bushfire, floods, drought or people experience personal tragedy the arts can provide an armory of skills and insights which encourage personal and community resilience, enabling people to combat grief, despair and feelings of destitution and loneliness.

The arts offer a simple but multi-disciplined and cost effective way to nurture vibrant Age-Friendly Communities and give older people their creative voice and visibility.



Image: Old Skool intergenerational graffiti project, 2013 Luminate, Scotland, Photo Eoin Carey

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## Further Information

NSW Ministerial Advisory Committee on Ageing (MACA)

[www.maca.nsw.gov.au](http://www.maca.nsw.gov.au)

For more information about Creative Ageing

Contact: Margret Meagher, Australian Centre for Arts and Health

[www.artsandhealth.org](http://www.artsandhealth.org) or [margret@artsandhealth.org](mailto:margret@artsandhealth.org)