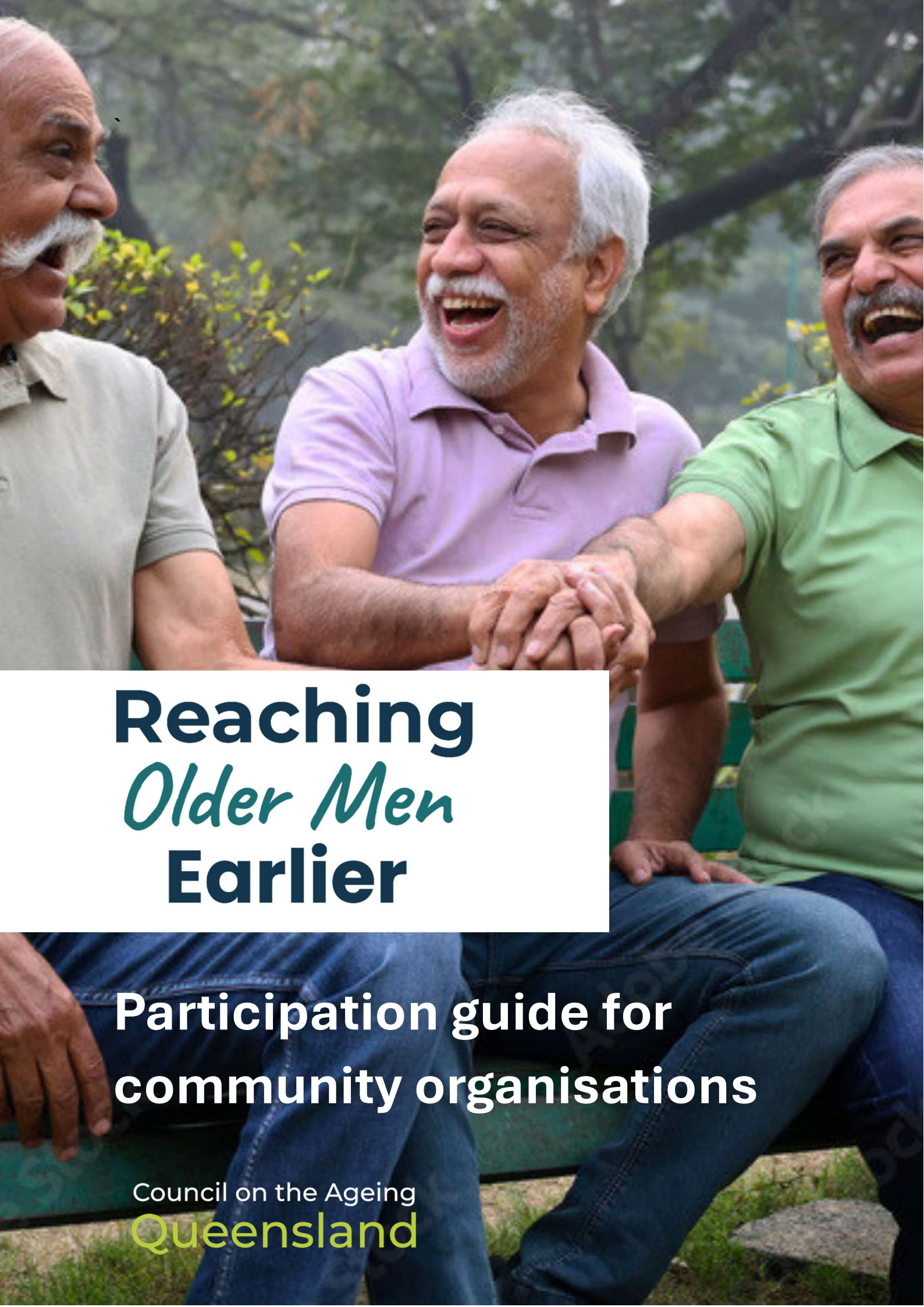


A photograph of three elderly men sitting outdoors, laughing heartily. The man on the left is wearing a light grey polo shirt. The man in the middle is wearing a light purple polo shirt. The man on the right is wearing a green polo shirt. They are all smiling and looking towards the right. The background shows green foliage and trees.

Reaching *Older Men* **Earlier**

**Participation guide for
community organisations**

Council on the Ageing
Queensland

Participation guide for community organisations

Help strengthen support for older men

Council on the Ageing (COTA) Queensland is looking for seniors social isolation prevention and community connection organisations to take part in the Reaching Older Men Earlier (ROME) project.

We are looking for organisations from metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Queensland.

By taking part, your organisation can help identify, test and improve practical ways to reach, engage and support older men, before things get too difficult.

ROME is designed to build on the trusted relationships, local knowledge and existing work of community organisations. It will not require your organisation to provide counselling, clinical assessment or crisis intervention.

This guide explains what ROME is, who we are looking for, what participation involves, what your organisation will receive and what happens next.

What is ROME and why does it matter?

Older men are at higher risk of suicide.

Later life can also bring changes such as retirement, losing someone close, changes in health, caring responsibilities, relocation, financial pressure or becoming less connected to other people.

Some men may try to manage difficulties on their own. They may not describe what they are going through as loneliness, distress or a mental health concern.

Instead, an older man may:

- stop attending activities
- become less involved
- withdraw from other people
- experience a significant change in his life

- appear distressed or overwhelmed
- benefit from additional support or connection.

Community organisations are often well placed to notice these changes and reach out.

ROME will work with organisations to strengthen practical ways to notice when an older man may be having a difficult time, make respectful contact and help him connect with appropriate support.

The aim is to help older men stay **connected, safe and supported**.

ROME is not a counselling, treatment or crisis service.

Who are we looking for?

We are inviting **seniors social isolation prevention and community connection organisations** across Queensland to express their interest.

We want to include organisations from:

- metropolitan areas
- regional communities
- rural communities
- remote communities.

Before participation is confirmed, we will talk with your organisation about:

- the communities and areas you serve
- your current work with older men
- any challenges you experience reaching, engaging or following up older men
- the staff or volunteers who may take part
- your organisation's capacity to participate
- any accessibility, scheduling or regional needs.

You do not need to already have specific programs for older men.

What will ROME focus on?

ROME will help participating organisations strengthen how they:

- reach out to older men who may have become less connected

- welcome and engage older men in respectful and relevant ways
- notice when a man has stopped attending or become less involved
- start supportive conversations
- follow up and help men reconnect
- respond safely when a man is distressed
- help staff and volunteers understand their role and when to seek additional help
- strengthen local referral and escalation processes
- help men connect with appropriate services and support
- build useful approaches into everyday work.

Each organisation will identify and trial at least **one practical improvement** that is relevant to its service, community and available resources.

For example, your organisation might:

- improve how you follow up when a man stops attending
- review information provided to new participants
- strengthen guidance for staff or volunteers
- improve a local referral process
- change communications or activities to help older men feel more welcomed and comfortable.

The focus is on **realistic improvements that can fit within your organisation's existing work.**

What will our organisation receive?

Participating organisations will have access to:

- practical training and learning opportunities for staff and volunteers
- guidance on respectful and safe conversations
- support to strengthen local referral and escalation processes
- practice workshops
- project check-ins and support while changes are put into practice

- opportunities to learn from other participating organisations
- input from older men with lived and living experience
- early access to ROME resources
- opportunities to test and shape the ROME Practice Toolkit
- project learning that may support future service planning, staff induction and volunteer development.

How will older men help shape the project?

COTA Queensland will engage with Queensland men aged 65 years and over as paid lived and living experience contributors.

They will help the project understand:

- what helps older men feel welcomed, respected and understood
- what can make it difficult to stay connected with community activities
- how men experience outreach and follow-up
- what words and approaches feel respectful
- what makes it easier to accept support
- what might discourage men from taking part or asking for help
- how organisations can respond in practical and appropriate ways.

Their insights will help shape workshops, resources, referral guidance, conversation prompts and the **ROME Practice Toolkit**.

COTA Queensland will manage recruitment, consent, payment, privacy, safeguarding and support arrangements for these contributors.

Your organisation may be asked to share information about opportunities for older men to contribute, where appropriate.

Your organisation will not be expected to manage lived experience consultations or provide clinical support to contributors.

What will participation involve?

Complete short starting activities

Relevant staff or volunteers will be asked to complete short activities about their current practices and confidence before workshops begin.

Choose an area to improve

Your organisation will work with the ROME team to identify one area where you would like to strengthen how you reach, engage, follow up or support older men.

Take part in workshops

Relevant staff and volunteers will be invited to take part in practice workshops and agreed training and learning activities.

Online, telephone and face-to-face options will be used where practical.

Trial a practical improvement

Your organisation will identify and trial at least one achievable improvement within its existing work.

The improvement will be suited to your organisation's size, workforce, community and available resources.

Take part in project check-ins

We will have brief follow-up discussions about:

- what you have tried
- what has worked
- what has been difficult
- whether additional support would be useful
- whether the change could become part of your organisation's usual work.

Contribute to evaluation

Relevant staff and volunteers will be asked to complete brief follow-up activities and provide feedback about the project.

We may also ask for examples or information that your organisation already collects. Any examples provided should have names and identifying details removed.

You will not be expected to set up complex new data collection systems.

Review project resources

Your organisation may also be asked to review draft resources such as:

- sections of the ROME Practice Toolkit
- conversation prompts
- referral guidance
- onboarding materials
- other practical resources.

Your feedback will help make sure the final resources are useful and practical for community organisations.

When will participation happen?

Organisation recruitment and confirmation will take place during **August and September 2026**.

Initial orientation, starting activities and planning will take place between **August and October 2026**.

Practice workshops will be delivered progressively from **November 2026 to January 2027**.

Organisations will generally trial their selected improvement and receive project support between **December 2026 and March 2027**.

Follow-up evaluation will usually take place about **six to eight weeks after your organisation begins testing its improvement**.

The final ROME Practice Toolkit and project findings will be shared during the final stages of the project.

Before participation is confirmed, we will discuss the activities, expected time commitment and suitable staff or volunteers with your organisation.

What commitment is expected?

We understand that many community organisations have small teams, part-time staff and significant volunteer involvement.

ROME will therefore aim to keep participation **practical, flexible and manageable**.

Organisations should be reasonably able to:

- have one person who stays in contact with the ROME team
- involve appropriate staff or volunteers
- take part in agreed workshops and project discussions
- trial at least one practical improvement
- provide brief feedback and evaluation information
- let the ROME team know if your organisation's capacity or circumstances change.

What can our organisation expect?

You can expect:

- clear information about project activities
- practical and flexible ways to take part
- support from the ROME project team
- opportunities for relevant staff and volunteers to participate
- input from older men with lived and living experience
- practical resources that can be adapted to your service
- opportunities to learn from other participating organisations
- access to the final ROME Practice Toolkit and project findings.

Interested in finding out more?

If your organisation is interested in taking part, or you are unsure whether ROME is suitable for your organisation, please contact:

Lisa Hodgkinson

ROME Project Lead

Council on the Ageing Queensland

Email: lisa.hodgkinson@cotaqlld.org.au

Telephone: 07 3316 2905

You are welcome to contact us even if you are unsure whether your organisation has the capacity or service model required.

What happens next?

A member of the ROME project team will arrange a discussion with your organisation.

We will talk about:

- your organisation and community
- your work with older men
- areas you may be interested in strengthening
- which staff or volunteers may participate
- the expected activities and timing
- any practical or accessibility requirements.

Following this discussion, COTA Queensland and your organisation can determine whether participation is suitable.

Funding

ROME is a 12-month project delivered by COTA Queensland and funded by the **Queensland Mental Health Commission through the Suicide Prevention for Men and Boys 2025–2026 Grant**.

About COTA Queensland

Council on the Ageing (COTA) Queensland is the state's peak body representing the interests of older Queenslanders.

We work to make sure older people have a strong voice in the decisions, services and policies that affect their lives.

Our work includes advocacy, community engagement, service development and partnerships with organisations across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Queensland.

We are delivering ROME because older men can be at particular risk of loneliness, distress, becoming less connected and suicide, but may be less likely to ask directly for help.

COTA Queensland also works closely with seniors social isolation prevention and community connection organisations across the state.

These services are often well placed to notice when an older man has withdrawn or stopped taking part.

ROME brings these strengths together. We listen directly to older men with lived and living experience and use their insights to help community organisations reach men earlier, respond with greater confidence and strengthen connections to appropriate support.