

## **The Purpose of OMNI**

OMNI (Older Men's Network Inc) is an organisation for men over the age of 50. Working through small community-based groups with about 10 to 15 members in each group, OMNI addresses older men's holistic health needs not only their physical, but emotional, mental and spiritual health. OMNI groups are unique in creating a safe, male-only sharing environment. Over time, older men address significant issues that have prevented them from enjoying full and enriching lives.

The isolation and loneliness most men experience, even in the company of others, is relieved in an OMNI group meeting by the men letting go of competition and fear developed from years in the workplace and its culture. Many men acknowledge in their group that this is the first time in their lives they have experienced this new type of relationship with other men.

Often, retirement causes a dramatic change in a man's life and being able to talk to others who have gone through the same experiences is very helpful. At a typical OMNI meeting, men talk about their life stories, their joys, their hopes and their sorrows. Worthwhile friendships result from these open and confidential discussions. Most of the members are married, and find that OMNI is a welcome change from the normal round of domestic duties and family obligations. In fact many wives have been instrumental in encouraging their husbands to join OMNI, but that doesn't mean that widowers or single men are not welcome.

The groups offer a place where men discuss things on a little deeper level than is usual in a club or hotel atmosphere and members also arrange other activities to suit their needs. OMNI men are free to discuss any topic of general interest. Life stories and experiences are very popular. Personal issues, health issues, retirement problems and relationship issues can be revealed in a safe environment where all matters remain confidential to the group.

Members have shown an increased interest in retirement, better communication and listening skills with family members, friends and others. They feel a clearer sense of direction and purpose in their lives. This then leads to greater willingness to become involved in family and community events. Wives and others report improved companionship and reduced time spent in isolation.

All men need the companionship and authentic support of peers they can trust, in a climate of confidentiality and caring as found in an OMNI group. These factors empower a man to take greater control of his life, leading to a richer, fuller and more satisfying existence.

## **History of OMNI**

The first group initially formed many years ago by volunteers at The Council for Aged (COTA) and at that time was supported by Pfizer Australia. This institution was supported by NSW Health who provided a group worker to foster groups and help their formation. The Pfizer funding was not renewed and consequently COTA withdrew their support and cancelled all insurance cover to the members of the 22 groups that existed when the funds and support collapsed.

The groups then went through a doldrums situation with no funds and no insurance cover. After a lot of work went on behind the scenes to resurrect a new organisation without success, two individuals, Keith Margules and Jim Finucane, were not prepared to give in. Keith then approached the Office of Fair Trading and with their support registered the name Older Men's Network Incorporated, as COTA had refused to release the original name Older Men New Ideas.

The first act was to arrange legal liability insurance cover for all groups that came under the network's banner. The formation of a Steering Committee was the next step. The names of Jim Finucane, Brian Mullins, Kevin Symonds, Alf McConnell, Kim Hopkins, Don Flint, Stephen Lerner, and Keith Margules formed this committee to start building the new OMNI.

Telstra came to OMNI's assistance with a grant of \$5000.00, and the Hawkesbury Community Outreach Services staff was very helpful in the early days.

The OMNI movement is now strong with 22 groups scattered throughout the state, with over 200 members. And in the future, many other groups are planning to join our national network.

OMNI have an annual get together called "The Shin-dig". This year it is to be held on Milson Island in the Hawkesbury River region, in February. This year's AGM is being held during the Shin-dig.