

## **Public Health Association Media release**

**1 September 2011**

### **Value of “Oldie Army” in post quake recovery: new research**

The Public Health Association Conference has been told that, rather than being a burden on emergency and other services in the hours and days following the February earthquake in Christchurch, the over-65s proved to be a resilient and energetic resource for recovery.

University of Otago PhD candidate Michael Annear’s thesis examines environmental influences on active ageing, and his study phases were inadvertently aligned with the Canterbury earthquakes. More than 350 subjects completed surveys and maintained activity diaries in the weeks after the September and February earthquakes.

Mr Annear told the delegates gathered at Lincoln University today, that the diaries indicated a surprisingly high level of post-quake activity among the over-65s and significant resilience in the face of adversity.

“The average age of participants was 77 years, with some in their 90s and one over 100. All live independently in the community. Like other groups, many suffered psychological trauma in the aftermath of the quakes, including reported depression and anxiety, which was to be expected. What was unexpected, however, was the degree to which many of them jumped into action when the shaking stopped.

“Many of our older residents were active in the recovery process, which was evident through their support for displaced family members; counselling of friends and neighbours; clearing properties of silt and repairing earthquake damage; setting up community resources, such as temporary markets, libraries and earthquake information centres; and supporting relief workers with food and supplies,” Mr Annear said.

“Rather than being a post-disaster burden, older people in our communities appeared to be a significant resource in the immediate aftermath and in the weeks following. As a society, we are quick to forget that older adults have a lifetime of experiences, including exposure to previous disasters, which often help them cope much better than younger adults in a crisis.”

**Media are invited to attend the whole or any part of the conference.**

**To arrange interviews with Michael Annear or any Conference speaker, please contact Penny Cooper (Conference media liaison): 0274 547 584. Michael Annear: 03 378 6479**

#### **Links:**

- [Conference website](#)
- [Conference handbook and programme](#)
- [Presenter abstracts and information](#)
- [Presenter abstracts only.](#)