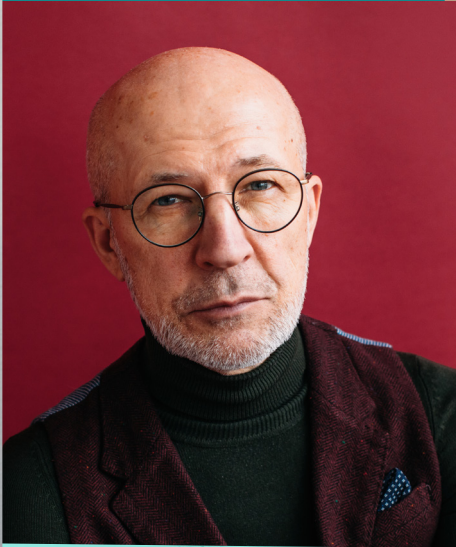




Australian
Human Rights
Commission



What's **age** got
to do **with it?**



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**What's age got to do with it?
A snapshot of ageism across the
Australian lifespan**

2021

Australian Human Rights Commission



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The Hon Dr Kay Patterson AO

*Age Discrimination Commissioner
Australian Human Rights Commission*



Message from the Commissioner

Ageism is arguably the least understood form of discriminatory prejudice. Evidence also suggests it is more pervasive and socially accepted than either sexism or racism. Although it was first named in 1969, there has been comparatively less progress made in identifying forms of ageism or raising awareness about it.

Australia was the first country in the world to appoint an age discrimination commissioner, following the passing of the *Age Discrimination Act* (2004). I am the second person to hold that role, after Hon Susan Ryan AO. Despite signs of progress such as this, there is much still to be done to reduce ageism and ensure Australians of all ages are included in society and have equal access to arenas including work, housing, healthcare and education.

This research was undertaken in order to explore what Australians think about age and ageism across the lifespan and to spark wider interest in this topic. The deliberate focus was on attitudes about age, rather than the resulting behaviours that can lead to age discrimination. The project involved an online survey of 2440 Australians, followed by 11 focus groups to discuss the themes in more depth.

As the 2021 World Health Organization (WHO) Global Report on Ageism notes, ageism arises when people are categorised and divided based on age in ways that cause disadvantage and injustice and affect solidarity across generations. Their report also recommends international research be undertaken to address the absence of knowledge about ageist attitudes towards young adults and middle-aged people, what these attitudes are and how they affect people. The 'What's age got to do with it?' report provides a contribution to filling gaps in existing research on ageism, including on relations between the generations and to shine a light on ageism as it affects young people in Australia.

The data builds a clear picture of the patterns of ageism across the lifespan in Australia with 90% of survey respondents agreeing that ageism exists, although many in the focus groups were unclear about the concept. Over half the survey respondents agreed that making jokes about age is more socially acceptable than making jokes about things like race or gender and two-thirds said it affected people across the lifespan.

Although antagonism between the generations is often seen as a given, I was struck by the warmth expressed by focus group participants towards members of age cohorts other than their own. While there was some evidence of tensions between generations, the findings revealed a real understanding of the life issues faced by those of other age groups, coupled with a desire to support them.

Participants rejected the suggestion that any one age group had more than its fair share of assets or resources. Most Australians (70%) did not agree that today's older generation is leaving the world in a worse state than it was before and fewer than 20% agreed that any age group was a burden on their family or a burden on society. There were clear signs in focus groups that for many, access to such things as public health, assets or government benefits were about factors other than age.

I also noted with interest that focus group participants had strong views about the role played by the media in disseminating stereotypical portrayals of people of all ages.

It is clear that inaccurate stereotypes are strongly held about each age group (and often accepted as fact) and some of these are explored in this report. Of particular significance is the discussion of life roles as they intersect with a traditional life trajectory that ascribes particular roles to particular ages, such as buying a home, finding a partner or retirement. Although research shows (and participants agreed) that this traditional trajectory is being considerably disrupted, these outdated expectations and stereotypes persist.

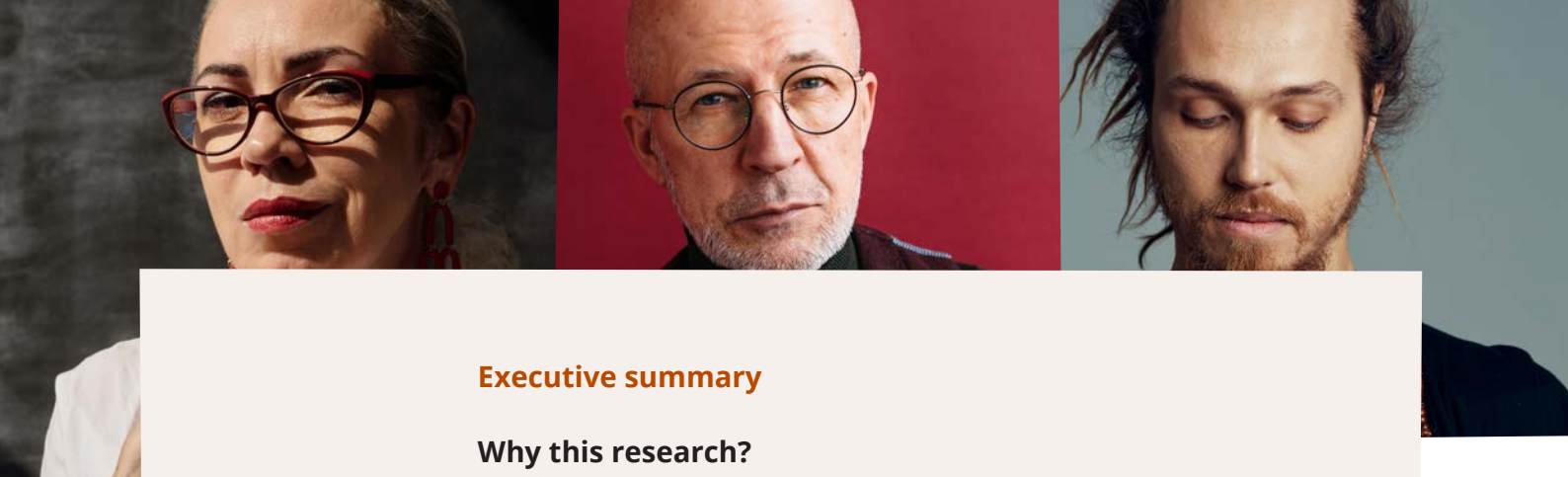
This finding about the impact of the changing life trajectory is one of a number of areas that can usefully be explored further. Another area for further work is the link between ageist attitudes and ageist behaviours, for example in elder abuse or discrimination against older or younger workers. There is also potential for more research in distinguishing attitudes within the broad age groups, such as between what have become known as the 'young old' and the 'old old'. I hope that researchers may use this report and its underlying data as a platform for their own research in this important field.

I want to thank the Australian Government and our external research partners for their support of this project. I also acknowledge our survey respondents and focus group participants for their time and generosity in sharing of opinions and ideas. In particular I would like to thank the team of dedicated and passionate individuals at the Commission who have worked tirelessly on this project.

I call on every Australian to think about ageism and how it affects people across the lifespan. It is incumbent on each of us to discuss these issues and do our bit to bring ageism into mainstream conversations in workplaces, living rooms, pubs and cafés. It needs every Australian to do what they can to challenge ageist attitudes in themselves and others, so together we can reduce ageism for Australians of all ages.

This report is called 'What's age got to do with it?' because it demonstrates that in most life arenas, age is much less relevant than we might often assume.

Age isn't the problem. Ageism is.



Executive summary

Why this research?

Ageism affects people across the adult lifespan, making it the most pervasive form of prejudice, yet it remains the least researched and the most socially acceptable.

Ageism can hide in familiar descriptions, in jokes and in narratives that render it normal and invisible. For example, older people may be seen as benign exemplars of warmth, experience and free childcare or as part of an impending threat of a ‘silver tsunami’. Middle-aged people can be seen as caught between work and raising families, while chasing lost youth. Young adults are seen as carefree, irresponsible hedonists when they are not studying or working, or immersed in social media. Intergenerational conflict is seen as the norm, an expected and inevitable part of age relations and conflict over scarce resources.

Ageism can be used to create exclusion or justify its continuation and result in inequality. It can affect and limit people’s participation in meaningful life **roles** and relationships. It can perpetuate misconceptions that ‘inform the policies we develop and the opportunities we create – or don’t’,¹ across the **lifespan**. It can exacerbate, or be exacerbated by, the impacts of other forms of inequality accrued over a lifetime.

Yet ageism remains normalised and acceptable. It is perhaps because of this fact that ageism has received less research attention than some other forms of prejudice. In particular, there has been relatively little research about ageism and young people, or about how it affects intergenerational relationships.

Ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) directed towards people based on their age.²

There is very little research on how Australians themselves understand and experience ageism across the adult lifespan. The Australian Human Rights Commission (the Commission) identified this gap and undertook this research to investigate these issues and spark interest in this topic. It aims to identify how Australians think about age and ageism and explore the links between ageist attitudes and the behaviors which can lead to age **discrimination**. It was important to scope this research across the adult lifespan, as ageism affects all age groups.

To do this, the Commission undertook a national survey and focus group discussions in 2020 and 2021. The ensuing report, ‘What’s age got to do with it?’ identifies the stereotypes, attitudes and beliefs about age that prevail in Australia, and captures some of the ways in which Australians understand and experience their impacts.

The research aimed to contribute to an increased community understanding of the age-based myths, stereotypes and misconceptions about younger adult, middle-aged and older Australians, and encourage a wider conversation on ageism in an intergenerational context.

For this report, the Commission:

surveyed 2,440 Australians nationally

- 809 young adults
- 902 middle-aged people
- 729 older people

conducted 11 focus groups (66 participants)

- 2 x younger adults (18–39)
- 2 x middle-aged people (40–61)
- 2 x older people (62+)
- 2 x mixed-age focus groups
- 2 x elder abuse spotlights
(1 x middle-aged group,
1 x older people group)
- 1 x young adults and leadership spotlight

examined existing Australian and international research

- current Australian research
- current international research
- stakeholder reports.

Ageism

Ageism pervades many institutions and sectors of society, including those providing health and social supports, the workplace, the media, and the legal system.³ It informs policies and practices that have profound impacts on people's lives, at all ages. Ageist perceptions can 'reinforce exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation and affect intergenerational solidarity by pitting younger people against older people'.⁴

Ageism can affect people's physical, mental and cognitive health and wellbeing.⁵ By limiting access to fundamental human rights, ageism can lead to discrimination.

For older adults, ageism is associated with poorer health outcomes, an increased risk of social isolation, decreased quality of life⁶ and greater financial insecurity.⁷

For young adults, it may affect employment, the type of healthcare they receive and access to housing.⁸ In one study, young adults reported experiencing ageism most frequently as a lack of respect, followed by cognitive, then physical and social assumptions about them.⁹

Ageism has economic costs. At the broader community level, ageism can cost the economy billions of dollars in reduced workforce participation. Research suggests that an extra 3% in workforce participation by people aged 55 and over would lead to a \$33 billion boost to Australia's GDP.¹⁰ Organisations not implementing strategies to prevent age bias can miss out on the skills and capabilities from employees of all ages.¹¹ This can have detrimental effects on productivity, morale and skills retention and transfer. Organisations lose the benefits of supporting and nurturing a multigenerational workforce.¹²

Yet ageism remains an accepted and normalised prejudice, underpinned by powerful stereotypes and assumptions which lead to exclusion, marginalisation and inequality.

Stereotypes

Ageism is evident across the adult lifespan as age-based attitudes and stereotypes that many Australians consider to be normal, acceptable, and not ageist. These can be descriptive labels such as 'silver tsunami' to describe retirees, 'tech savvy' young adults, or the middle aged 'empty-nester'.

Stereotypes also prescribe what people should be doing, or the roles they should have, based on their age. Leadership, for example, is a role mostly associated with middle-aged or older adults, not young people.

All stereotypes, even if benign and regarded as humorous, can and do have a range of negative impacts. They can lead to age discrimination and result in inequality. They convey ageist attitudes and, if they inform policies and legislation, can limit people's access to work, housing, healthcare and education. In this way, age-based stereotypes and ageism can shape societies, influence the [life trajectory](#), and affect relationships across generations.

Human rights

Ageism and human rights are intrinsically connected. Regardless of age or life stage, we all have a fundamental right to health, education, housing, and employment, and the basic freedom to make choices about whether we marry or live with a partner and when, or if, we start families. Ageism, like other forms of prejudice, can limit the ability to fully realise these rights. The enjoyment of all human rights may diminish with age, owing to the 'negative notion that older persons are somehow less productive, less valuable to society and a burden to the economy and to younger generations'.¹³

Ageism is a human rights issue. Age-based stereotypes can limit the opportunities people have to participate equally in society and limit access to fundamental human rights. This is a form of discrimination.

Globally, there is a move to recognise the impact of ageism. For example, there are international working groups on ageism and age discrimination, moves to develop a binding convention on the rights of older persons, and research by organisations such as WHO which positions ageism as a global problem.¹⁴

Age is not the issue – ageism is

Age should not affect how human rights are realised. Age should not affect the roles people can have at different stages of life or the value ascribed to these roles; but when age is a proxy for ageism it has significant consequences on the ability of people to realise their rights to employment, to housing, to healthcare, to education and more.

People may believe that 'age has nothing to do with it' – and it shouldn't. However, the evidence suggests that ageism has much to do with people's choices and rights, expressed through exclusion, stereotyping and inequality. It drives discrimination. It is mobilised to spur narratives of intergenerational conflict and competition for resources, particularly through media narratives of scarcity and greed, at the expense of the shared values and connections that unite most Australians across age groups.

Findings

The Commission's research led to 8 findings. A full discussion of these findings can be found in [Chapter 2](#), [Chapter 3](#), [Chapter 4](#) and [Chapter 5](#) of this report. The following summary captures key insights from the Commission's research.

Key findings

Finding 1

Ageism exists in Australia – even when we are not consciously aware of it.



Finding 2

Ageism affects Australians across the adult lifespan.



Finding 3



Australians see **young people** as attractive and still finding their way.

Finding 4



Australians see **middle-aged people** as being in the prime of their lives.

Finding 5



Australians see **older people** as nice (if frail) onlookers to life.

The Generations

Finding 6

Age stereotypes have traditionally underpinned a life trajectory which is being increasingly disrupted.



Finding 7

Fairness and equality matter across the generations.



Finding 8

The generations have much in common, but there are tensions.





Finding 1

Ageism exists in Australia – even when we are not consciously aware of it.

Most Australians (90%) believe ageism exists in Australia, and that it is directed at people across the 3 adult age groups. A majority of Australians (83%) believe that ageism is a problem. Of these, 65% think it is a problem whoever it is directed towards, 13% only think it is a problem when directed towards older people, 5% think it is only a problem when directed towards younger people, and 17% don't think it is a problem. Most Australians (63%) have experienced ageism in the last 5 years. While ageism is pervasive, Australians are more familiar with other forms of discrimination, such as racism or sexism.

Finding 2

Ageism affects Australians across the adult lifespan.

Ageism is experienced across the adult lifespan, although in different ways.

- Young adults are most likely to experience ageism as being condescended to or ignored, particularly at work.
- Middle-aged people are most likely to experience ageism as being turned down for a job.
- Older people are more likely to experience ageism as being 'helped' without being asked.

Ageism is conveyed through stereotypes. Overall, 60% of Australians agree they may have stereotyped people or made assumptions about people because of their age, with young adults (70%) more likely to agree than middle aged (58%) or older people (45%).

Finding
3

Young adults are seen as attractive, but still finding their way.

Only 55% of surveyed Australians have a positive overall view of young adults.

While Australians across all age groups consider young people to be energetic, dynamic, open to new ideas and up-to-date with technology, they were also viewed as being bad at managing finances, and as expecting things on a platter.

Only about one-third (35%) of survey respondents see young adults as being polite and respectful or consider that young adults have a great work ethic. Many Australians see young adulthood as a learning stage, where making mistakes is accepted as the norm.

Finding
4

Middle-aged people are seen as being in the prime of their lives.

Australians consider middle-aged people to be in the prime of their lives, consolidating professional success, busy rearing growing families and working to ensure their future economic security. They are the age group most associated with leadership roles.

Unsurprisingly, Australians also considered middle-aged people to be stressed and juggling the competing demands of raising children, caring for their parents and managing workplace responsibilities.

**Finding
5****Older people are seen as nice (if frail) onlookers to life.**

Most Australians (74%) have a positive overall attitude to older people, viewing them as nice, likeable, warm and good listeners. However, Australians also considered older people to have declining skills, agency and vitality, and to lack competence in many areas, such as with technology or professionally. Their lack of association with meaningful life roles means they are regarded as onlookers, rather than active participants in society, including in the workplace. Many Australians view older adults as retired and therefore slowing down and enjoying leisure time yet limited by frailty and ill health.

**Finding
6****Age stereotypes have traditionally underpinned a life trajectory which is being increasingly disrupted.**

The Commission asked Australians for their views on the age-related milestones associated with different phases of the [life trajectory](#), conventionally seen as a linear pathway from youth to old age. For Australians, what it means to be a certain age is changing. Increased longevity, changing social mores, cultural factors and economic shifts mean people are realising key [milestones](#) (completing an education, establishing a career, finding a partner, buying a home, having children, retiring) at later ages. Although Australians continue to see these milestones as relevant and important, they questioned whether these should be, or could be, accomplished at a specific age.

Finding
7**Fairness and equality matter across the generations.**

Australians of all ages understand the challenges faced by people in other age groups. Australians considered that all age groups make a valuable contribution to the economy and to the community, and that no one generation had more than their fair share of assets and resources.

Australians want to share what they can and provide support across generations. They viewed responsibilities and obligations as applying across generations, with no single generation being more of a burden or having less responsibility than other generations.

- Most Australians (70%) did not agree that today's older generation is leaving the world in a worse state than it was before.
- Less than 20% agreed that any age group was a burden on their family or a burden on society.

Finding
8**The generations have much in common, but there are also tensions.**

The 3 age groups have more things in common than things that separate them. While tensions between generations exist, the bonds and empathy between them are stronger. Most of these intergenerational conflicts are based on stereotypes held by one generation about another, for example, that young adults are impatient and not good financial managers, and that older people do not care about the environment.

- 1 World Health Organization, *Global Report on Ageism* (2021) x.
- 2 World Health Organization, *Global Report on Ageism* (2021) ix.
- 3 See, for example, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Shifting Perceptions: Towards a Rights-based Approach to Ageing* (Report, 2018) Ch 1; Rosa Kornfeld-Matte, Report of the Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of all Human Rights by Older Persons, UN Doc A/HRC/33/44 (8 July 2016) para 24.
- 4 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Shifting Perceptions: Towards a Rights-based Approach to Ageing* (Report, 2018) 5.
- 5 David Burnes, Christine Sheppard, Charles R Henderson Jr, Monica Wassel, Richenda Cope, Chantal Barber and Karl Pillemer, 'Interventions to Reduce Ageism Against Older Adults: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis' (2019) 109(8) *American Journal of Public Health* e1.
- 6 David Burnes, Christine Sheppard, Charles R Henderson Jr, Monica Wassel, Richenda Cope, Chantal Barber and Karl Pillemer, 'Interventions to Reduce Ageism Against Older Adults: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis' (2019) 109(8) *American Journal of Public Health* e1.
- 7 Laura A Robbins, 'The Pernicious Problem of Ageism' (2015) 39(3) *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging* 6.
- 8 Alison L Chasteen, Michelle Horhota and Jessica J Crumley-Branyon, 'Overlooked and Underestimated: Experiences of Ageism in Young, Middle-Aged, and Older Adults' (2021) 76(7) *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 1323.
- 9 Alison L Chasteen, Michelle Horhota and Jessica J Crumley-Branyon, 'Overlooked and Underestimated: Experiences of Ageism in Young, Middle-Aged, and Older Adults' (2021) 76(7) *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 1323.
- 10 Deloitte Access Economics, *Increasing Participation Among Older Workers: The Grey Army Advances* (Report prepared for the Australian Human Rights Commission, 2012).
- 11 Justyna Stypińska and Pirjo Nikander, 'Ageism and Age Discrimination in the Labour Market: A Macrostructural Perspective' in Liat Ayalon and Clemens Tesch-Römer (eds), *Contemporary Perspectives on Ageism* (Springer, 2018) 91.
- 12 Laura Naegele, Wouter De Tavernier and Moritz Hess, 'Work Environments and the Origins of Ageism' in Liat Ayalon and Clemens Tesch-Römer (eds), *Contemporary Perspectives on Ageism* (Springer, 2018) 73.
- 13 Report from the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing on its Eighth Working Session, UN Doc A/AC.278/2017/2 (28 July 2017) 8.
- 14 World Health Organization, *Global Report on Ageism* (2021).



CHAPTER

1

Introduction



CHAPTER

1

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1.1 Background

'What's age got to do with it?' is a contribution to understanding the nature and prevalence of ageist attitudes towards the 3 adult age groups (young adults, middle-aged people and older people) in Australia.

The Commission's 'What's age got to do with it?' research builds a picture of ageist attitudes which may be communicated through [stereotypes](#) about these 3 adult age groups in Australia.

1.2 Objectives

The key aim of the project is to understand the experience of ageism in Australia across the adult lifespan.

The objectives of the project research were to:

- explore the prevalence of positive and negative age-based stereotypes by and about Australians, across the adult lifespan
- understand the [roles](#) and expectations traditionally associated with the 3 adult life stages (young adulthood, middle age and older adulthood)
- identify similarities as well as differences in attitudes towards age, ageism, and intergenerational connections across the age groups
- capture a snapshot of attitudes about intergenerational relationships and strategies for countering ageism.



1.3 Methodology

The project involved a multi-phase study, including a national online survey¹ to investigate the prevalence and nature of ageist attitudes across the adult **lifespan** and a qualitative phase consisting of 11 focus groups to explore ageism across the adult lifespan.

Methodology

(a) Data sources

- 2,440 surveyed
 - 809 young adults
 - 902 middle-aged people
 - 729 older people
- 11 focus groups (66 participants)
 - 2 x younger adults (18–39)
 - 2 x middle-aged people (40–61)
 - 2 x older people (62+)
 - 2 x mixed-age focus groups
 - 2 x elder abuse spotlights (1 x middle-aged group, 1 x older people group)
 - 1 x young adults and leadership spotlight
- Desktop research
 - Australian and international research

(b) Research and data

To inform the quantitative and qualitative research phases, the Commission undertook an extensive review and analysis of Australian and international research and data relevant to ageism, including:

- academic and social policy literature
- reports and recommendations of national and international reviews
- other sources of domestic and international data.

(c) Definition of age group bandings used in this report

The age groups used in this report are defined as follows:

- young adults 18–39
- middle-aged people 40–61
- older people 62+.

Survey participants were asked to define the 3 age groups. These definitions are based on the averages given.²

(d) Base size

- For all 'Total' charts, base size is n = 2,440 (total sample).
- Nationally representative sample by location and gender.
- 200 respondents for each 5-year age cohort.
- For all charts split by age group, base sizes are (unless otherwise specified):
 - young adults: 809
 - middle-aged people: 902
 - older people: 729.

All charts referred to in the report are available in the Appendices.³

(e) Quantitative phase – online survey

The Commission worked with a research partner, Quantum Market Research (Aust) Pty Limited, to design a survey to gather insights into attitude about ageism in Australia.

(f) Survey instrument

The survey was administered by members of the market research panel PureProfile. The study received ethics approval from the Bellberry Human Research Ethics Committee.

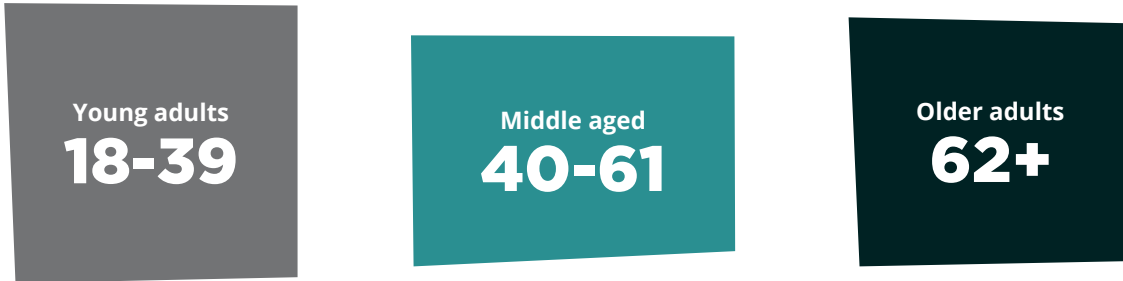
Quantitative fieldwork was undertaken between 11–18 September 2020. An online data collection approach was utilised to reach a representative sample of Australians efficiently. Quotas were set to achieve a good coverage of age, gender and state. Data was then weighted in line with Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census data (2016) to ensure that it was representative of Australian adults by these 3 variables.

(g) Sample size and design

A total of 2,440 people completed the survey, with an average survey completion time of 44 minutes. Final data was weighted based on age, gender and state, in line with ABS data (see further details in section above).

The research was carried out in accordance with AS ISO 20252.

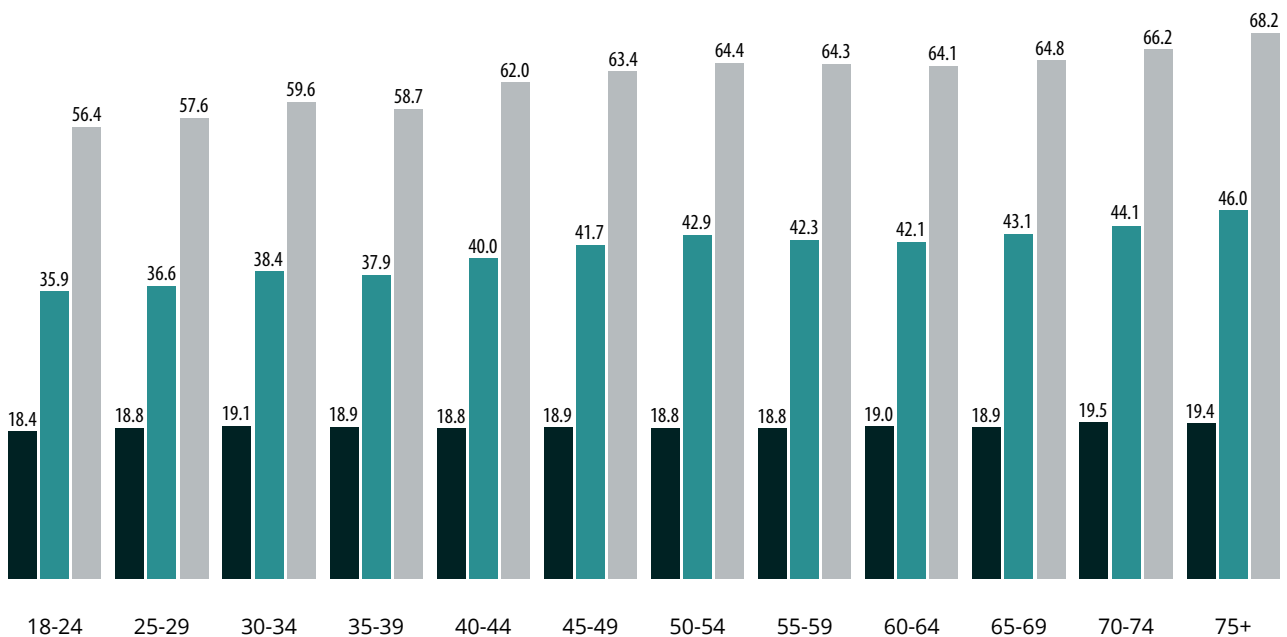
(h) Age group definitions used in this report



Survey participants were asked to define the upper and lower ages for the 3 age groups. The definitions in this report are based on the average ages given. The average age given for the beginning of young adulthood was 19 years, but for the purposes of analysis the definition was expanded to begin at 18 years, to allow the inclusion of all survey participants for analysis.

Participants in all 3 age groups nominated the age at which young adulthood is said to begin; this was in statistically the same band (18.4–19.5 years). However, the age at which middle age and older adulthood are thought to begin increases as participants get older. For the purposes of clarity, the overall average (as described above) has been used when grouping participants into age groups.

Average age groupings



Become young adult



Become middle aged



Become older adult

(i) Demographic sub-group analysis

The following demographic information was recorded and explored through various statistical analyses, including Chi square testing, discriminant analysis and regression analysis:

- age
- gender
- education level
- income level
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) status
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander status
- parental status.

Analysis was undertaken on all demographic sub-groups. While there were some differences on a case-by-case basis, the Commission did not find statistically significant differences which would explain patterns of variation in the data. Analysis by demographic sub-group is included in the few cases where statistically significant differences formed a clear enough pattern to add insight about the specific sub-group.

(j) Limitations

The purpose of the research was to capture a snapshot of attitudes about age groups in Australia. While people may experience multiple types of discrimination which may intersect with age, detailed analysis of this is beyond the scope of this research.

Research participants were grouped into 3 broad age groups: young adults, middle-aged people and older people. These 3 age bandings are based on the views of participants as to the age ranges which constitute these broad adult life-stage categories. It is a recognised limitation of this research that these 3 bandings cannot capture the full breadth of age diversity.

While the primary focus of the research was to assess attitudes towards age groups, the recruitment of participants considered a nationally representative sample of locations and genders, with CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander demographic data also captured. Experiences and attitudes relating to intersectional factors, such as gender, CALD status, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status and income and educational levels also arose, and these are noted when they appeared.

(k) Rounded numbers

All numbers in this report are rounded to the nearest whole number. Consequently, it should be noted that:

- Percentages may not add up to 100% in some figures due to rounding.
- In other cases, numbers in the text that are cumulated totals may differ from the total of individual numbers shown in a figure because of rounding of decimals.
- Similarly, the largest single rounded numbers in pie charts may be adjusted to add to a total of 100%. In such cases the number reported in the text may differ from the number in the pie chart because of this adjustment.

(l) Phases of qualitative research

First phase:

- 60 respondents completed an online forum task answering questions about themselves, their attitudes to age groups and the role of traditional media in representing the 3 age groups over a period of 4 days.
- These tasks were moderated, with the participants asked further questions to explore their views.
- This online forum took place between 24–27 November 2020.

Second phase:

- All online forum respondents were invited to participate in one of 10 focus groups conducted online between 30 November 2020–11 December 2020, using a video conferencing platform for market research.
- Prior to engaging in the focus groups, participants completed a range of moderated online activities. These included sourcing and discussing media articles about the representation of each age group.
- Of these groups, 8 focused on the same broad topics, covering similar themes to those in the online forum, but explored in greater depth.
- Of these groups, 2 had a particular focus on attitudes and elder abuse. While the topic of elder abuse was not discussed explicitly, the groups focused on the relationships between adult children and their parents to explore ageist attitudes as a potential driver of elder abuse.
- An additional focus group was held with 6 young adults on the topic of young adults and leadership, bringing the total number of groups to 11. This final group did not participate in the online forum exercise.

(m) Report methodology

This report summarises the key survey and qualitative research findings in tandem with background domestic and international desktop research.

By asking, 'What's age got to do with it?', the research design was informed by 'grounded theory'.⁴ This allows for discovering patterns that emerge in quantitative and qualitative data in order to build a snapshot of ageism in Australia. When reviewing this data, the Commission observed repeated elements and ideas that could be grouped into key themes which provided the basis for structuring and drafting this report.

[Chapter 3](#) draws together the survey data and direct quotes from focus group participants to outline what was uncovered about stereotypes across the 3 age groups. [Chapter 4](#) and [Chapter 5](#) contain reflections on this data, drawing it together to identify key themes which emerged to highlight ways that ageist attitudes affect people across the adult lifespan.

1.4 Definitions and key terms

Ageism is a combination of stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) directed towards people on the basis of their age.⁵ Ageism is not limited to older people. It can be directed at adults of all ages, by people of all ages.

Personal or self-directed ageism occurs when we accept and use age-based stereotypes and prejudices against ourselves, and how we perceive our abilities, capacities and roles. An example of self-directed ageism is deciding not to undertake an activity or apply for a job because we believe we are 'too old' or 'too young'.

Interpersonal ageism occurs between 2 or more people, when one person directs age-based stereotypes and prejudices against another person or persons.

Institutional ageism underpins laws, rules, social norms, policies and practices of institutions, restricting opportunities and systematically disadvantaging individuals because of their age.⁶

Age group bandings: The following age group categories are used in this report:

- **young adults** are aged from 18 to 39 years
- **middle-aged people** refer to those aged between 40 and 61 years
- **older people** are aged from 62 years and up.

Discrimination refers to any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference that can impair or stop people from enjoying, recognising or exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms, in any field, on an equal basis with others.⁷

Equality is a key human rights principle recognising that, as human beings, we all have the same value and rights. Equality does not mean always treating everyone the same but ensuring that everyone has access to opportunities and resources to realise their rights without discrimination.

Non-discrimination is an integral part of the principle of equality. It ensures that no one is denied their rights because of factors including age, race, colour, sex, nationality, marital status, disability, place of residence within a country and sexual orientation.

Generation is a way of categorising groups of people born during the same, specific period, usually 15 to 20 years. Members of a generation are considered to share similar formative events, such as war or recession, which shape the unique values, attitudes and behaviours that characterise their cohort. For example, people born between 1925 and 1945 are sometimes referred to as the 'silent generation' because they were born or raised during a period of war and economic depression.

The idea of generations is often used to explain how people behave, think and feel day-to-day, even though there is little evidence for the relevance of generations and generational differences.⁸ However, generations are pervasive categories, and people do use them to describe themselves and others, including throughout this research.

The key generational categories referred to in this report are:

- **Baby Boomer** or **Boomers** – adults born between 1946 and 1964
- **Generation X** or **Gen X** – adults born between 1965 and 1980
- **Millennials** – born between 1981 and 1996.

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled. They ensure people can live freely, are treated fairly, live with dignity and respect, and have the opportunity to flourish, reach their potential and participate in society. People have human rights simply because they are human, and they cannot be taken away.

Some of the rights discussed in this report are civil and political rights, which encompass the rights of individuals to freedom and equality; and economic, social and cultural rights which give people social and economic security, through for example, the rights to work, shelter, education and healthcare.

Intergenerational refers to things occurring or transmitted between different generations. Intergenerational conflict, for example, refers to the assumed battle between older and younger generations for jobs and resources, or power.

Lifespan refers to a view where adulthood is seen traditionally as having 3 distinct stages, beginning at youth and young adulthood, building to a peak of prime at middle age, before falling into gradual decline and decay in older age. During recent times, this conventional approach has been disrupted, at least to some extent.

Life trajectory refers to the long-term pattern of change and progress of a person's life. It involves many transitions through different life stages over the lifespan.

Milestones are significant moments or achievements in life that mark our progress through the course of our lives. Completing an education, employment, securing stable housing and marriage or partnership are examples of key milestones.

Roles relate to the attributes and behaviours that we are expected to fulfil or have, based on our life stage. Another way of understanding roles is as prescriptive stereotypes, in that they tell us what it is thought people should be doing or the roles they should have, based on their age.

Stereotypes are generalisations that convey beliefs and expectations about the characteristics of members of social groups. Stereotypes guide our social behaviour and often govern what information we seek and remember.⁹ Stereotyping is the process of applying stereotypical information.

Stereotypes can be prescriptive, that is they prescribe what people should or should not be doing. Stereotypes that describe characteristics of people based on their age are descriptive stereotypes.

Age stereotyping means applying these beliefs and expectations to people based on their age.

Age-based stereotypes communicate ageist attitudes about people across the adult lifespan. They may apply to young adults, middle-aged and older adults. Stereotypes can take many forms. They can be positive, negative or benevolent.

- A negative age-based stereotype of young adults is that they are spendthrifts or rude.
- A positive stereotype of middle-aged people is that they are powerful leaders.
- A benevolent stereotype of an older adult is that they are frail and need help.

While some stereotypes may contain an element of truth, for example some health issues become more prevalent with advancing age, stereotypes can also exaggerate differences between age groups.

Transition refers to changes in roles and status that represent a distinct departure from prior roles and statuses.¹⁰

- 1 Survey instrument, Appendices 225.
- 2 Average Age Groupings, Methodology 23.
- 3 Appendices 225.
- 4 Barney G Glaser and Anselm L Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Aldine, 1967).
- 5 World Health Organization, *Global Report on Ageism* (2021).
- 6 Adapted from World Health Organization, *Global Report on Ageism* (2021).
- 7 World Health Organization, *Global Report on Ageism* (2021).
- 8 Cort W Rudolph, Rachel S Rauvola, David P Costanza and Hannes Zacher, 'Generations and Generational Differences: Debunking Myths in Organizational Science and Practice and Paving New Paths Forward' (2020) *Journal of Business and Psychology* 1.
- 9 World Health Organization, *Global Report on Ageism* (2021).
- 10 Elizabeth D Hutchison, *Dimensions of Human Behaviour: The Changing Life Course* (Sage Publications, 2008).

A close-up portrait of an elderly man with a warm, smiling expression. He has dark hair with some graying at the temples and is wearing a maroon zip-up jacket over a patterned shirt. The background is a solid, dark maroon color.

CHAPTER

2

Snapshot of ageism in Australia



CHAPTER

2

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Key points

- The vast majority (90%) of Australians agree that **ageism** exists, and 83% think it is a problem in Australian society.
- Ageism exists and is pervasive. All adult age groups experience it and hold ageist attitudes.
- Ageism is experienced differently across the adult **lifespan**.
- While most Australians (63%) have experienced a form of ageism, they may not describe this as ageism.
- Ageism is a human rights issue. Age-based **stereotypes** can limit the opportunities people have to participate equally in society, and can limit access to fundamental human rights. This is a form of **discrimination**.
- Understanding that ageism matters, including identifying what it looks like, who experiences it, how they experience it and its impacts, is key to countering it.

Finding 1

Ageism exists in Australia – even when we are not consciously aware of it.

2.1 What is ageism?

Ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) directed towards people on the basis of their age.¹

The WHO in their Global Report on Ageism² highlights that ageism arises when people are categorised and divided based on age in ways that cause, 'harm, disadvantage and injustice and erode solidarity across generations.'³

Stereotypes are a key way in which ageist attitudes are identified and communicated.

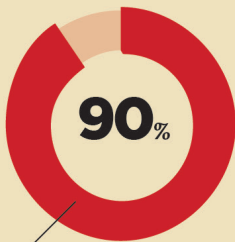
Ageism can be:

- Institutional: this refers to the laws, rules, social norms, policies and practices of institutions which can restrict opportunities and disadvantage individuals based on their age.
- Interpersonal: this refers to ageism that arises in interactions between 2 or more individuals.
- Self-directed: this occurs when individuals take on ageist attitudes and internalise them against themselves.⁴

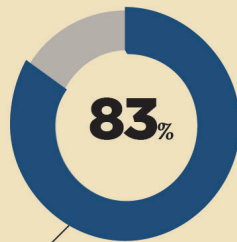
This research focused primarily on exploring Australians' attitudes of ageism at the interpersonal level.

Finding
1

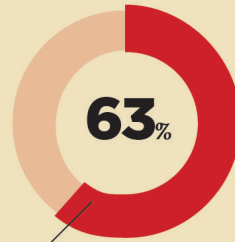
Australia is ageist



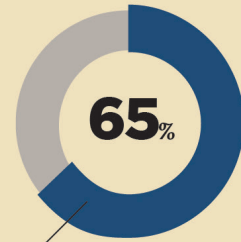
of Australians believe ageism exists.



say ageism is a problem in Australia.



of Australians have experienced ageism in the last 5 years.



think ageism is directed at people across all 3 adult age groups.



Young adults are most likely to experience ageism as being **condescended to**, particularly at work.



Middle-aged people are most likely to experience ageism as **being turned down for a job**.

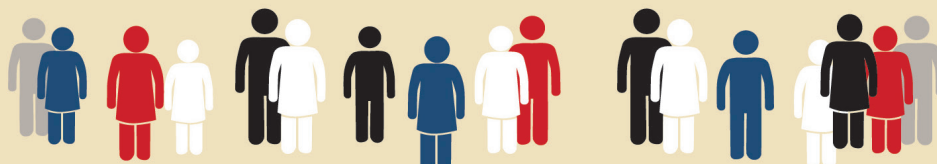


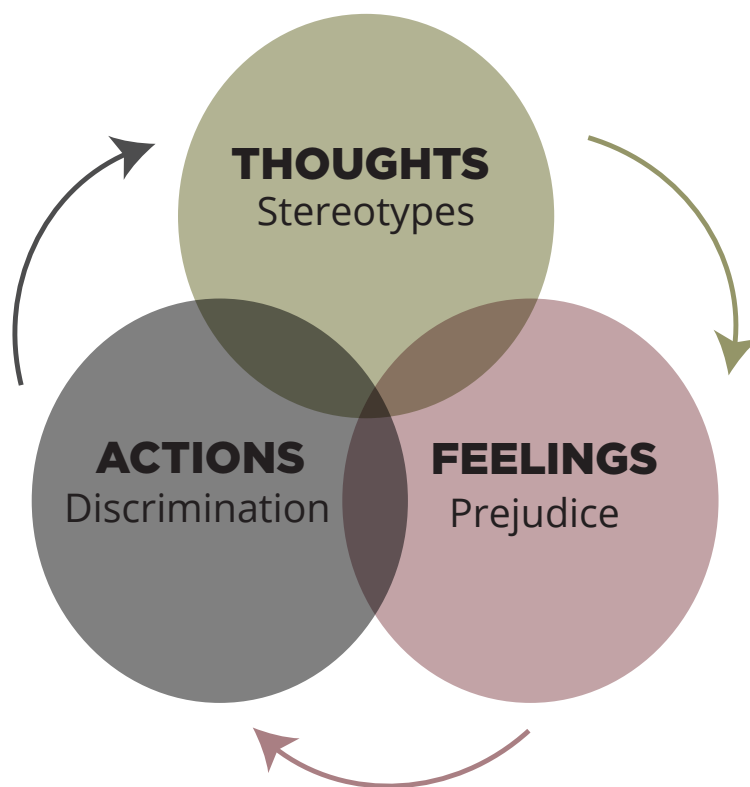
Older people are more likely to experience ageism as **being 'helped' without being asked**.

'Ageism, is that a new word?'

'I haven't really heard about [ageism] to be honest. It's not something I come across very often.'

'I don't think about ageism.'



The 3 dimensions of ageism⁵**Finding
2****Ageism affects Australians across the adult lifespan.****2.2 What is known about ageism across the adult lifespan?**

Not a great deal is known about ageism across the whole lifespan, as the majority of the existing literature on the nature and prevalence of ageism relates to older people.⁶

The nature, prevalence and impact of ageism towards younger people (defined by WHO, in their Global Report on Ageism, as those less than 50-years-old) is '... still poorly understood'.⁷ Preliminary studies in Europe indicate that interpersonal ageism directed towards younger adults may be more prevalent than interpersonal ageism towards older people. WHO also notes there is no evidence available on the scale of self-directed ageism in younger adults.⁸

WHO recommends international research be undertaken to address the absence of knowledge about ageist attitudes towards young adults and middle-aged people, what these attitudes are and how they affect people.⁹ Building an understanding of how adults across the lifespan experience ageism will provide a foundation for developing strategies to combat ageism in all its forms.¹⁰

A small number of international researchers have sought to address this gap in understanding of ageism across age groups.¹¹ The Commission collected data on ageist attitudes about young adults, middle-aged people and older people in Australia, as a starting point for understanding the 'what', 'who', 'how' and 'where' of ageism in Australia across the adult lifespan.



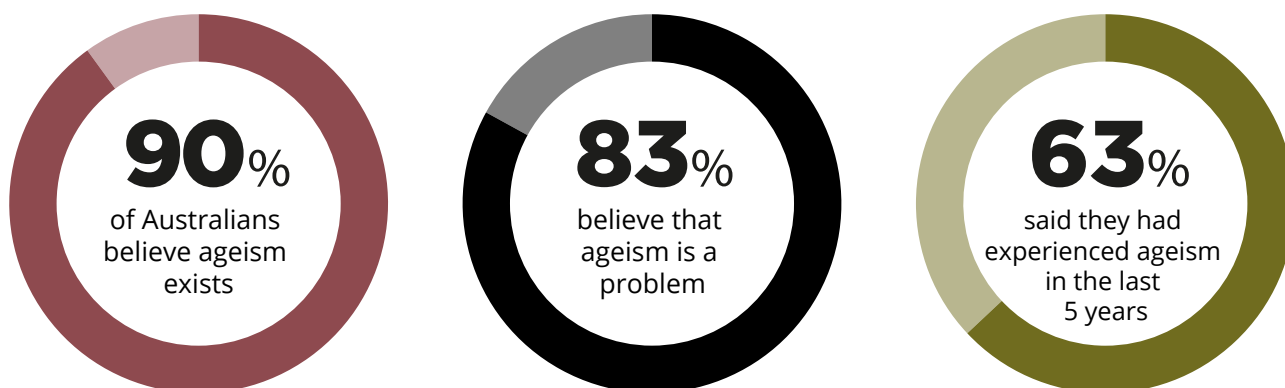
**Ageism, is that
a new word?**

Older person

2.3 Does ageism exist in Australia?

Although many Australians feel that age has little to do with how they see the world, 9 out of 10 Australians agree that ageism exists.

Ageism in Australia¹²



Ageism is not a new word, nor is it a new concept. It has been part of the lexicon since 1969, when gerontologist Richard Butler coined the term to describe 'prejudice by one age group against another age group'.¹³ In naming age-based assumptions and stereotypes, which are the foundations of prejudice, Butler placed ageism alongside other more identifiable 'isms', such as sexism and racism. This recognition of ageism was a seminal step in acknowledging and building an understanding of ageism and how, as a form of prejudice, it also has negative consequences and impacts.

The Commission found that 90% of respondents thought that ageism exists in Australia, although some participants said they were somewhat unfamiliar with the concept of ageism.

'I haven't really heard about [ageism] to be honest. It's not something I come across very often. I'm assuming it's something to do with stereotypes of age basically.'

Young adult

Several participants conveyed surprise that age could be a central topic of discussion or viewed it as less important than other forms of prejudice.

'Finally, age to me is just a number.'

Middle-aged person

'I don't think about ageism.'

Older person

'Age is definitely a lower factor when it comes to barriers. A main one but lower than after sex and race for example.'

Young adult

Did you know?

The perception that ageism is less important than other ‘isms’ is consistent with other research. However, preliminary research indicates that ageism is more pervasive than sexism and racism across 28 European countries.¹⁴

When comparing ageism with other forms of prejudice, 52% of Australians agreed that ‘making jokes about age is more socially acceptable than making jokes about things like race or gender’.¹⁵

This is in line with other research¹⁶ that suggests there is not the same degree of hesitancy in making ageist comments publicly or ascribing behaviours or traits on the basis of age, compared with other forms of prejudice. WHO attributes reasons for this difference in the greater social acceptability of ageism as follows, ‘Ageism is highly prevalent, however, unlike other forms of discrimination, including sexism and racism, it is socially accepted and usually unchallenged, because of its largely implicit and subconscious nature’.¹⁷

‘A 91-year-old man paragliding had an accident; they were interviewing him in his hospital bed. He said, “I can’t wait to get out of here to go on another flight”. When I first saw that I thought “what an idiot, he should know better”. But then I thought, “he should do what he wants with his life, I shouldn’t judge him and say he should be in a nursing home watching TV”.’

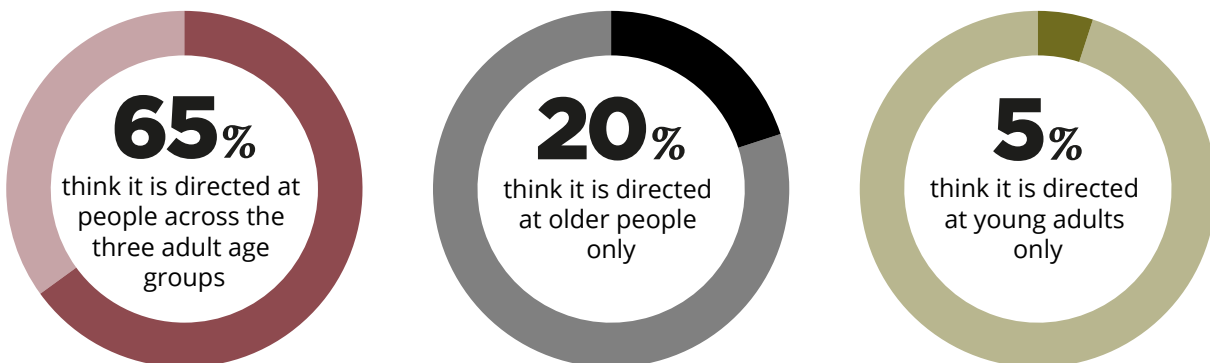
Middle-aged person

2.4 Who experiences ageist attitudes?

The survey data illustrates that ageism can affect people at any age. As everyone belongs to an age group, ageism is the one prejudice that may affect anyone.¹⁸

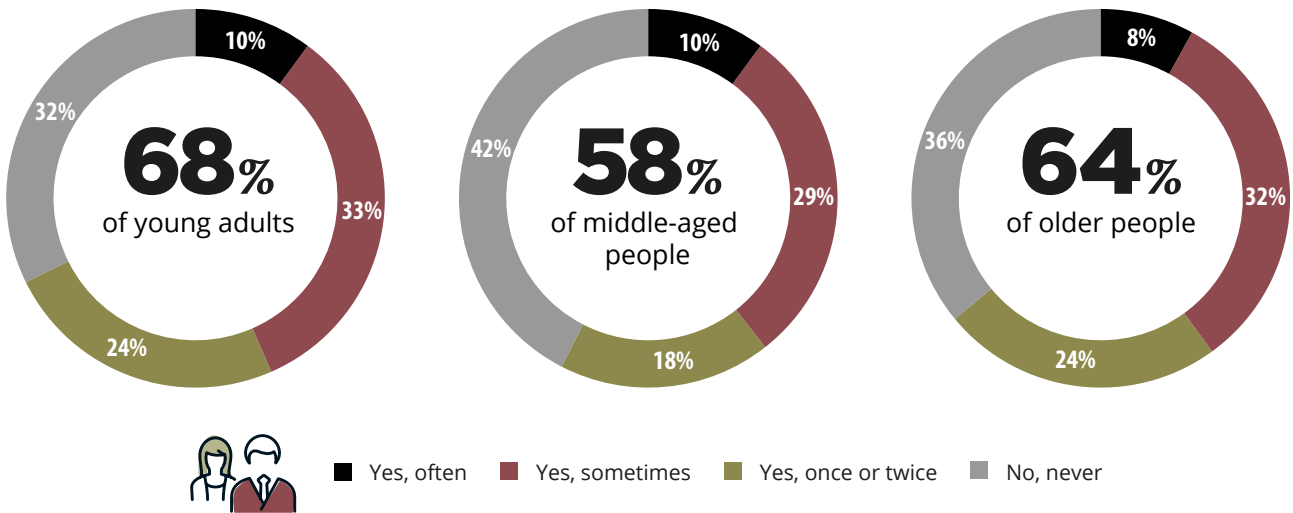
While ageism towards older people has received the most research attention, the Commission found that around 2 in 3 Australians agree that ageism is directed towards people in all age groups across the adult lifespan.

Does ageism exist: 90% of Australians say yes¹⁹



A majority of Australians across the 3 adult age groups agree they have been affected by ageist attitudes in the past 5 years.

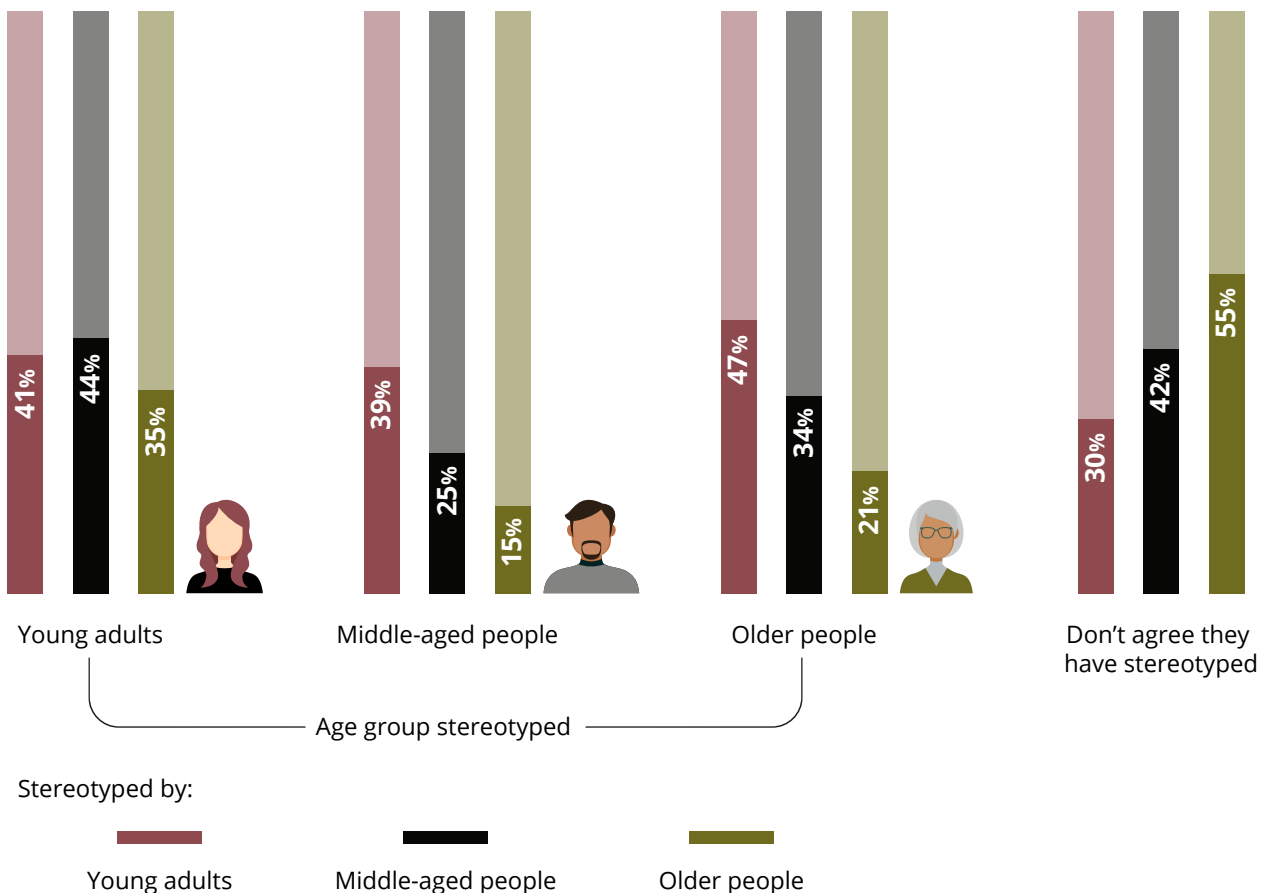
Have you been affected by ageism in the last 5 years?²⁰

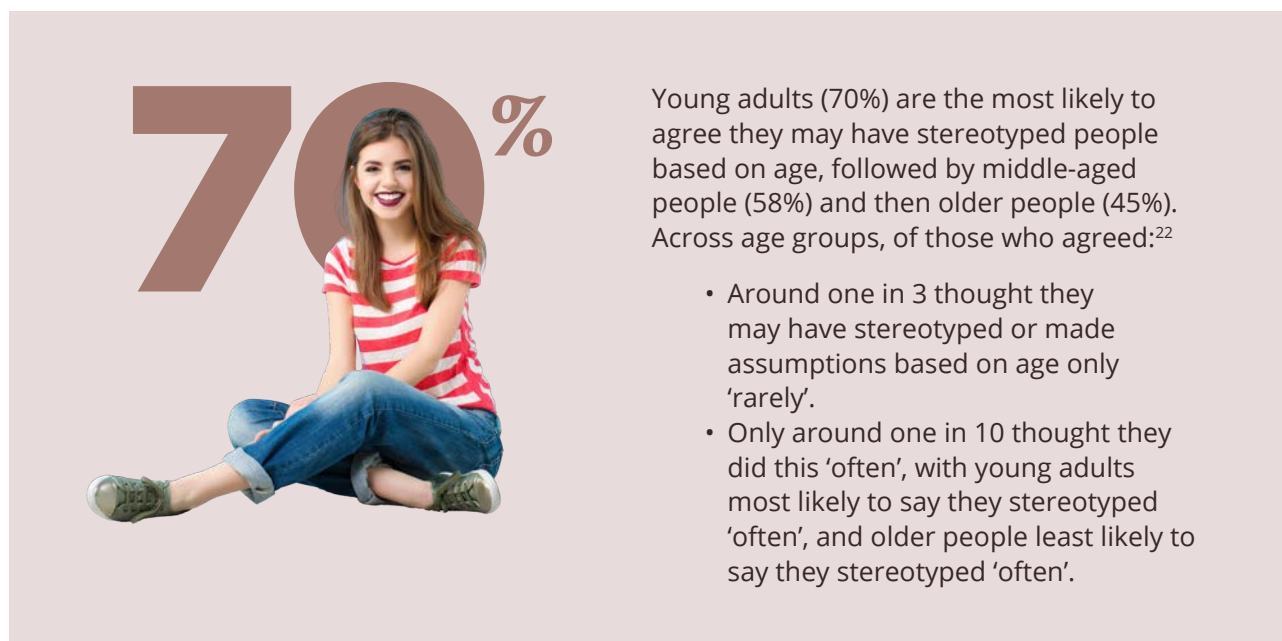


Who is ageist? Ageist attitudes in the form of **stereotypes** are held about, and by, people in all 3 age groups across the adult **lifespan**. The most common stereotypes the Commission found about each age group are outlined in [Chapter 3](#).

Most (60%) survey respondents agreed they may have stereotyped people or made assumptions about them because of their age.

Prevalence of stereotyping by each age group²¹





This generational pattern of young adults being the most negative is seen across other findings. For example, young adults are the most negative about their own age group and themselves, while older people are the least negative about their age group and themselves.²³ This suggests that people tend to become more positive about their age group (and themselves) over time.

Australians across age groups are aware of the age-based stereotypes about all age groups, including their own. Some participants defended their age group, while others distanced themselves from the stereotypes; this pattern is not unusual.²⁴

Young adults are slightly more positive about the other age groups than they are about their own.²⁵ They are the most likely age group to be negative about their own age group; sometimes more than twice as negative.

Middle-aged people are more likely to be positive about their own age group than they are about young adults.²⁶ They are also less negative about their own age group (and older people) than they are about young adults.²⁷

Older people are almost as positive about middle-aged people as they are about their own age group.²⁸ They are also considerably more negative about young adults than they are about middle-aged people and their own age group.²⁹

2.5 How are they ageist?

Age-based **stereotypes** are a form of **ageism**. They are held by all the age groups about all the age groups across the adult lifespan, including their own age group and, to varying degrees, themselves.

While a more layered picture emerged in focus group discussions, with a mix of positives and negatives, many of the same generalisations about each age group found in the survey arose.

These stereotypes are pervasive. Although expressing age-based assumptions was relatively widespread, participants did not necessarily regard this as ageism. Instead, many participants saw the making of generalisations based on age as at least somewhat accepted and even normalised.³⁰

While ageism can be **institutional** (how the policies and practices of institutions can restrict opportunities and disadvantage individuals based on their age), the generalisations made during focus group discussions predominantly highlighted attitudes at the **interpersonal** level (expressed between 2 or more people). In addition, some indications of **self-directed ageism** (internalised toward oneself) emerged.³¹

The stereotypes respondents hold about each of the age groups and themselves are explored further in [Chapter 3](#).

2.6 How are people affected by ageism?

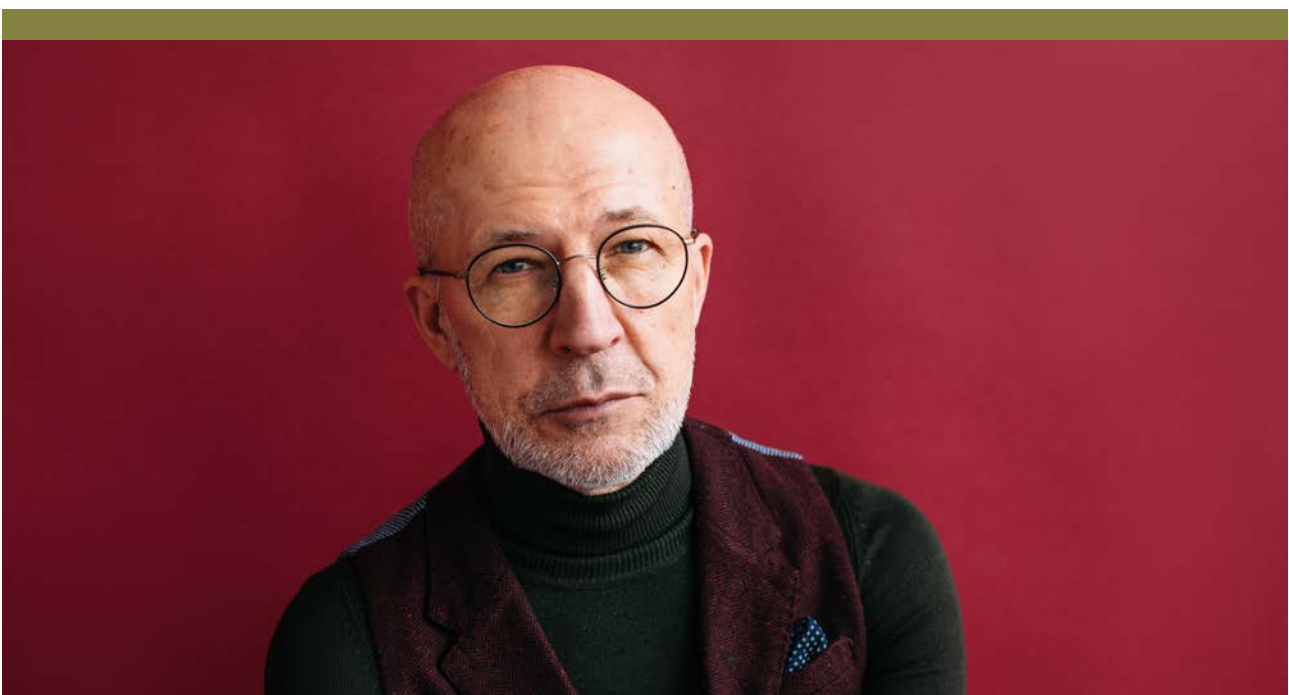
The Commission found that most Australians (60%) feel they have made assumptions about others based on their age. However, this was not always recognised as prejudice.

Most (63%) also reported experiencing ageism at some point in the past 5 years, but the types and impacts of these attitudes differed across the lifespan.

Surveyed types of ageist attitudes

The survey included 15 types of ageist attitudes.³² These attitudes can be grouped into:

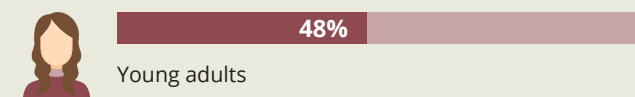
- experiences of social exclusion
- assumptions of cognitive, physical or social competence
- lack of respect
- receiving unwanted help or 'special' treatment.



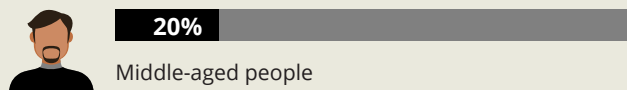
The 3 age groups reported commonalities in the ways they had been affected by ageist attitudes.

Selected ways the age groups are affected by ageism: similarities³³

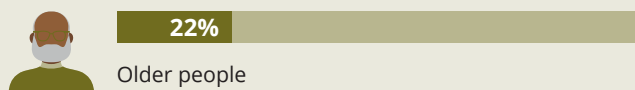
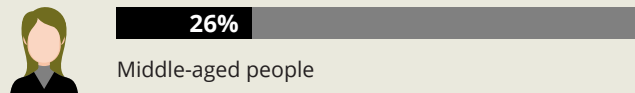
Having age-based assumptions made about them



Ignored or talked down to in a social environment due to their age



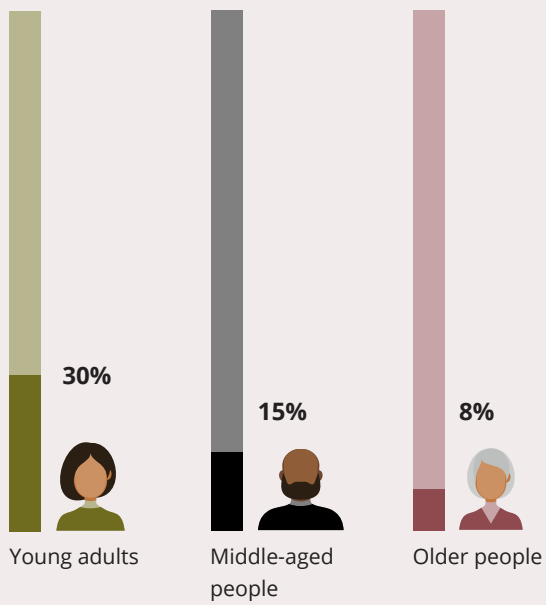
Subjected to jokes about my age/ageing



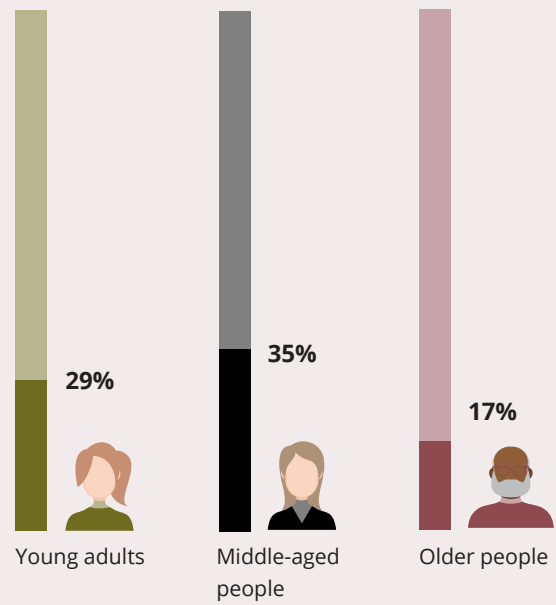
Some differences in how the age groups experience ageist attitudes became apparent.

Selected ways the age groups are affected by ageism: differences³⁴

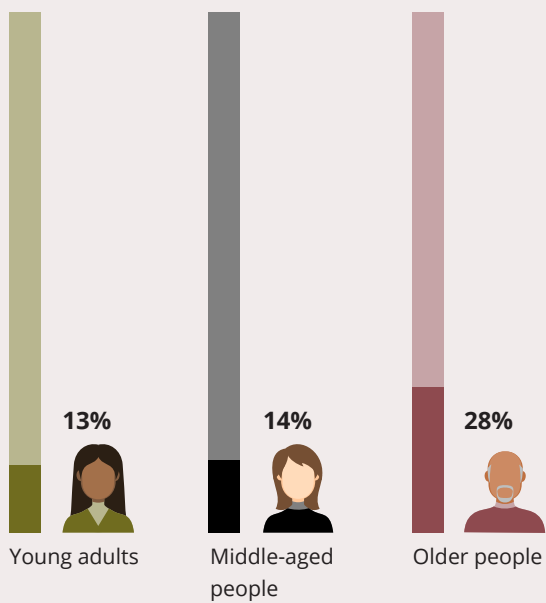
Ignored or talked down to in a workplace environment



Turned down for a job/ position



Been 'helped' without being asked



The ways that Australians report being affected by ageist attitudes are explored in detail in [Chapter 4](#) and [Chapter 5](#).

2.7 Differences in attitudes towards age, ageing and ageism

The research data indicates that participants have differing perspectives on age, ageing and ageism, which is not unusual.³⁵ For example, while most do not feel that they define themselves based on their age,³⁶ and most express a predominantly positive attitude towards ageing,³⁷ most also see that ageism exists³⁸ and feel they have been affected by it.

Most survey respondents:

- Feel that 'age is just a number' and not relevant to who they are – only 28% say that 'I feel my age', whereas 8% agreed 'age isn't something I think about'. The remainder feel either older or younger than their chronological age.³⁹
- Think that 'people should embrace getting older rather than fearing it' (74%).⁴⁰
- Agree (90%) that ageism exists.⁴¹
- Agree (63%) that they have been affected by ageism, with 42% who felt this was 'sometimes/often'.⁴²





While

10%

of surveyed Australians felt that ageism does not exist,



17%

did not think ageism is a problem.



This suggests that

7%

of the population agree that ageism exists but also do not think that it matters.⁴³



In addition,

69%

of survey participants who agreed they have experienced ageism also agreed they have stereotyped others.



In contrast,

43%

of those who agreed they have not experienced ageism also agreed they have stereotyped others.



The data highlights that

69%

of those who think ageism does not exist also felt they have not stereotyped or made assumptions about any age group,

compared with

37%

of those who agreed ageism exists.

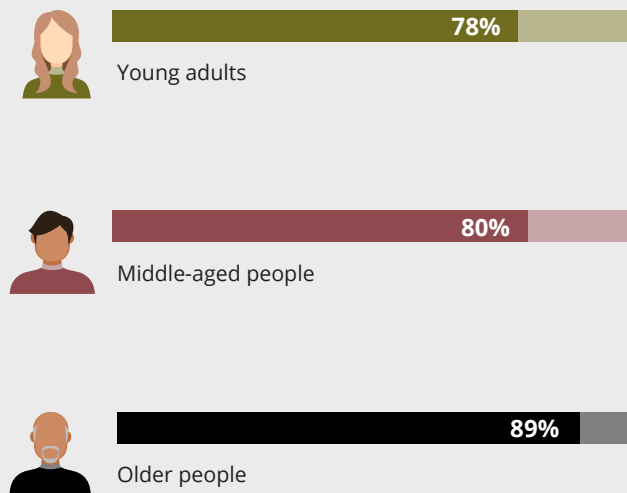
The disconnection in attitudes about age, ageing and ageism can perhaps be seen in the context of early research on ageism towards older people at the personal level which discussed it as a prejudice based on fear of one's future self, including our mortality.⁴⁴ However, this understanding of ageism does not explain ageism towards young adults. This is beyond the scope of the research but is an area that would warrant further exploration.

2.8 Changes in attitudes across age groups

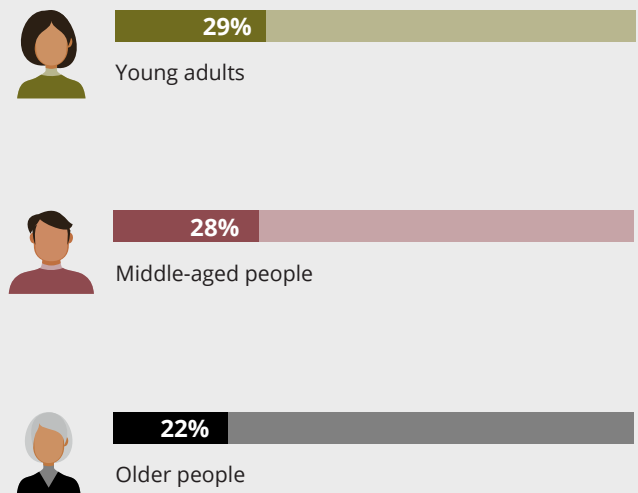
People’s relationship to age and ageing changes as they get older, which has implications for how we understand and experience ageism.

Changing attitudes across the age groups⁴⁵

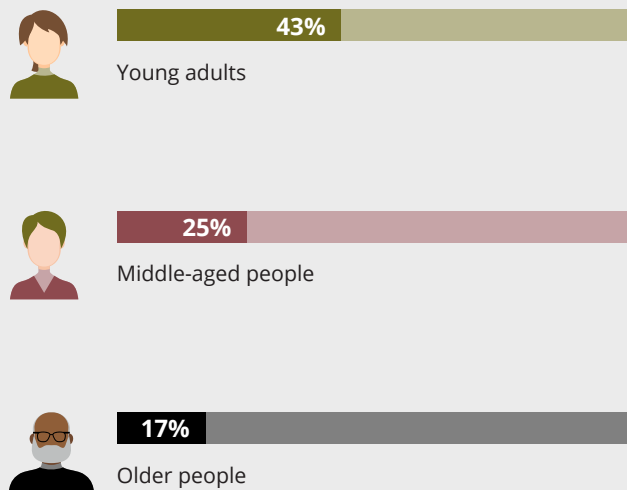
The older you are the more likely you are to agree with the statement that ‘It’s wrong to make judgements about someone based on their age’.



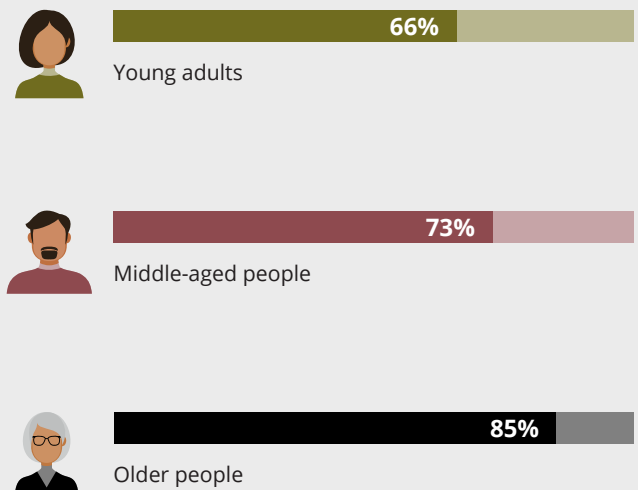
The older you are the less likely you are to agree that ‘When I think about getting older, I can’t see any positives’.



The younger you are the more likely you are to agree that ‘Today’s older generation is leaving the world in a worse state than it was before’.



The younger you are the less likely you are to agree that ‘People should embrace getting old, rather than fearing it’.




While at an explicit level participants agreed that ‘it’s wrong to make judgements about someone based on their age’, ‘ageism exists’ and ‘ageism is a problem in Australia’, the data shows that most also hold at least some age-based perceptions.⁴⁶

2.9 Why ageism matters


‘It’s fine if you acknowledge general patterns but ascribing specific characteristics to groups results in generalisations ... about the capacities of these groups.’

Young adult


The research results indicate that ageism matters to most Australians:



90%
of those surveyed
recognised that
ageism exists in
Australia⁴⁷



83%
agree that ageism is
a current problem in
Australia⁴⁸



82%
of those surveyed
agree that it is
wrong.⁴⁹

Ageism matters and, like any other form of prejudice and discrimination, it has profound impacts on people’s wellbeing, social inclusion, and equality.⁵⁰ ‘At a societal level ... ageist perceptions can reinforce exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation and affect intergenerational solidarity by pitting younger people against older people.’⁵¹

When members of an age group are categorised on the basis of generalisations about their age group, this can lead to age discrimination. When people’s access to the enjoyment of human rights outlined in the United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁵² and other international instruments⁵³ is limited due to their age, they are unable to participate equally in society.

This report highlights that ageist attitudes in Australia, and globally, are ubiquitous.⁵⁴ Ageism is also insidious because it largely goes unrecognised and unchallenged.

As outlined in [Chapter 4](#) and [Chapter 5](#), ageist attitudes can limit access to a range of fundamental human rights, such as health, education, employment, secure housing, and safe interpersonal relationships. From a human-rights perspective, ageism has serious and far-reaching consequences for individuals and the community.⁵⁵

The WHO Global Campaign to Combat Ageism's Global Report on Ageism⁵⁶ highlights the link between ageism and its impact on people: 'Ageism arises when age is used to categorize and divide people in ways that lead to harm, disadvantage and injustice and erode solidarity across generations.'

At the personal level, ageism can affect people's physical, mental and cognitive health and wellbeing.⁵⁷ By limiting access to fundamental human rights, ageism can lead to [discrimination](#). Research has shown that if an older person takes on an [ageist attitude about themselves](#), this is associated with an average estimated loss of 7.5 years of life,⁵⁸ as well as poorer health outcomes, increased risks of social isolation, decreased quality of life,⁵⁹ and greater financial insecurity.⁶⁰

Research into the specific effects of ageism on younger adults has been less explored. In the limited literature available, young adults report impacts in relation to employment,⁶¹ health and housing. In one study,⁶² young adults report experiencing ageism most frequently as a lack of respect, followed by having cognitive, then physical and social assumptions made about them.

At the broader community level, ageism can cost society billions of dollars. For example, Deloitte Access Economics estimated that an extra 3% in workforce participation by people aged 55 and over would lead to a \$33 billion boost to Australia's GDP.⁶³ Organisations who do not implement strategies to prevent age bias can miss out on the benefits that skills and capabilities employees of all ages have to contribute.⁶⁴ This can have negative effects on the productivity, morale and expertise benefits of supporting and nurturing a multigenerational workforce.⁶⁵

Research discusses negative portrayals of older people as unproductive, frail and incapable.⁶⁶ This, coupled with narratives about the perils of an 'ageing population', can lead to presenting older age as an economic problem to solve.⁶⁷ For example, when ageing and increasing longevity are presented as a burden rather than something to be celebrated, age discrimination, for example in policy responses, can be an unintended consequence.⁶⁸

2.10 It is about ageism, not age

As this report explores in [Chapter 4](#) and [Chapter 5](#), ageism affects all age groups across the adult life course.

The [survey data](#) presents a snapshot of how people think and feel about ageism in Australia. While many Australians did not see themselves in terms of their age, the majority acknowledge that ageism exists, that this is a problem, and it is wrong.

This highlights the differences in how Australians view age and ageism. The data shows that although Australians do not tend to define themselves by their age or generation, and also have a predominantly positive attitude towards ageing, ageist attitudes still prevail.

This disconnection between explicit statements and implicit attitudes is not uncommon in literature about ageism.⁶⁹ Although people are not as aware of ageism as they are of other forms of prejudice, the data in the following chapters demonstrate that ageism is a force at play. While ageist attitudes are mostly not expressed at the conscious level, they clearly underpin how people see the age groups and what they expect them to be doing or achieving in their lives (see [Chapter 3](#)).

The findings show that while ageism may be a new word for some, the prejudice and stereotyping ageism entails is commonplace and unchallenged. [Chapter 3](#) outlines the explicit and implicit [stereotypes](#) the Commission found about each of the 3 adult age groups.



Spotlight 1

What's ageism got to do with the media?

Focus group participants agreed that traditional media uses age-based stereotypes to characterise people across all adult age groups.

'While I think it is important for the media to understand and talk about the different issues facing different groups of people, I think it can lead to a lot of stereotyping and two-dimensional coverage that isn't particularly valuable.'

Young adult

'[The media] don't treat people individually.'

Older person

'I think the media print stories that create headlines. They seem to generalise categories but that does not paint a true picture.'

Older person

Participants felt that the media tends to focus on negative stories.

'I think the media can be biased towards fear-based news.'

Middle-aged person

'The media focus on negativity to scare people into reading the article thus selling advertising space. They wrongly have the idea good news stories don't sell newspapers.'

Older person

'News appears to thrive on the negative [with] all age groups. Truthfully, I don't believe the media care what picture they paint of any particular generation or gender, they play on what sells their interests.'

Older person

'The media is always publishing stories that will attract an audience and sales. I don't think the media is interested in anything else. It is all about grabbing the headlines.'

Older person

'The media is trying to target a specific audience with each story they write, who they want to appeal to those ages of readers. The media always seems to dramatise the news stories because they are the ones that get the clicks.'

Young adult

'I think [the media stories] were all very negative. I think the younger people stories were focused on financial issues, older people [stories were] also negative and I felt like the stories were making them look sad and struggling.'

Young adult

'There was emphasis on how to refer to older people – elderly, older – I had not at any time given consideration to the references some may not like. I do think it comes down to how one sees oneself.'

Older person

Australians think the media portrays all age groups negatively.

'In all generations, the vast majority of stories are somewhat negative; seems bad news sells.'

Middle-aged person

'All the different age groups were portrayed as having problems and stories were negative. I was surprised as I was expecting the stories about young people to be positive, especially when it came to health stories. I was expecting the stories about older people to be negative and thought middle-aged people was pretty accurate regarding stress levels.'

Middle-aged person

One participant felt that, while all age groups are associated with a risk profile, the nature of the risk differed for each group.

Participants expressed a range of views on the way that each age group is portrayed in the media.

'I think that the coverage about older people showed them to be vulnerable and dependent, whereas the middle-aged coverage was sparse, while the coverage about young people sought to be controversial.'

Young adult

'In the news, the elderly do not have a great deal of input, the wise comment political views and considerations are inclined to be by the middle-aged groups, the young are more inclined to activism and are concerned about government decisions and lack of immediate action. The elderly still with family have younger attitude, the elderly seem to be older than they really need to be, almost in care to prepare for the inevitable.'

Older person

Several participants perceived middle-aged people to be the least represented age group. Many felt that this age group are 'invisible'.

'I don't think the media portrays middle age really.'

Older person

'I was surprised at lack of [media] stories around middle age.'

Middle-aged person

'[In media stories, I noticed] positive and hope for seniors, worries and solution to worries for youngsters versus less talk about middle-aged people. What 40-50 years think and go through is gone missing in the media.'

Middle-aged person

However, others (mostly older people) feel that older people are not represented in media.

'More bums on seats if you don't talk about old people.'

Older person

'I feel like the media is concentrating on the middle-aged person and attempting to find content which interests them more. I feel the older persons are neglected and this reflects real life.'

Older person

'I think the older group is generally forgotten. People work hard all their lives and when they retire, their savings are eroded by superannuation returns, less government incentives and high fees for care. The media should be more uniform.'

Older person





There is a discourse around risk that is associated with each generation differently. With the older generations, it's risks on health and heart attacks. Young people are risk takers, who can't make good decisions. For middle-aged people, it's mortgage stress and running the risk of house foreclosure and familial conflict.'

Young adult



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CHAPTER

3

Stereotypes: what the Commission found

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Key points

- Ageist stereotypes apply to all 3 adult age groups.
- These stereotypes are both **positive** and **negative**, and both can be harmful when they affect access to human rights on the basis of age and underpin age discrimination.
- Young adults are perceived as having fun, attractive and still at the learning stage, yet feckless, selfish, risk takers who cannot manage their finances.
- Middle-aged people are viewed as being at the height of workplace competency yet stressed due to juggling competing demands of raising children, caring for their parents and managing workplace responsibilities.
- Older people are viewed as likeable and warm yet experiencing declining skills and life roles. They are regarded as onlookers, rather than active participants in society, including the workplace.
- Self-perception improves with age. The youngest adult age group hold the most negative and the older age group the most positive self-views.
- Stereotypes about each age group underpin the **roles** people in each group are expected to both fulfil and not have.¹

3.1 Defining stereotypes

Stereotypes are generalisations that capture beliefs and expectations about the characteristics of members of social groups. Age stereotyping is the process of applying these beliefs and expectations to people based on their age.²

Stereotypes can be either positive or negative; both are inaccurate and can lead to negative impacts. From a human-rights perspective, stereotypes can affect equality by limiting people's access across a range of areas, resulting in age **discrimination**.

3.2 Stereotypes and ageism

Researchers often group stereotypes into 2 broad types:³

- Label-based (descriptive) stereotypes describe perceptions of what an age group is like.
- Role-based (prescriptive) stereotypes prescribe behaviours and roles⁴ that people in each age group are assumed or expected to either fulfil or not have.⁵

When exploring ageist attitudes to understand how ageism works, some researchers have grouped age stereotypes into 2 sub-groups: warmth characteristics and competence characteristics.⁶ These categories arose from research into ageism and older people which observed that stereotypes about this age group tend to fall into these 2 clusters.

Warmth characteristics capture general likeability and social participation traits, such as being loyal, polite, respectful and being good listeners.

Competence characteristics represent assumed skills and capabilities, for example, being up-to-date with technology, the ability to understand complex topics, and financial management and workplace skills.

This framework is useful when looking at the stereotypes that were identified about each age group, as the same broad categorisation of traits emerged in the Commission's research.

3.3 Snapshot of stereotypes about each age group

Australians perceive each age group as having differing levels of warmth and competence characteristics:

- Young adults are seen to have lower warmth characteristics (more selfish, complaining) and higher competence characteristics (technological skills, students).
- Middle-aged people are seen to have both warmth (responsible, loyal) and competence (leadership roles, making good financial decisions) characteristics.
- Older people are seen to have high warmth characteristics (polite, respectful, good listeners) and lower competence characteristics (frail, inflexible, lacking technological skills).



SNAPSHOT OF AGE-BASED STEREOTYPES			
Warmth characteristics	Younger people are seen as ...	Middle-aged people are seen as ...	Older people are seen as ...
Positive	Diverse, interesting to spend time with, physically attractive	Making a valuable contribution to society, diverse, polite and respectful	Polite and respectful, good listeners, deserving respect because of their age, interesting to spend time with
Negative	Thinking they are always right, expecting things on a platter, complaining a lot	Thinking they are always right, having it easier than other ages, have too much say in society	Often lonely or isolated, too sensitive, having it easier/better than people of other age groups
Competence characteristics	Younger people are seen as ...	Middle-aged people are seen as ...	Older people are seen as ...
Positive	Up-to-date with new technology, energetic and dynamic, flexible and open to new ideas	Making a valuable contribution to the economy, able to understand complex topics, having a great work ethic	Able to understand complex topics, worth listening to on issues
Negative	Bad at managing their finances, not having a great work ethic	Having more than their fair share of assets/ material possessions	Forgetful, being unwell, not up-to-date with technology, not energetic or dynamic

*The descriptors in this table were used in the survey.⁷

Many participants expressed the view that people are ‘pigeon-holed’ based on their age. The stereotypes about each age group are detailed in the next sections.



◀ The expectation is when you're young you're gathering, middle-aged building, and older age you enjoy.'

Older person

3.4 Stereotypes: ageist attitudes against young adults in Australia

Finding 3

Young adults are seen as attractive, but still finding their way.

‘Young adults are carefree and usually don’t have many responsibilities at such a time in their lives. Being a young adult should be about having fun ... but also about exploring what you want for the future, taking chances ...’

Middle-aged person



Young adults are seen as finding their way in life. Many focus group participants feel that young adults ‘... don’t know what they don’t know’.

‘The young adults are forging a world which they live in that is foreign to my age group, but that’s life. This group I feel need to get their skates on if they want to achieve their life dreams. I like the ‘no pressure’ they seem to live in but too many seem to be wanting it a lot easier than it is.’

Middle-aged person

However, most Australians surveyed did not necessarily see these characteristics as being inappropriate at this life stage.

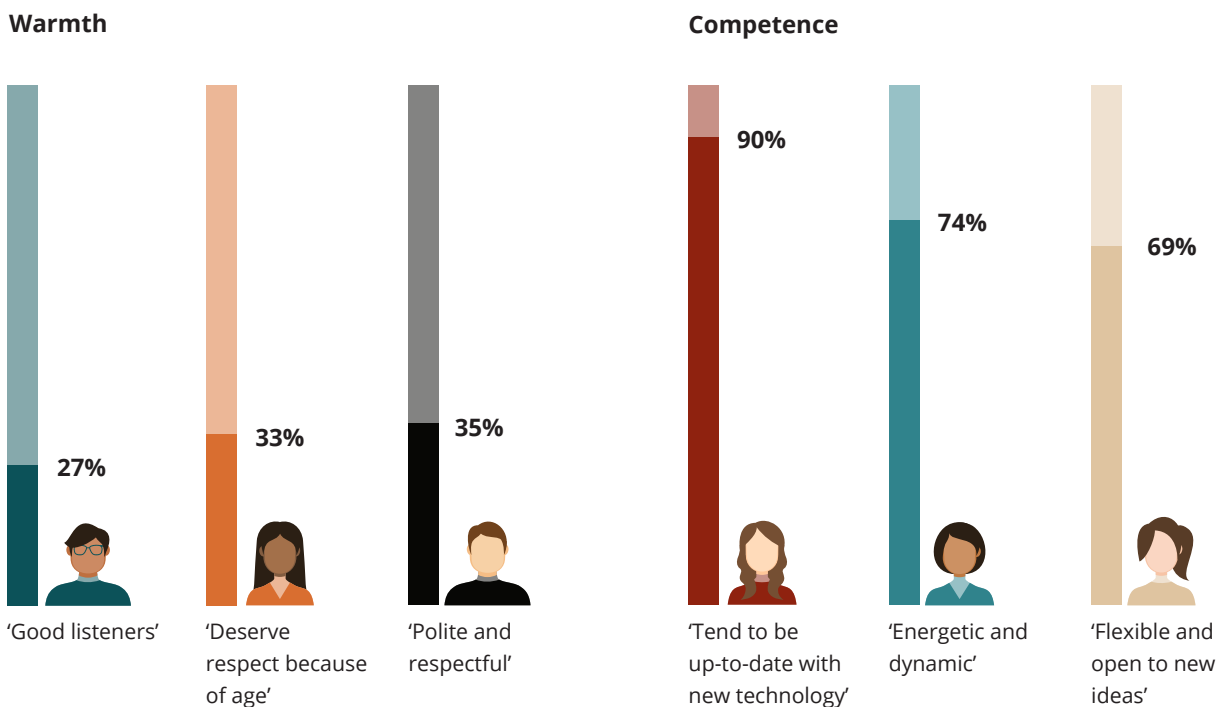
‘They’re just kids, experimenting with life.’

Older person

(a) Positive stereotypes about young adults

Most participants (55%) have a positive overall view of young adults.⁸ However, young adults are seen to have more **competence** and fewer **warmth** characteristics.

Young adults: snapshot of agreement by all age groups with warmth and competence characteristics (positive)⁹



Many focus group participants expressed similar views of young adults.

‘Younger adults are more physical, more interested in taking risks. They also are looking for love and up with technology.’

Older person

However, a few viewed assumptions of high technology use as a negative.

'Don't you also find them superficial? If you look at the social media and even like the early adults, I find them very superficial ... and even some of their relationships I find not very deep. Which I suppose they don't have to be at that age. I just feel sometimes that they have it a bit too easy.'

Middle-aged person

'[Young adults] don't know how to communicate, [they have] lost the art of conversation – everything [is] done by text.'

Older person

Many participants also viewed young adults as energetic and dynamic. Labels mentioned frequently include 'lively', 'daring', 'courageous' and 'risk taking'.

'[Young adults are] a lot more active and a bit less worried about long term things and I guess there's a bit of a focus on having fun and those sorts of things.'

Young adult

Young adults are seen as flexible and open to new ideas, with one participant saying that they are 'wanting to change the world, being fearless in that way'.

'[Young adults'] education has taught them to think more critically, not just by rote, and this has made them somewhat different.'

Older person

'They are open minded.'

Older person

'More tolerant of differences in others.'

Older person

Only about one-third (35%) of survey respondents see young adults as being polite and respectful.¹⁰

'The primary value of respect has all but evaporated in many cases among the younger generation, which is the foundation of civil society.'

Older person

'A lot are seen as having no respect – not all of them.'

Older person

'Younger people should respect older people – we were brought up to respect our elders.'

Older person

'Courtesy has eroded over time.'

Older person

Only about one-third (34%) also think that young adults have a great work ethic.¹¹

'When it comes to work and ethics for younger adulthood it's not there from when I was younger.'

Middle-aged person

'I married young, and we had a mortgage by age 20. My husband and I have always worked 50–60-hour weeks in our cleaning business. Our kids, who are grown up now, do the same. What I see is other young people who think things should be easy or that they shouldn't have to work to be able to have the things they want.'

Older person

'They don't want to put in the hard yards ... at work. [They want] to socialise rather than work.'

Older person

(b) Negative stereotypes about young adults

The Commission found that age-old¹² negativity towards 'the youth of today' persists.

'[The] youth of today don't want to work for it, they expect everything today ...'

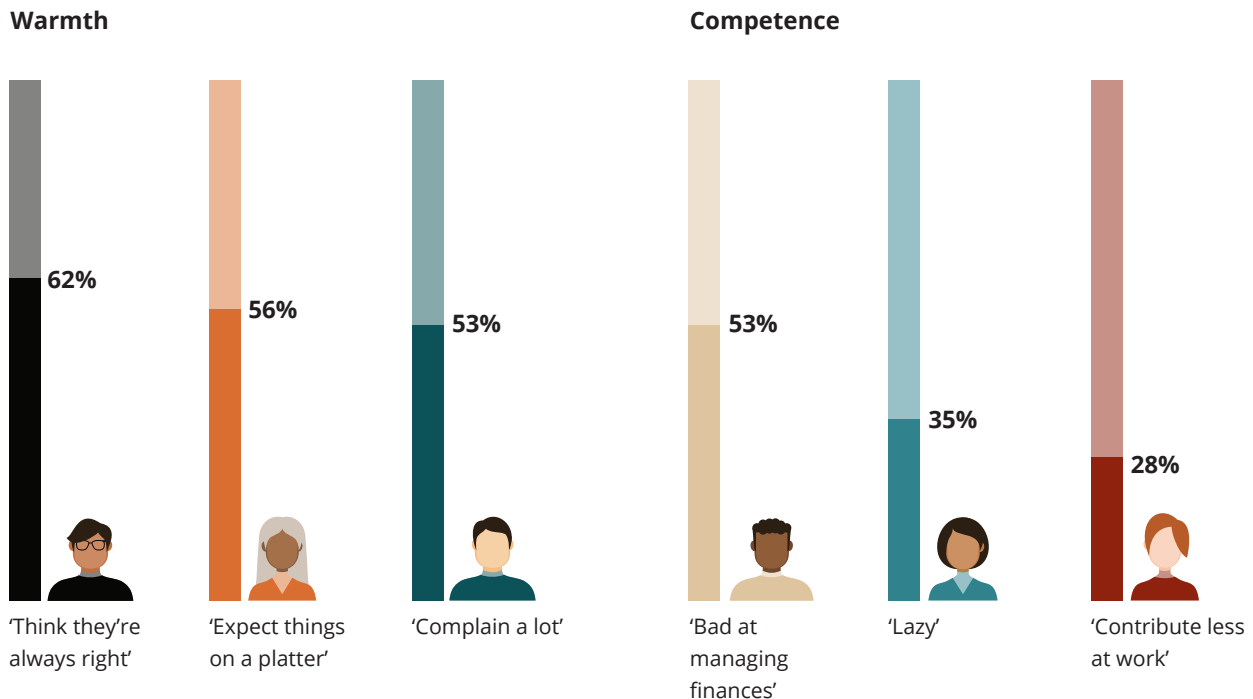
Older person

There is a much higher level of agreement with negative statements for young adults than for any other age group.¹³

The data indicates that negative perceptions of young adults in Australia centre around stereotypes of them as being selfish, entitled complainers who lack work ethic and do not manage money well.



Young adults: snapshot of agreement by all age groups with warmth and competence characteristics (negative)¹⁴



However, the same degree of negativity towards young adults found in the survey was not evident in focus group discussions. It is not unusual for focus group participants to be reticent to express negativity directly.¹⁵ While attitudes expressed about young adults were often tempered by a sense of empathy across the generations, some critical attitudes did arise in focus group discussions.

Many focus group participants feel that this age group is entitled.

'[In contrast to young adults], I believe the boomers (yes, I am aware of the derogatory 'thanks boomer' tagline) generally are hardworking, less entitled and more likely to get on with things rather than wallow and expect others to help them.'

Middle-aged person

Young adults are seen to focus on the present rather than planning for the future, which connects with a stereotype of them as impatient.

'[They] expect a lot. [What] we've achieved over a lifetime they expect it immediately ...'

Older person

'[Young adults] don't need to wait for anything – everything is now.'

Older person

'The younger generation or 'now generation' tend to want something now and don't have to save like older generations, rather [they] borrow the money to achieve their short-term goal. But not all young people are that way and [some] are prepared to wait and save to reach their goal.'

Middle-aged person

'[Young adults are] mostly about having fun without worrying about the future.'

Middle-aged person

This is accompanied by a sense that young adults have less responsibility and pressure than both older age groups.



Some focus group participants feel that young adults complain a lot.

'A 21-year-old I believe is more likely to moan about life and less likely to be involved in the community in volunteering – they are more individualistic despite wanting to change the world.'

Middle-aged person

Did you know?

While only about one-third of survey respondents (35%) agreed with the perception that young adults are 'lazy', this was approximately 5 times more than for either middle-aged or older adults.¹⁶

One participant recognised this negative stereotype about young adults, although they did not agree, stating:

'Young people get a bad rap for being lazy and unmotivated, live at home longer, rely on their parents a lot more. I don't personally think that way, but I think there is a view in that sense that younger gens aren't as hard working as they used to be.'

Middle-aged person

Many participants think young adults are bad at managing finances, for example, one person referred to them as the 'material generation'.

'There is just so much consumerism these days. The younger generation think it is a right rather than a privilege. I think it is a privilege rather than a right. [They want the] newest phone, Uber eat – money can only go so far.'

Older person

'[Young adults are] learning to manage money ... by borrowing money from family [and so on].'

Older person



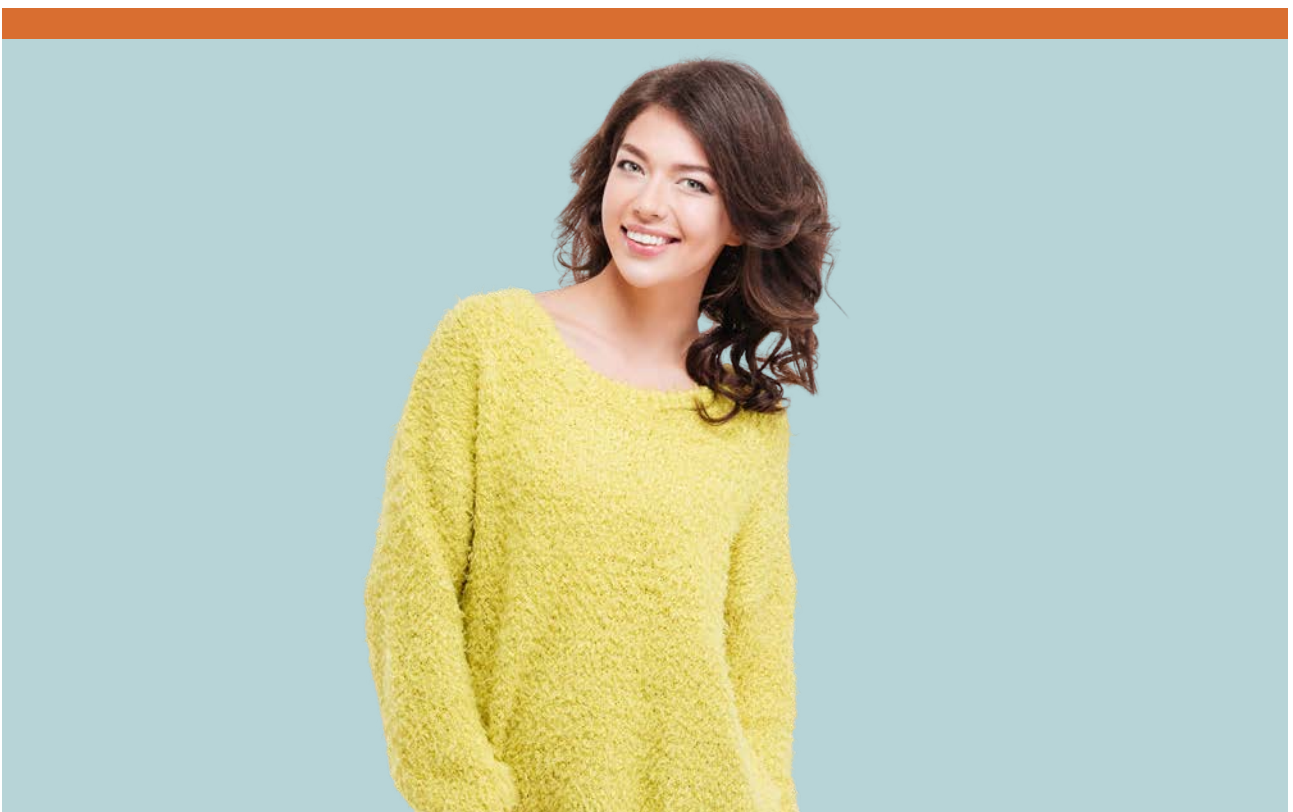
Compared to the other age groups, young adults are:¹⁷

- seen as 5 times more likely to be described as 'bad at managing finances'
- almost 4 times more likely to be described as 'expecting things on a platter'
- almost 4 times more likely to be described as 'selfish/self-centred'
- viewed as 3 times more likely to be described as 'taking more days off for mental health'.

Perceptions that young adults focus on fun and lack a sound work ethic and financial management skills can perhaps be seen to influence the life **roles** society expects of them.¹⁸ As with all age groups, assumptions of limited roles can impact the participation of young adults across a range of social and economic areas, and this can be experienced as a form of age discrimination.¹⁹

Did you know?

Younger men who participated in this survey were more likely than their female counterparts to hold negative perceptions more generally of all age groups, including their own. They also were the group most likely to hold negative self-perceptions.²⁰



(c) Young adults and life roles: still learning the role?

The stereotypes that young adults are technologically savvy and focused on fitness and their appearance yet lack experience and a work ethic underpin the life roles it is expected, even assumed, that they should and should not fulfil.²¹

Roles closely associated with young adults



71%

Student

14% middle-aged and 4% older people



70%

Using new tech

35% middle-aged and 5% older people



54%

Physically attractive

32% middle-aged and 4% older people



52%

Sexually active

35% middle-aged and 7% older people

Roles not associated with young adults



7%

Making financial decisions

51% middle-aged and 30% older people



7%

A leader

51% middle-aged and 28% older people



7%

Employer/manager

63% middle-aged and 33% older people



8%

Being unwell

9% middle-aged and 50% older people

Young adults are connected most with life roles that centre on vitality, dynamism and attractiveness; such perceptions have been documented widely.²²

'I think young adults ... give lots of importance to their physical looks.'

Older person

'[Young adults are] all about looks, all about going to the gym.'

Middle-aged person

The role most associated with young adults is being a student.²³ They are also the age group most connected with this role.

'I feel like a lot of them are studying at this time.'

Young adult

'Studying – younger adults are more likely to study at university or TAFE.'

Middle-aged person

However, a few young adults mentioned that being a student is only one of many roles people in their age group are balancing.

'I'm a full-time employee, part time student and a partner.'

Young adult

'A lot of [young] people [are] studying at TAFE or uni and working part time and have very little time for themselves.'

Young adult

Did you know?

While young adults make up the highest proportion of those enrolled in study, the majority of young adults are not students. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data shows that, in 2020, 42% of males and 47% of females aged 20–24 were enrolled in study, the highest of any adult age range. This was followed by 15% of males and 27% of females aged 25–34. Only 2% of males and 3% of females aged 55–64 were enrolled in study.²⁴

Young adults are described overwhelmingly as 'tech savvy', 'the tech generation'.

The lack of connection between young adults and advancing at work fits with the perception of them as inexperienced and still finding their way in the workforce.

‘Young adults lack experience and need support and advice of middle-aged adults, who in turn need to respect the older adults and tap into their wealth of knowledge and experience.’

Older person

Only 7% of survey respondents associated young adults with being an employer, manager or leader.²⁵ Some participants also mentioned that managerial roles should be linked to older age.

‘[The] age and experience of older people [means they] should be more in a supervisory role.’

Older person

‘Just think of our prime ministers and the US presidents. They are certainly not young. For jobs like that a young person would not have the vast knowledge and experience that is needed.’

Older person

There was a consistent perception that young adults are bad at managing money. Some participants mentioned that a lack of financial decision-making skills is connected to insecure work and low-paying jobs.

Did you know?

The risk of underemployment (part-time workers who would like to work more hours) declines steadily with age.²⁶ According to HILDA, this is not just because younger adults make up a higher proportion of part-time employees, but they also have a higher share of underemployment among part-time workers across age groups. In 2017, 47% of part-time employees aged 20–24 were underemployed.²⁷

One young adult acknowledged these negative stereotypes by distancing themselves from them.

‘I am considered a Millennial, but I don’t really feel like I fit into that stereotype as I would like to think of myself as quite compassionate, thoughtful and also pretty good with money and saving.’

Young adult

Did you know?

Over 80% of **Millennials** budget, compared to two-thirds of older generations, and 30% are more likely to be regular savers than are their parents.²⁸

Did you know?

Australia's youngest (15–24) and oldest (65 and over) workers make up the highest proportion of employees in non-standard employment (defined as fixed-term contracts, casual employment, temporary agency employment and permanent part-time employment). Australia's youngest workers have the highest share of non-standard employment, at 76% in 2017, up from 68% in 2001.²⁹

For young adults, this trend is driven largely by a rise in the share of casual and permanent part-time employment over the reporting periods. In addition to being the age group who already had the highest share of non-standard work, this is the only age group whose share of casual contracts is increasing.³⁰

The second youngest age group (25–34) also experienced an increase from 37% to 43% in non-standard employment in the same period of time, due to increasing numbers on fixed-term contracts and in permanent part-time work. This age group now has the highest share of fixed-term contract workers.³¹

In focus group discussions, the **roles** most connected with young adults centre around perceptions that they are having fun. They are viewed as living a more carefree, fun-focused, and risk-taking lifestyle than both the middle-aged and older age groups. This is generally seen as appropriate at this life stage.

'I believe that young adults have more freedom (time, financially) than other adults. There is more time and less restraints to pursue leisure pursuits even though perhaps they don't realise or appreciate this.'

Middle-aged person

'Younger adults like to have fun, take risks, enjoy company and interact socially.'

Older person

'I think young adults are carefree and adventurous. They are finding their feet in the adult world and trying new things, like parties, university, new relationships. There may not be a whole lot of stability with their finances, and they may also just be figuring what they want from life.'

Young adult

Overall, participants stated that young adults are seen as still at the 'learning stage', that society regards 'making mistakes as the norm' and that 'it is important to encourage them in their endeavours'.

The young adult life stage is seen as a period of emerging adulthood, including by many young adults themselves. One young adult referred to their life stage as 'getting into adulthood'.

Did you know?

Compared to their peers, young adults aged between 18 and 29 who live with their parents are more likely to be unemployed, non-working full-time students and single.³²

Did you know?

As young Australians delay purchasing a home, an increasing proportion of Australians are renting, with the largest cohort of these aged between 25 and 34. From 2007 to 2017, the proportion of those aged 30–34 who are renting increased from 33% to 42%. Over the same period, the proportion of those aged 35–39 renting jumped from 29% to 38%.³³



(d) Media portrayals of young adults

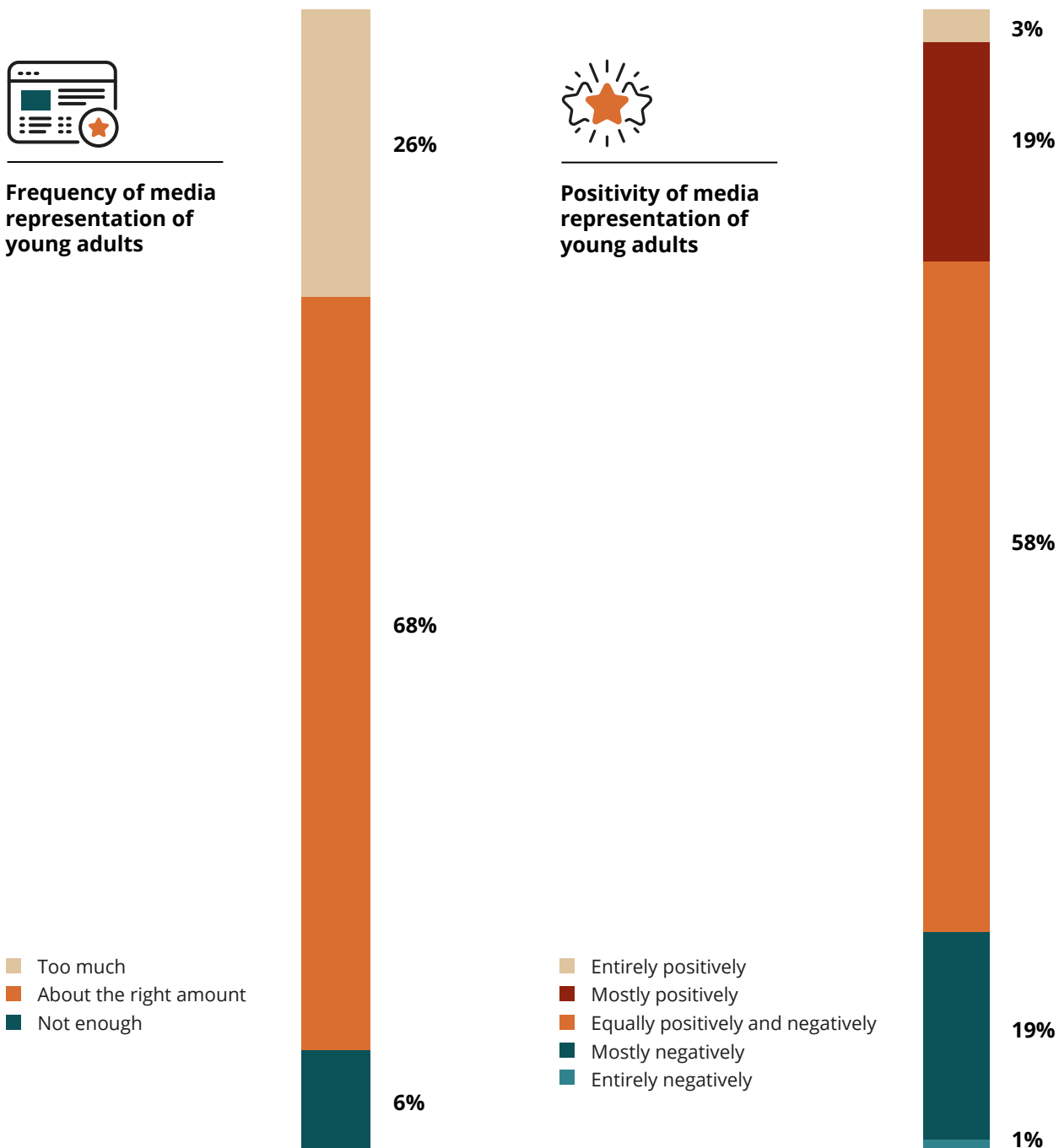
Survey respondents were given a list of 30 words to choose from which they felt were often used to describe young adults in the media and a list of 30 words to choose from which they felt were seldom used to describe young adults in the media.³⁴ The following diagram sets out the results.

Words used to describe young adults in the media³⁵

Often	Seldom/never
Risk taking	Wise
Irresponsible	Caregiver
Carefree	Principled
Ambitious	Powerful
Depressed	Volunteer
Needy	Invisible
Independent	Skilled
Happy	Competent
Naïve/gullible	Upbeat
Friendly	Unhealthy

Most survey respondents felt that young adults are portrayed equally positively and negatively in the media.³⁶

Frequency and positivity of media representation of young adults



Focus group participants took part in an online forum before attending their focus group session.³⁷ One of the online activities involved identifying media articles about the 3 age groups, then documenting their impressions of how each age group was portrayed.

Perceptions of the media portrayal of young adults reflect similar stereotypes to those identified in the Commission's broader research. A sample of the headlines chosen is captured below.



The news stories that participants found about young adults were thought to be significantly more likely to be negative than those about middle-aged and older people.³⁸

‘The most obvious thing is that the stories cover a much broader range of issues related to young people. There is a scattering of stories about finance and health, but on the first couple of list pages alone, I see stories about crime, disability services, jobs and careers, education, lifestyle and living, etc.’

Older person

A number of participants observed that many media stories with young adults as the subject focus on crime. However, it was also noted that stories about crime dominate news coverage.

‘[Stories about] younger people are assuming they do lots of crime. I have always known that news focuses on the negative that young people do and never highlights the positive they do.’

Older person

‘Crime rate by younger people – the younger generation going down the path of criminal activities.’

Middle-aged person

A few participants viewed media representations of young adults more positively. This reflects perceptions that young adults have more agency than middle-aged and older people.

‘The stories paint young people as extremely capable and active – they are capable of changing the world or destroying it, but also at the same time are victims of the political and societal structures and norms which exist.’

Young adult

Others rejected negative media depictions of young adults.

‘Millennials are not as selfish as portrayed ... same as for older people, there are stereotypes that contradict each other.’

Older person

During focus group discussions on age groups and the media, many participants noted that young adults are the group most likely to be connected with the concept of ‘the future’ in articles. However, this future was often seen as ‘uncertain’.

‘Young adults face a very bleak future.’

Older person

‘They (media) talk about a fairly uncertain future – trying to secure housing, employment, protesting about things that are undesirable.’

Young adult

'A lot of talk about the future being scary for them, buying houses and what worries them.'

Middle-aged person

Overall, there was a view that media representations of young adults are consistent with the stereotypes outlined above. They are portrayed as emerging adults – carefree, focussed on fun and taking risks. The media was not seen to represent young adults in workplace and other leadership roles.

(e) Overall picture of young adults

'Younger adults are working, studying, leaving home, travelling, exercising, partying and enjoying life.'

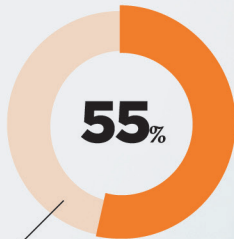
Middle-aged person

In general, young adults are seen as more dynamic, energetic, and carefree, yet less responsible, financially savvy and respectful than other age groups.



Finding 3

Australians see young adults as attractive and still finding their way

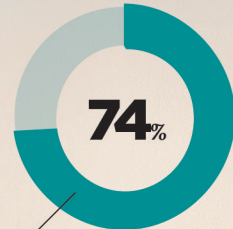


of Australians have a **positive overall** view of young adults.

Some see young adults as **selfish, entitled complainers.**

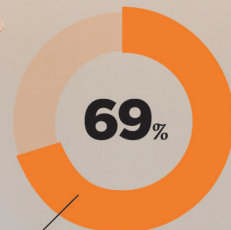


agreed young adults **have a good work ethic.**



of Australians view young adults as **energetic and dynamic.**

The role most associated with young adults is being a **student (71%).**



of Australians consider young adults to be **flexible and open to new ideas.**



'[The] youth of today don't want to work for it, they expect everything today.'

'Young adults are carefree and usually don't have many responsibilities.'

'I think young adults are finding their feet in the adult world and trying new things, like parties, university, new relationships.'

'Younger adults like to have fun, take risks, enjoy company and interact socially.'



3.5 Stereotypes: ageist attitudes against middle-aged people in Australia

Finding 4

Middle-aged people are seen as being in the prime of their lives.





Overall, more positive characteristics³⁹ and fewer negative characteristics⁴⁰ were found to be connected with middle-aged people than the other age groups.

The stereotypes which emerged centre around middle age as the peak life stage, consistent with other research on attitudes about middle-aged people.⁴¹

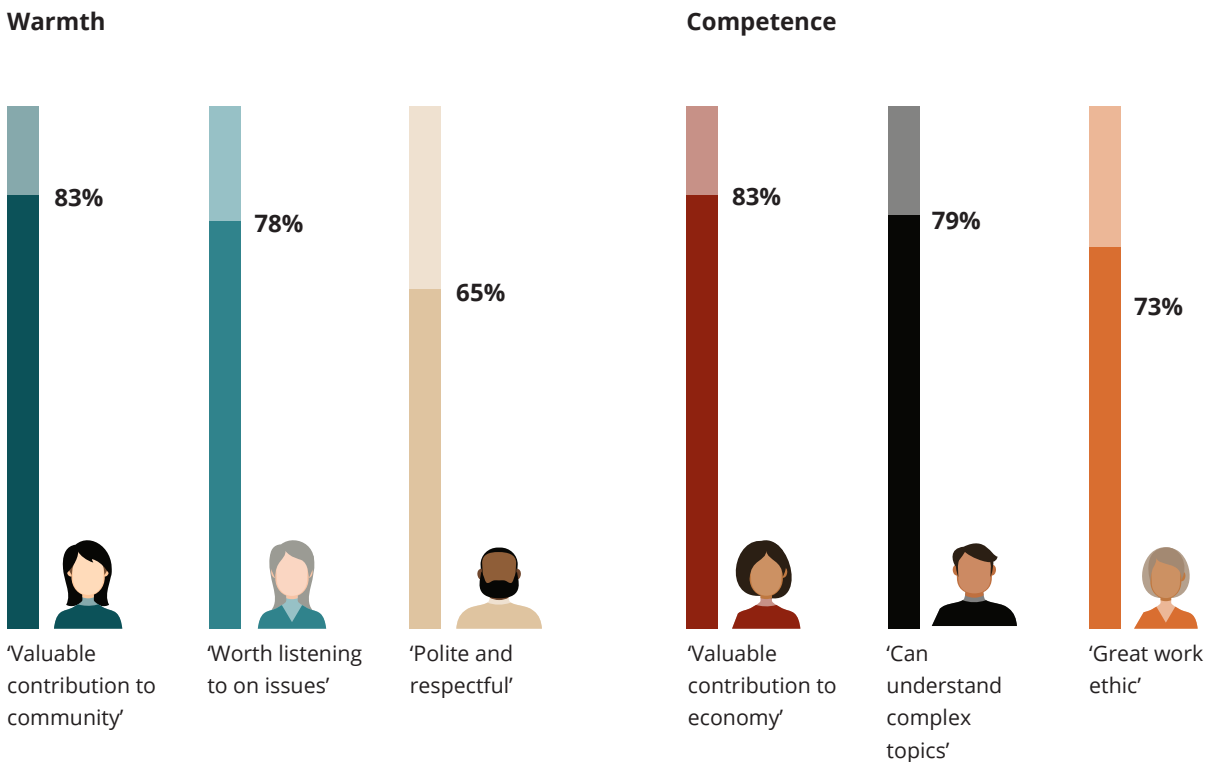
While middle-aged Australians are the age group most seen as having meaningful life roles, some also see this age group as perhaps holding disproportionate power in society.

(a) Positive stereotypes about middle-aged people

Middle-aged people are perceived as being in the prime of their lives.

More than half of those surveyed connected middle-aged people with both more **warmth** and **competence** characteristics than the other age groups.

Middle-aged people: snapshot of agreement by all age groups with warmth and competence characteristics (positive)⁴²



Middle-aged people are seen as the age group contributing the most to society and the economy.



'The middle aged are carrying us!'

Middle-aged person

'We want those taxpayers in the middle to continue to pay tax please.'

Older person

Many focus group participants agree that middle-aged people have a strong work ethic and are consolidating their career to provide security for their family.

'We did 9 to 5 and now expected to work longer without paying overtime, always on call.'

Older person

'Middle-aged adults are more settled, more financial [security] and more likely to have settled down with family.'

Older person

Middle-aged people are seen consistently as stable and 'settled'.

While the views of middle-aged people as being at their peak are positive, these perceptions can also have negative connotations.

Did you know?

Happiness across the adult lifespan resembles a U-shaped curve,⁴³ with its lowest point averaging at 47.2 years of age.⁴⁴

The low connection between middle-aged people and happiness was mirrored by many focus group participants. This was often linked to, and perhaps even the flipside of, the view that middle-aged people are at the peak of their work and family responsibilities.

'The balancing aspect becomes hard, you are a bigger part of the family, and if you do have kids, it can take a toll. Yes, you do have more money, maybe a mortgage and a house, but it comes at a cost – the amount of responsibility you carry that wasn't there 10 years ago. I wasn't successful absolutely as a younger adult, but some problems weren't there either!'

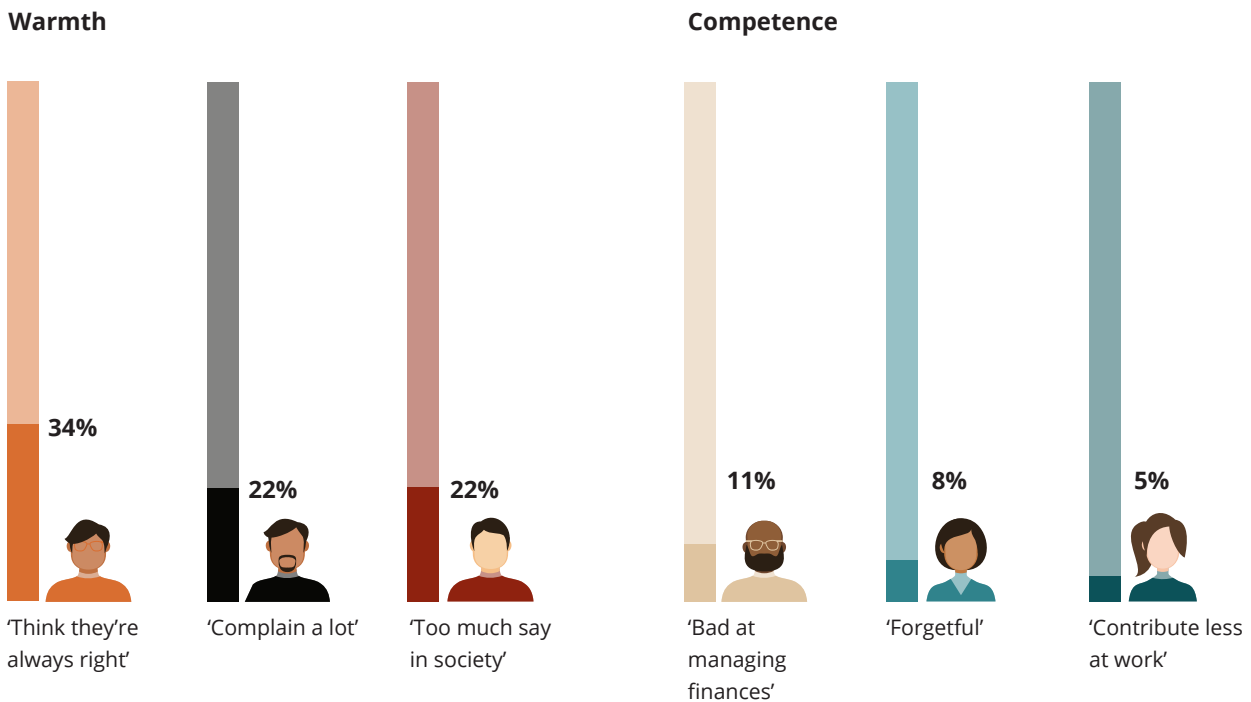
Young adult



(b) Negative stereotypes about middle-aged people

Middle-aged people are the age group with the lowest level of agreement with negative statements of all the 3 age groups. Around two-thirds or more of survey participants did not agree with any of the negative statements in relation to middle-aged people.⁴⁵

Middle-aged people: snapshot of agreement by all age groups with warmth and competence characteristics (negative)⁴⁶



Any negative perceptions about middle-aged people indicate perceptions that they perhaps have too much say and sway in society.⁴⁷



'Politics is crowded with mature aged and older people, although some younger ones are coming up through the ranks.'

Older person

Middle-aged people are the age group viewed overwhelmingly as juggling responsibilities for work, financial commitments, and family, both in relation to their children and parents. As a result, many participants described this age group as experiencing stress.

'Yes certainly, taking more responsibility, being more mature, doing chores associated with household. [For middle-aged people] life has certainly become busier, sometimes hard to find time for oneself.'

Young adult

'Have to look beyond yourself and have to consider what's best for the family.'

Middle-aged person

'Middle age was when my life became more serious (marriage, family, career).'

Older person

The word ‘should’ was mentioned more in relation to this age group than either of the others, especially by older people.

‘Middle-aged should be focusing on their career path, accumulation of wealth and assets and looking after family.’

Older person

‘It’s a time when one should be working to full capacity, saving as much as possible.’

Older person

Did you know?

Australian Taxation Office data highlights that in the 2018–2019 income year, income tax returns were received from 5 different generations.⁴⁸ If the 14.7 million individuals who lodged tax returns were represented as 100 people, a generational picture would look like this:

- 10 from Generation Z (born from 1996 to 2009)
- 35 from Generation Y (born from 1980 to 1995; this age group correlates largely with the group referred to as Millennials in this report)
- 31 from Generation X (born from 1963 to 1979)
- 19 from Baby Boomers (born from 1946 to 1962)
- 4 from the Silent Generation (1945 or earlier).⁴⁹

Based on the views expressed by focus group participants, the negative perceptions for this age group relate less to any assumed characteristics and more to the **roles** they are expected to have and the pressures they face.

These attitudes underpin the roles most and least associated with this age group.

(c) Middle-aged people and life roles: playing the role?

Middle-aged people are the age group most viewed as being at the height of workplace competence and achievement and the least connected with being unwell.⁵⁰

Roles closely associated with middle-aged people

**63%****Employer/manager**

7% young adults and 33% older people

**59%****At height of competence**

11% young adults and 16% older people

**58%****Getting a promotion**

26% young adults and 10% older people

**51%****A leader**

7% young adults and 28% older people

**51%****Making financial decisions**

7% young adults and 30% older people

Roles less associated with middle-aged people

**9%****Being unwell**

8% young adults and 50% older people

**14%****Student**

71% young adults and 4% older people

**32%****Physically attractive**

54% young adults and 4% older people

Middle-aged people are also seen as at the height of financial decision-making prowess and the pressures accompanying this. Middle age was mentioned frequently as a time of 'consolidation' – the implications of this assumption on expected milestones for this age group are explored further in [Chapter 4](#).

'It's a period of consolidation of lifestyle, of marriage, of career, of a lot of things. You've got to knuckle down. The dream has just about gone.'

Older person

'The middle-aged adults usually are getting married and starting a family. Budgets and finances all of a sudden become very important. It's also important for them to have catch ups with their friends every so often.'

Young adult

'I think this is the time in life where a lot of people focus on saving money and setting themselves up and maybe buy a house.'

Young adult

'[Middle-aged people are] always thoughtful about making or correctly spending money.'

Older person

Some older participants, in particular, mentioned the pressure of middle age.

'[Middle age is] a lot harder today – cost of housing, the children's expectations, school costs, medical costs. Age of consumerism – there's a lot of pressure on us now to have all the bells and whistles. There's an infinite number of things you can spend your money on, so that puts more demand on good jobs, longer hours, all that sort of thing.'

Older person


'More pressures on middle age because this generation just want more, not content with basic stuff, cost of raising kids is more than it was years ago ... pressure from the younger coming up after them.'

Older person

There were fewer perceptions of this age group having fun, rather more of middle age as a time when life is routine and tiring.

'More settled down. A lot of people have families, they've bought a house, they're probably more focused on supporting their families. So not as much fun maybe?'

Young adult

 **Middle aged ones are middle well settled mostly, trying to balance home and work. They have accepted the reality of life.'**

Older person



**Being tired is part
of middle age.
One day will often
roll into the next.'**

Middle-aged person

A number of participants see middle age as being 'stuck' in the middle of the other age groups and the pressures they face.

'I think the toughest thing for middle-aged people is financial. The financial consequences of being stuck. Stuck where they are. Can't change anything, because they've got a wife, children, mortgage, bills.'

Older person

Did you know?

Coined in 1980, the term 'sandwich generation' refers to those in middle age who are 'sandwiched' between providing support for their parents and their own maturing children, a phenomenon that can create a great deal of stress.⁵¹ A 2017 report found that this demographic cohort is more likely to retire with debt, including the one in 3 employed Australians over 50 who are likely to enter retirement with a mortgage.⁵²

An estimated 1.5 million middle-aged Australians are sandwiched in the middle of responsibilities for caring for their parents and raising children.⁵³

There is a widespread perception of middle-aged people as sandwiched between juggling workplace and family responsibilities. The idea of 'work-life balance' and time constraints were consistent themes when discussing middle-aged people.

'Mess is starting to creep into life a little more due to raising kids ... having to really juggle the work-life balance here.'

Young adult

'Life can be challenging, with hard to manage work-life balance, a big mortgage and very busy life. They also have to deal with family challenges, mid-life changes and being in a bit of a routine or rut. Their children take up a bit of their time and expenses and sometimes elderly family too.'

Older person

Did you know?

'Role overload theory' is applied to the middle-age life-stage. It suggests that when individuals have an increasing number of social roles and responsibilities, this can result in stress and have a negative impact on their physical and mental health and wellbeing.⁵⁴

These attitudes underpin, and perhaps even shape, the [roles](#) expected of those in middle age.

(d) Media portrayals of middle-aged people

Middle-aged people are not seen to be represented in traditional media. When asked to find media stories about each of the age groups, many focus group participants felt that middle-aged people are perhaps assumed to be the ‘default’ age group in society.



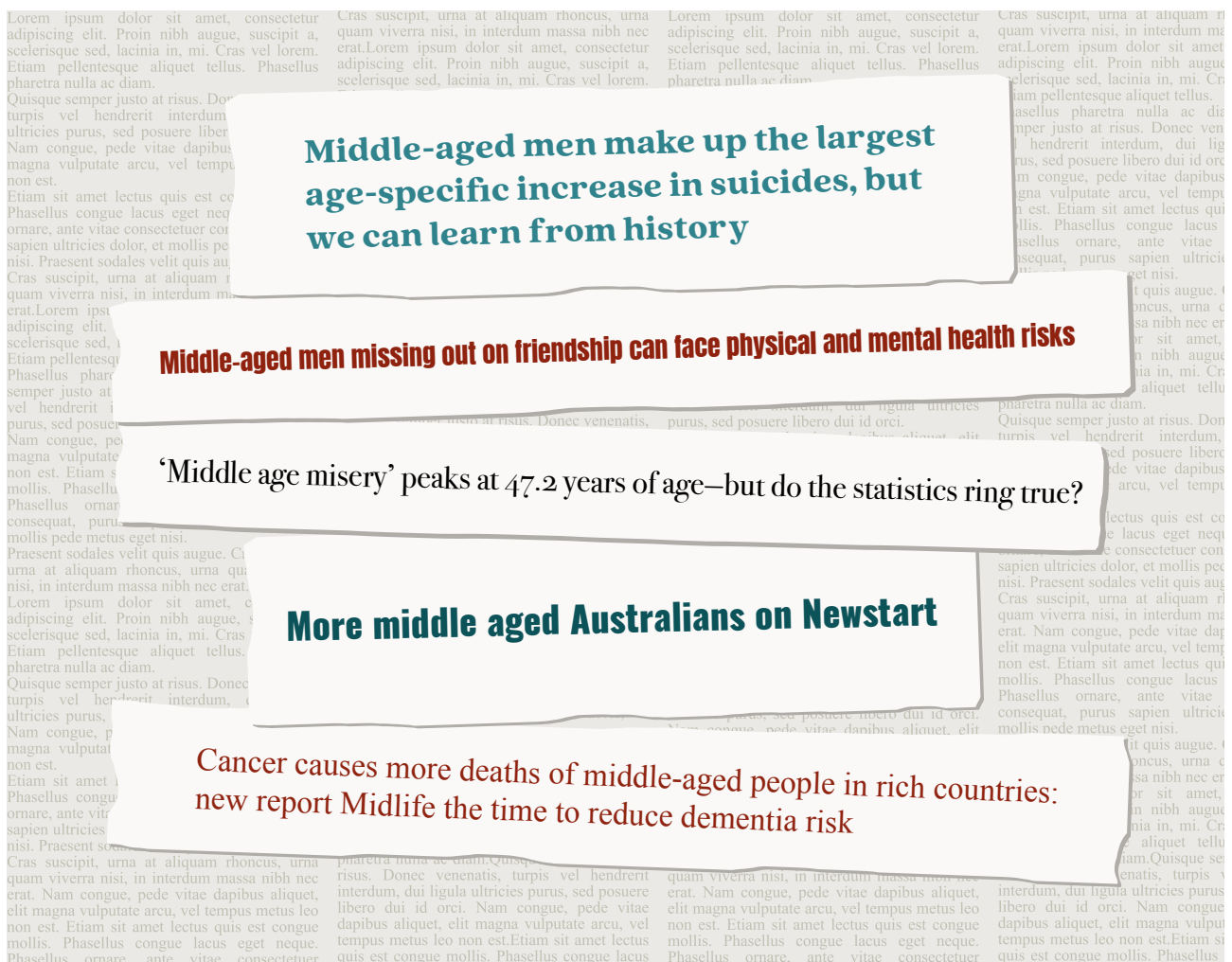
‘There were no stories on middle-aged people! Discrimination, where is my equity?’

Middle-aged person

‘The stories don’t tend to address middle-aged people as a group, they seem to be the ‘default’ in a lot of the stories. They seem to show this group as very confident and comfortable.’

Young adult

A sample of the headlines chosen by focus group participants is captured below.



Participants saw media representations of middle-aged people as predominantly negative.

'A generation falling behind.'

Middle-aged person

'Once again pretty negative. Things about middle-aged people committing financial elder abuse, being spreaders of coronavirus and that they have become boring and conservative.'

Middle-aged person

A few participants also felt that middle-aged people are portrayed the most negatively of all the age groups.

'I feel there is more negativity toward middle-aged compared to older and younger age groups. That's not how I see things in my middle years. I am healthy and look after myself.'

Older person [who identifies as middle aged]

There is a strong perception of health risks increasing in middle age in tandem with their age, as they approach older adulthood.⁵⁵

'Wow if I was middle-aged, I would say goodbye to the planet, the top several stories were so negative.'

Older person

'It's about death and preventing death and diseases.'

Young adult

'Middle-aged people news articles are dominated about health.'

Older person

The media portrayals of middle-aged people are consistent with the stereotypes outlined earlier. Participants considered that middle-aged people are portrayed primarily as holding important workplace and political positions yet struggling with stress.

'They all refer to the health of middle-aged people – heart attack risk, coronavirus, stress, chronic pain.'

Young adult

There was a consistent theme of middle-aged people being represented as being in the middle. Like young adults, they were discussed as having a future, however this future is often portrayed as one where the risks assumed to be associated with ageing lie ahead.

'The young people are referred to as the 'future' whereas that is never mentioned in the older people stories. It feels like the middle-aged people stories are there to help the people 'just keep surviving' or suggest ways to improve their life.'

Young adult

(e) Overall picture of middle-aged people

Middle aged ones are well settled mostly, trying to balance home and work. They have accepted the reality of life.

Older person

The middle-aged group was seen as being at the peak life stage, compared to both young adults and older people. Views on the traditional [life trajectory](#), with middle age at the peak, are explored in [Chapter 4](#).

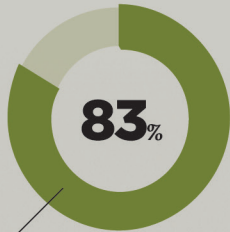
These perceptions reinforce existing research⁵⁶ on ageist stereotypes across the adult [lifespan](#), which suggests every generation will experience the 3 adult life stages, and therefore takes turns at accessing the roles associated with each stage.⁵⁷

Middle-aged people are seen as at the peak of competence, with their student days past them and ill health yet to strike.

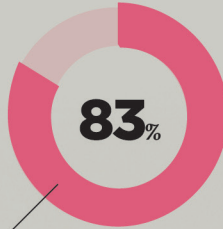


Finding
4

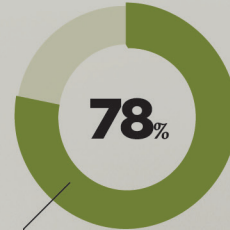
Australians see middle-aged people as being in the prime of their lives



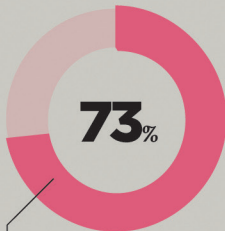
83% of Australians agreed that middle-aged people make a **valuable contribution** to the economy.



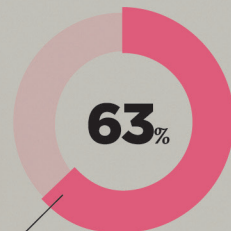
83% of middle-aged people agreed that middle-aged people make a **valuable contribution** to the community.



78% of Australians agreed that middle-aged people are **worth listening to on issues** that affect society.



73% of Australians agreed that middle-aged people have a **great work ethic**.



The roles most associated with middle age are work related. The role most closely associated with middle-aged people is **employer/manager**, by 63% of Australians.

'Being tired is part of middle age. One day will often roll into the next.'

'Middle-aged ones are well settled mostly, trying to balance home and work. They have accepted the reality of life.'

'Middle-aged adults are still working things out but have more stability in their life. They are more goal-oriented in most avenues of their life.'



3.6 Stereotypes: ageist attitudes against older people in Australia

Finding 5

Older people are seen as nice (if frail) onlookers to life.



Research on stereotypes about older people highlights a persistent perception that they are likeable, yet ultimately lacking competence across a range of markers.⁵⁸


The Commission’s research found that Australians also connect older people strongly with qualities, such as being good listeners.⁵⁹ At the same time, Australians also tend to see older people overall as increasingly frail and unwell, with declining competence.

Echoing this view of older people as being nice but lacking competence, a 2017 report by the Australian Benevolent Society⁶⁰ highlighted a similar pattern of high connection of older people with **warmth characteristics** (such as, thinking of others, being kind and resilient) and low connection with **competency characteristics** (a view that they are frail, dependent, vulnerable, and experiencing physical and mental deterioration). It found that ‘people are often ambivalent about older people’.⁶¹

These stereotypes underpin a lack of identification of older people with meaningful life roles. This is consistent with international literature on the limited life **roles** older people are expected to have.⁶²

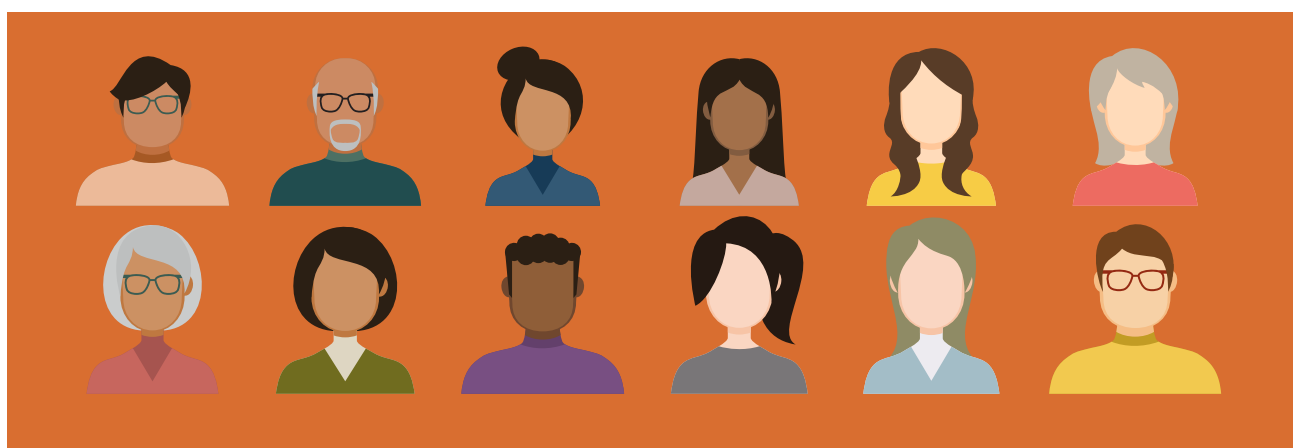
Older people are seen predominantly as nice (albeit frail) onlookers to life.⁶³

(a) Positive stereotypes about older people

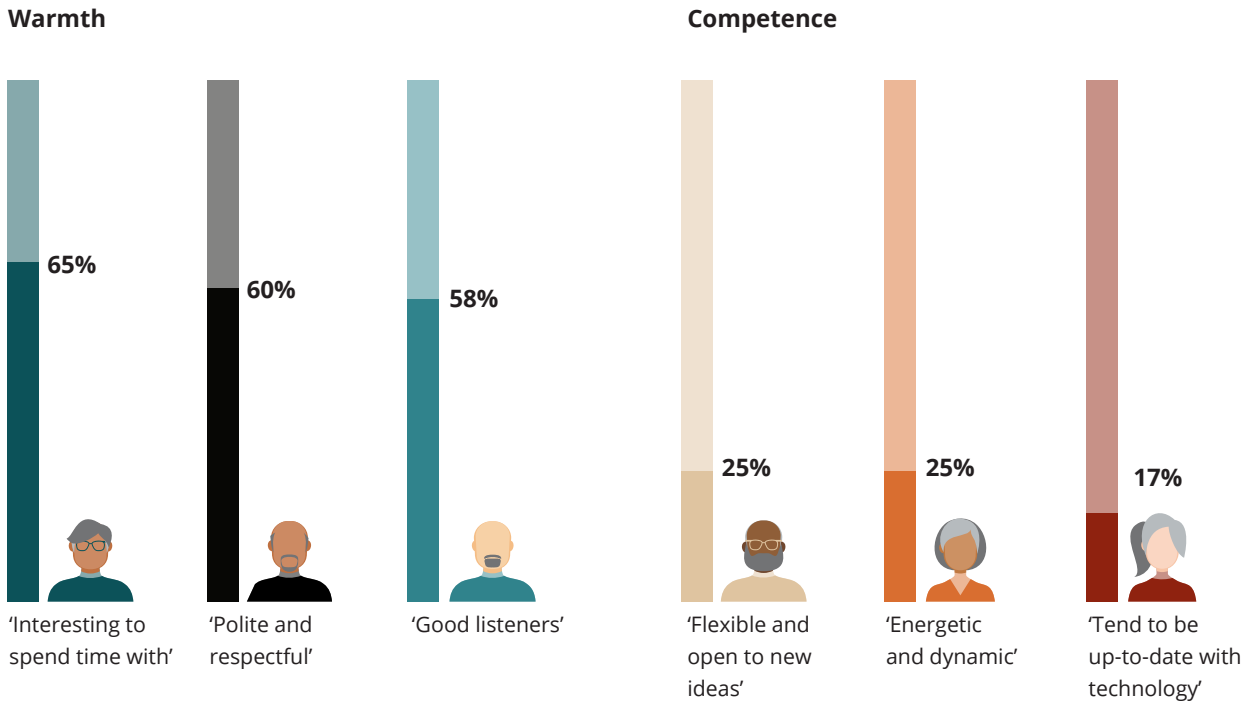


The majority (74%) of those surveyed expressed a positive overall attitude towards older people.⁶⁴

Older people are seen to have many more warmth characteristics and significantly fewer competence characteristics than the other age groups.⁶⁵



Older people: snapshot of agreement by all age groups with warmth and competence characteristics (positive)⁶⁶



Focus group participants expressed a high degree of warmth towards older people.

'Older adults in my opinion base their life on relationships and spending more time with their loved ones and spending more time in nature.'

Middle-aged person



'I believe you can learn a lot about life from the older generations, as long as you are willing to sit down for a cup of tea and listen.'

Young adult

Comments by focus group participants highlighted the persistent stereotype that older people lack technological competence.

'I think younger people are better at navigating technology, so its horses for courses.'

Young adult

Some focus group participants (particularly older people) rejected the assumption that older people do not, or cannot, use technology.

... who is to say that older generations are not interested in technology or emerging practices?’

Middle-aged person

‘[The] assumption that younger people are the ones who are tech savvy – people are surprised when I can step up and solve things from a technology point of view.’

Older person

A few older adult participants mentioned feeling that older people also benefit from technology.

‘[Older people are] better off because of it ... [technology] is good... it enables us to be better informed, make better decisions.’

Older person

Did you know?

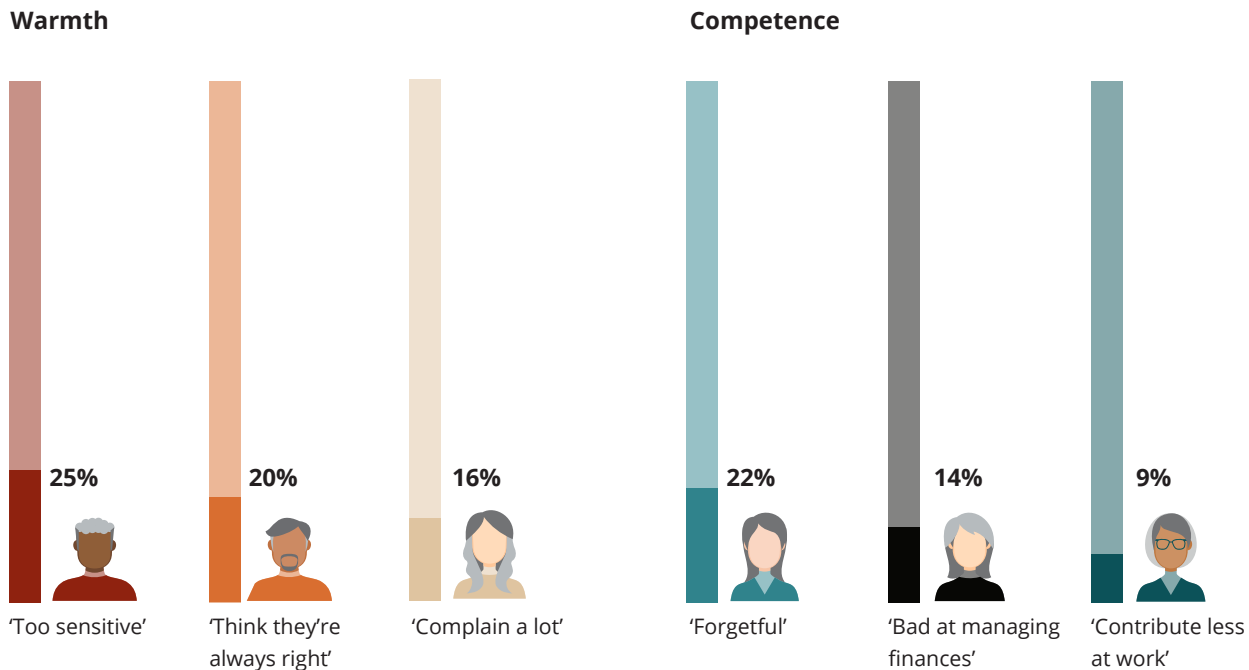
The Office of the eSafety Commissioner found that approximately 70% of older Australians use the internet multiple times a day.⁶⁷

(b) Negative stereotypes about older people

Most survey respondents did not agree with any of the negative statements in relation to older people.⁶⁸



Older people: snapshot of agreement by all age groups with warmth and competence characteristics (negative)⁶⁹



Did you know?

Survey respondents were 3 times more likely to associate loneliness with older people:⁷⁰

- 23% associated this with young adults
- 20% associated this with middle-aged people
- 60% associated this with older people; even older people considered their group to be the loneliest.⁷¹

However, contrary to the assumption that older people are the loneliest age group, young adults were most likely to agree that they feel lonely. This finding is supported by other research.⁷²

For example, Melbourne Institute data highlights that, in 2020, younger adults reported the highest levels of feeling depressed or anxious across all age groups. Those aged 25–34 reported the highest levels of mental distress (24%), followed closely by those aged 18–24 (23%), compared to 10% of those aged 55–64.⁷³

Older people are the age group least connected with negative 'character' statements. This reinforces the perception of them as being generally likeable.

They are seen concurrently as experiencing declining physical, cognitive and mental health.

Did you know?

The age profile of Australia's population is shifting upwards. The median age increased from 35 years in 1997 to 37 years in 2019. The proportion of the population aged 65 years and over rose from 12.3% to 15.9% in the 20 years from 1999 to 2019. In the same period, the 'working-age population' (those aged between 15 and 64 years) declined slightly from around 66% in 1999 to 65.4% in 2019.⁷⁴

Some participants spoke about increased ailments and reliance on both other people and medications and linked this to a loss of independence and increased frailty.

Did you know?

While the number of Australians with dementia is predicted to continue to increase, research highlighted that dementia rates are falling.⁷⁵ A 2019 study found that the prevalence of dementia among people receiving aged care services in the home fell from 26% in 2005 to 21% in 2014. For people entering residential aged care, the rate declined from 50% in 2008 to 47% in 2014.⁷⁶

Not all comments about older people were positive. In line with other Australian research,⁷⁷ statements by some participants (young adults in particular) reflect a perception that older people hold more rigid viewpoints.

'We aren't as judgmental as some older aged people can be.'

Young adult

'Some older people are rigid, not welcoming to other ethnic groups, don't accept multiculturalism.'

Older person

**'We might have to open our mind to different ways of thinking
– different values, different language.'**

Older person



Only one-quarter (25%) of respondents see older people as energetic and dynamic.⁷⁸

'Generally older adults return to a young adult's lifestyle but with more health concerns and less time due to possible grandparent duties.'

Middle-aged person

This perception was mirrored in focus group discussions. Older people are also seen as 'slowing down'.

'Very quiet, slow, daily life – plain and simple, even for the ones who have acquired wealth. It's obvious most of them are on medication as their health isn't good.'

Young adult

While older people are perceived largely as likeable, they are not seen as having much agency, agility or vitality. The assumption that their health and skills are declining perhaps underpins the lack of life roles associated with them.

'For some older people, they have multiple health issues and are on a definite decline (like the decaying pear sadly) ... I think most older people have a lot more to do with doctors and healthcare.'

Older person

(c) Older people and life roles: relinquishing the role?

Older people are the age group least connected with the 12 roles included in the survey.⁷⁹

Roles closely associated with older people



50%

Being unwell

9% middle-aged and 8% older people

Roles less associated with older people



4%

Being a student

71% young adults and 14% middle-aged people



4%

Physically attractive

54% young adults and 32% middle-aged people



5%

Using new technology

70% young adults and 35% middle-aged people

Being unwell is the only role linked with older people by a significant proportion of respondents. They are also the only age group linked with this role. Older people are the age group least associated with 'being a student' and 'using new technology'.⁸⁰

These role perceptions are consistent with the view of older age as a period of physical and cognitive decline.

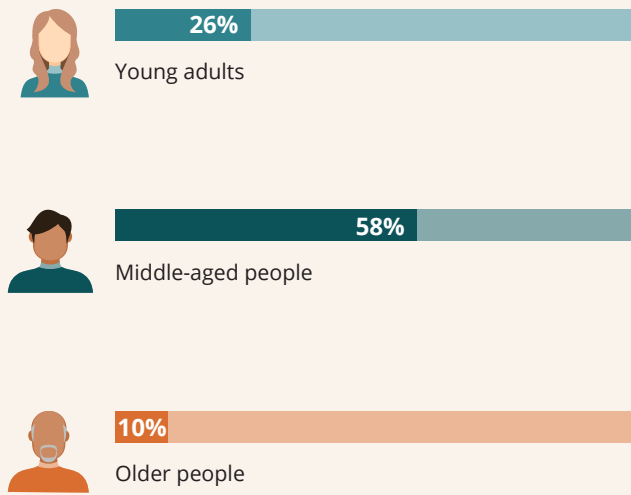
'[When I think of older adults, I think of] decline and poor physical and mental health.'

Young adult

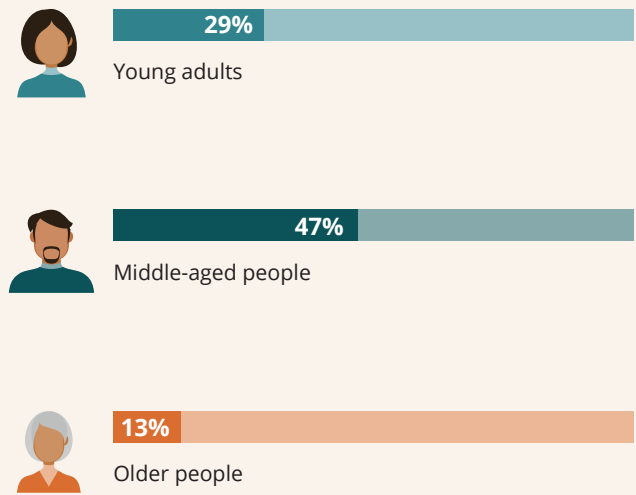
These perceptions of declining health and abilities shape views that older people's participation in meaningful life roles is also declining.

Older people: perceptions of declining roles by all age groups⁸¹

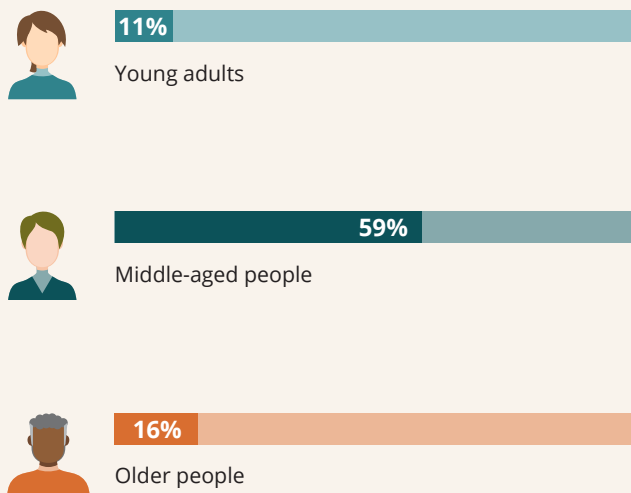
Associated older age with 'getting a promotion'



Associated older age with being an 'entrepreneur'



Associated older age with being at the 'height of competence'



In focus group discussions, the broad life role most associated with older people is being retired.

‘[Older people are] ... finding life outside of work.’

Young adult

‘Older adults often have retired and are now enjoying life.’

Older person

Did you know?

Australians are increasingly working to older ages. In January 2018, Australians aged 65 and over had a workforce participation rate of 13% (17% for men and 10% for women), compared with 8% in 2006 (12% for men and 4% for women). In 2016, 6% of centenarians were still working.⁸²

In contrast, a few participants challenged the perception that most older people are retired.

‘Older people are actually working a lot longer than what they used to. No hard and fast retirement age anymore.’

Middle-aged person

‘I think there is an expectation that someone of my age would be retired. There are plenty of people, many older than me, who still work – sometimes for the sheer enjoyment, sometimes for financial reasons.’

Older person

Did you know?

A 2021 report by the Council on the Ageing Australia (COTA) found that 49% of people aged 65 had retired, down from 60% in 2018. In addition, 25% of working Australians aged 50-plus did not think they would ever retire (24% in 2018).⁸³

Alongside a view that older people are enjoying a leisurely retirement is a related perception expressed by some participants that they are financially secure homeowners who are sitting on assets.

'Time and money. The older adults no longer have the stress of mortgage payments and can indulge in their interests more with no longer working.'

Older person

'... the time of life when health issues have greater significance, a time when life experiences and knowledge can be shared, a time when financial security will model your retirement and a time for nurturing possibly 2 or more generations of your own family towards prosperity and happiness.'

Middle-aged person

'Time and money in some cases to enjoy overseas travel. Retirement. Finding hobbies such as gardening, book clubs – babysitting grandchildren.'

Older person

Did you know?

The proportion of people carrying mortgage debt into retirement is increasing.⁸⁴ Between 2002 and 2018, approximately 80% of retirees lived in owner-occupied housing. In contrast, the proportion of the non-retired population who were homeowners declined from 69.9% in 2002 to 65.7% in 2018, so the rate of home ownership among retirees will decline.⁸⁵

Did you know?

While average income levels have risen and poverty rates have fallen for retirees, these poverty rates remain at least 80% higher than for the non-retired population over the 16-year period of the Housing, Income and Labour Dynamics survey. However, at the same time, 7.4% of retirees reported experiencing financial stress, compared to 11.9% of the non-retired population.⁸⁶

However, a few participants noted that a secure, carefree, leisure-based retirement does not apply to all older people.



'While the worry of a mortgage is not with me now, I still have to manage my finances in order to live.'

Older person

For instance, a number of participants mentioned that not all older people experience financial security.

'Some older people are relatively well off and some are facing financial difficulties.'

Middle-aged person

'Most older Australians enjoy a healthy, balanced lifestyle, but unfortunately not everyone has that luxury.'

Older person

Did you know?



Older women are the fastest growing cohort of people at risk of homelessness.⁸⁷

Did you know?



Household, Income and Labour Dynamics survey data indicates that 'late' retirement (defined as after the age of 67) is associated increasingly with more advantaged economic circumstances. 'Early' retirement (before the age of 64) is associated increasingly with less advantaged circumstances. For example, it is associated particularly with men renting privately. Homeowners were the most likely to retire 'on time' (defined as aged 64 to 67). After housing status, employment status immediately before retirement was another key driver, with the majority of those who retired 'early' not employed. This is a reversal in trend from at the start of this century, where early retirees tended to be the most financially secure and those retiring later the least.⁸⁸

As older people are not seen as participating in the workforce, what are they seen as doing? They are viewed as enjoying a fun life at a more relaxed pace. Underlying these stereotypes around older people having fun is the perception that they have plentiful leisure time.

Did you know?

The value of annual informal care provided by people aged over 45 in Australia is estimated to be \$22 billion per annum.⁸⁹

Being a grandparent is the second most common role focus group participants associated with older people.

‘Older people have the time for the little ones. Sometimes the little ones are so glad to tell them something, the parents are rushing in with the shopping. Older people have a lot more time to spend with the little ones and the little ones like it.’

Older person

A few participants equated this view of diminishing roles with the diminishing relevance of older people.

‘There is an expectation that as an older person you would retire and that your opinion may not be as valued, particularly among the younger generation.’

Older person

‘A group that has been somewhat marginalised and needs more voice.’

Middle-aged person

Did you know?

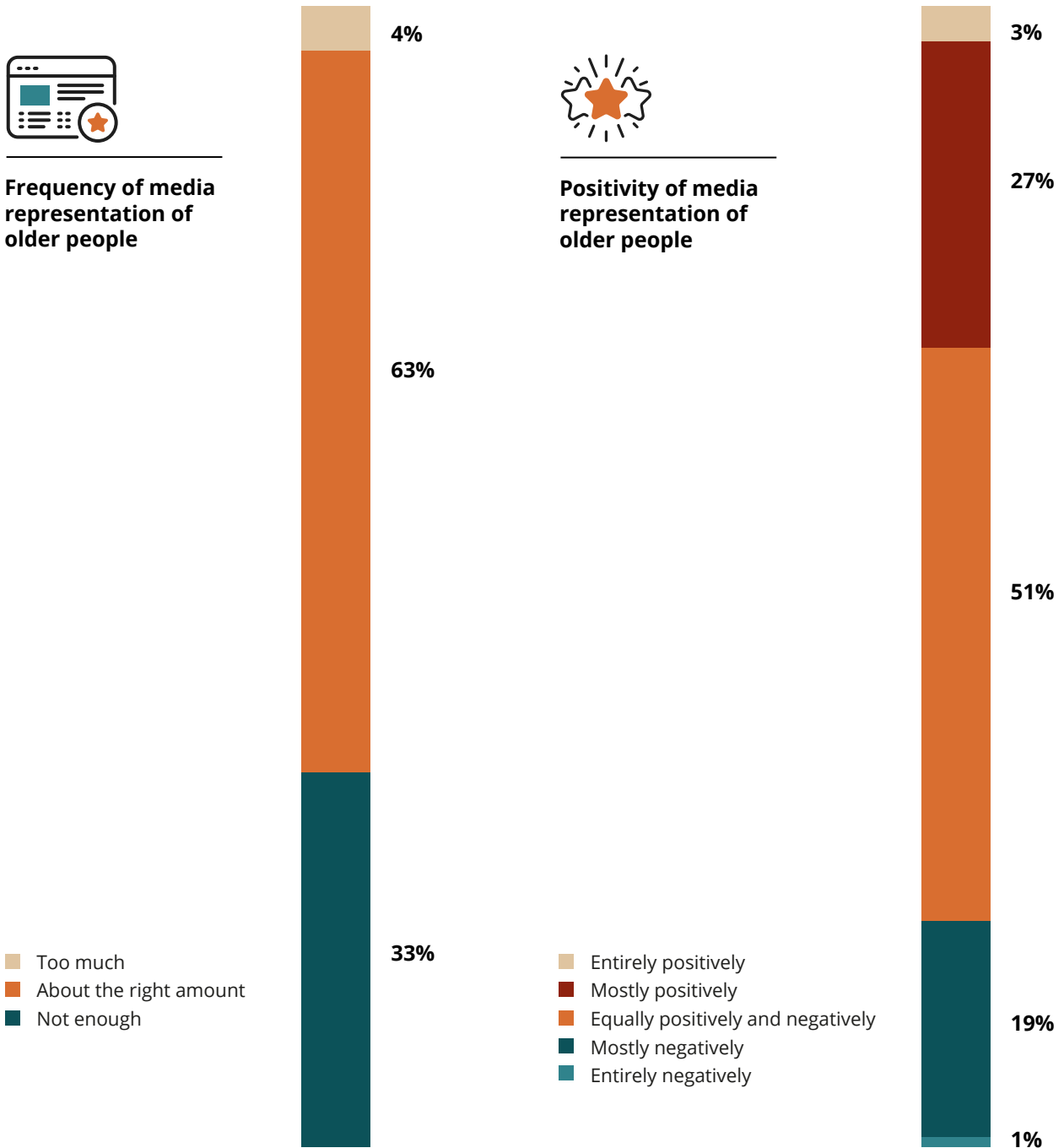
In line with the Commission’s research, other research also highlights that it is not uncommon for people to feel that leaving the workforce changed their position in society. Research conducted by IPSOS for the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety found that some people, including older people, felt that older people become invisible once they leave the workplace.⁹⁰

(d) Media portrayals of older people

Most survey respondents (51%) feel that traditional media portrays older people equally positively and negatively. About a third (30%) feel they are portrayed mostly positively, with the remaining 20% seeing their representation as mostly negative.⁹¹



Frequency and positivity of media representation of older people⁹²



When asked to find media stories about each of the age groups, many focus group participants felt that older people are often portrayed negatively.

A sample of the headlines chosen by focus group participants is captured below.



A few older people demonstrated a more equivocal view of how their age group is represented.

‘Homelessness is a risk, especially for older women, companies telling older people not to bother applying for jobs in the Jobmaker adverts ... to older people nailing happiness in their 70s, older people taking onboard new opportunities ... [so] a mixture of both negative and positive articles and words.’

Older person

‘I sometimes get the impression that we don’t matter but these stories seem to indicate that’s not the case.’

Older person

Many participants noted that older people are not seen as having a ‘future’.

Money and jobs are quite a common theme in the news stories. They are always talking about the ‘future’ whereas that is never mentioned in the older people stories.’

Young adult

Survey respondents were given a list of 30 words to choose from which they felt were often used to describe older people in the media and a list of 30 words to choose from which they felt were seldom used to describe older people in the media.⁹³ The following diagram sets out the results.

Words used to describe older people in the media⁹⁴

Often	Seldom/never
Lonely	Risk taking
Wise	Attractive
Knowledgeable	Irresponsible
Victims	Powerful
Friendly	Strong
Volunteer	Carefree
Needy	Upbeat
Unhealthy	A nuisance
Independent	Competent
Naive/gullible	Skilled

The adjectives most used (friendly, wise and volunteer) and least used (powerful, competent, strong) to describe older people in the media fit with the consistent perception outlined above that older people are viewed more warmly but as less competent.

Focus group participants perceived that media stories reinforce stereotypes of older people as low on **competence** traits, including technological and financial management skills.

‘Older people seem to be portrayed as weak and possibly incompetent. Needing help at every turn.’

Older person

‘The news stories that relate to older people are mostly giving advice as though older people are stupid and don’t know anything so need spoon feeding, and make a lot of assumptions about being frail, isolated, lonely, unhealthy, needy, high risk of dying. There are no stories of positivity about older adults. When I read news articles, I just ignore this thinking, “well I am not in this category”.’

Older person

‘The stories were more about retirement finance planning, dealing with people’s assumptions about how old age should look like and struggles with technology.’

Middle-aged person

One participant referred to a media story about older people struggling with QR codes.

‘It is not an age-related issue but a tech issue.’

Older person

Most participants noted that media stories about older people focus on their being frail, vulnerable and experiencing declining health.

‘I figured the articles on older people would all focus on health. It’s like they can’t achieve anything and that is their only concern – it’s almost like they are marginalised to the edges.’

Middle-aged person

‘Older people targeted as more vulnerable.’

Middle-aged person

‘A lot of the stories appear to portray older people as weak and fragile and speak quite negatively about them.’

Young adult

Media representations of older people were seen as ‘one-dimensional’. For example, older people were not often seen as participating in the workforce.

‘They [media stories] centre on health and disease and how older people struggle to get work. It seems to be quite a deficit and one-dimensional approach to older people.’

Young adult

'The stories were highlighting the health challenges plus the impact in the future job market.'

Young adult

While the data suggests that media portrayals of older people tend to be 'sympathetic', many participants observed that older people are represented as frail and lacking agency. They saw this as contributing to a view that older people are vulnerable and need protection, which undermines their autonomy.⁹⁵

'Older people seem to be portrayed as frail but also they need to be looked after.'

Older person

'A lot of the stories talk about the conditions of older people, their income, their health, etc. and it seems to portray them as vulnerable and relying on the help of others. There aren't many stories about them actively doing things or pursuing change, mostly trying to maintain their existing conditions.'

Young adult

One older person saw young adults and older people both represented as lacking power in society.

'I found that the younger and the older group had common elements – the young with difficulties in finances and work linked to COVID, in particular, the older group with health concerns of all types, not just COVID. The middle group had more positive prospects and they were able to increase these. Really, I think it meant that the middle group could be more proactive about their lives than the other 2 groups who were just affected by all the elements around them. I had not realised the link between the young and the old previously, except possibly in the very young (children) and the old who both had a lack of power.'

Older person

A few older people distanced themselves from negative media portrayals of older people.

'News items about older people appear to assume they are weak and ill-informed. I have always had it in the back of my mind that articles mentioning older people make them sound dependent and needy but just ignore it as not being true.'

Older person

Some older participants noted positive examples of media portrayals of older people, and some stated that they are sometimes portrayed as a more 'resilient' age group.

However, there was a strong sense that traditional media echoes and reinforces the stereotypes discussed above that older people are frail, vulnerable and somewhat helpless, who lack agency and do not hold leadership roles in the workplace or society.

(e) Overall picture of older adults**‘Older adults have more time to spend reading, enjoying family and travel but are also more worried about health and mortality.’****Middle-aged person**

The strong assumption that older adults are retired and therefore slowing down and enjoying leisure time, yet limited by frailty and ill-health, is consistent with research on ageing fitting within a ‘decline, disability, depression, death’ model of ageing. In this framework, older age is seen as a progression from declining physical, cognitive and mental health, leading to assumed disability, then finally, death.⁹⁶

While the older age group is associated with a large degree of warmth, this does not translate into perceptions of their relevance.⁹⁷

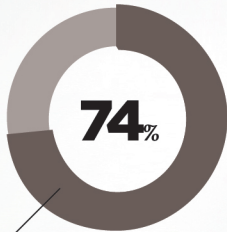
Did you know?

While it is often assumed that **Baby Boomers** make up the largest proportion of Australia’s population, there are actually more **Millennials**. Based on 2020 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) demographic statistics, while 3 of the adult generations, Millennials, **Generation X** and Baby Boomers, make up a similar proportion of the total population, Millennials (aged 23–38) lead slightly with 23.4%, compared to 19.7% who were Baby Boomers (aged 55–74), and 20.09% who were Generation X (aged 39–54).⁹⁸

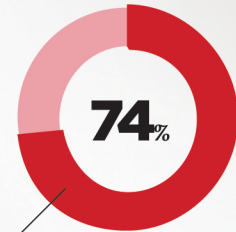


**Finding
5**

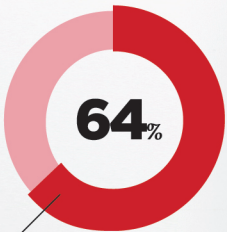
Australians see older people as nice (if frail) onlookers to life



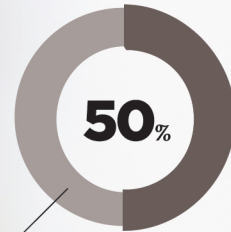
of Australians have a **positive overall attitude** towards older people.



agreed that older people are making a **valuable contribution to the community**.



of Australians agreed that older people make a **valuable contribution to the economy**.



The role most associated with older age is **being unwell** (by 50% of Australians).



'Older adults have more time to spend reading, enjoying family and travel but are also more worried about health and mortality.'

'Lifestyle has become a buzz word for older people - wealth, nice home, easy living. All lovely things, but not necessarily attainable by everyone.'

'Very quiet, slow, daily life - plain and simple, even for the ones who have acquired wealth. It's obvious most of them are on medication as their health isn't good.'



3.7 Life roles and stereotypes

(a) What is meant by life roles?

In this report, ‘life roles’ refer to attributes and behaviours that capture people’s societal functions. The survey⁹⁹ asked respondents to associate each of the age groups with 12 examples of life roles to capture a snapshot of what Australians think each of the age groups are and are not doing.

Age-based stereotypes can be **prescriptive**; that is, they can prescribe and therefore limit, the roles people are expected to have based on their age.¹⁰⁰

The 12 surveyed life roles are:

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
|  | purchasing goods and services |  | at height of competence |
|  | making financial decisions |  | student |
|  | a leader |  | using new technology |
|  | entrepreneur |  | being unwell |
|  | getting a promotion |  | sexually active |
|  | employer/manager |  | physically attractive. |

Snapshot of roles all age groups associate most and least with each age group

Roles most associated with		
Younger people	Middle-aged people	Older people
Students, using technology	Leaders, managers, entrepreneurs, getting a promotion	Being unwell

Roles least associated with		
Younger people	Middle-aged people	Older people
Leaders, making financial decisions, physically attractive	Being unwell, students	Leaders, managers, entrepreneurs, students, using new technology, physically attractive

The Commission found that the majority of people assign specific roles to a particular age group. However, over one-quarter of Australians surveyed agreed that ‘age is irrelevant’ for 9 of the 12 roles.¹⁰¹



Percentage who agreed age is irrelevant to these roles



48%
Purchasing goods and services



31%
Being physical attractive



40%
Being unwell



27%
Getting a promotion



37%
Making financial decisions



27%
At height of competence



35%
Being a leader



23%
Being a student



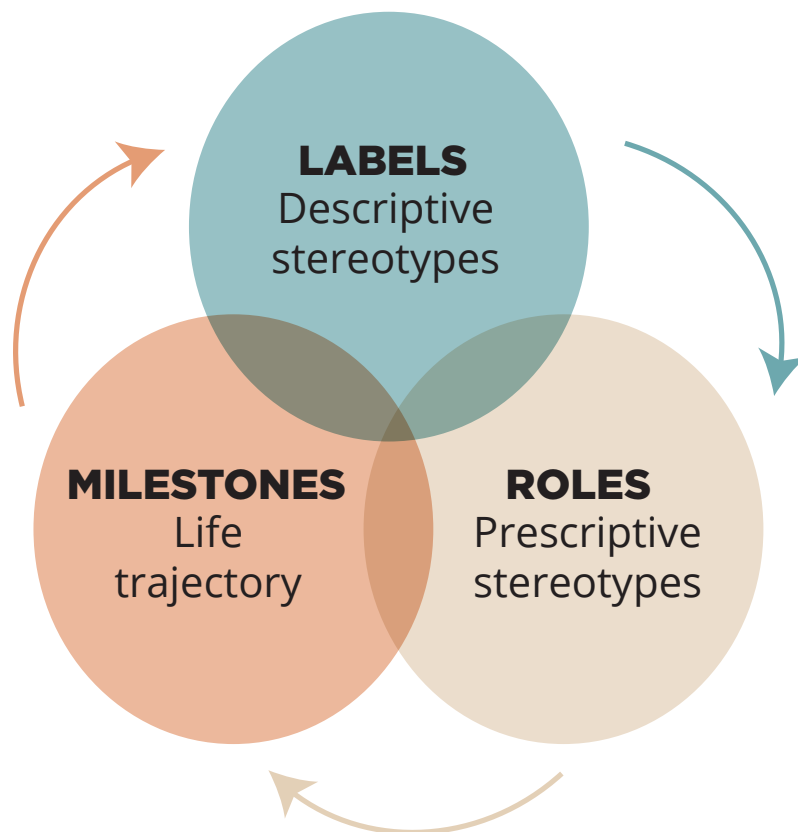
32%
Being an entrepreneur

A varying but significant group of participants regarded age as irrelevant across a number of the surveyed roles, with the notable exception of being unwell, which was seen as the domain of older people. This indicates that while attributing life roles to age groups is common, it is not universal. It also provides a foundation for re-envisioning milestones attached to the traditional [life trajectory](#) and exploring strategies to counter ageism.

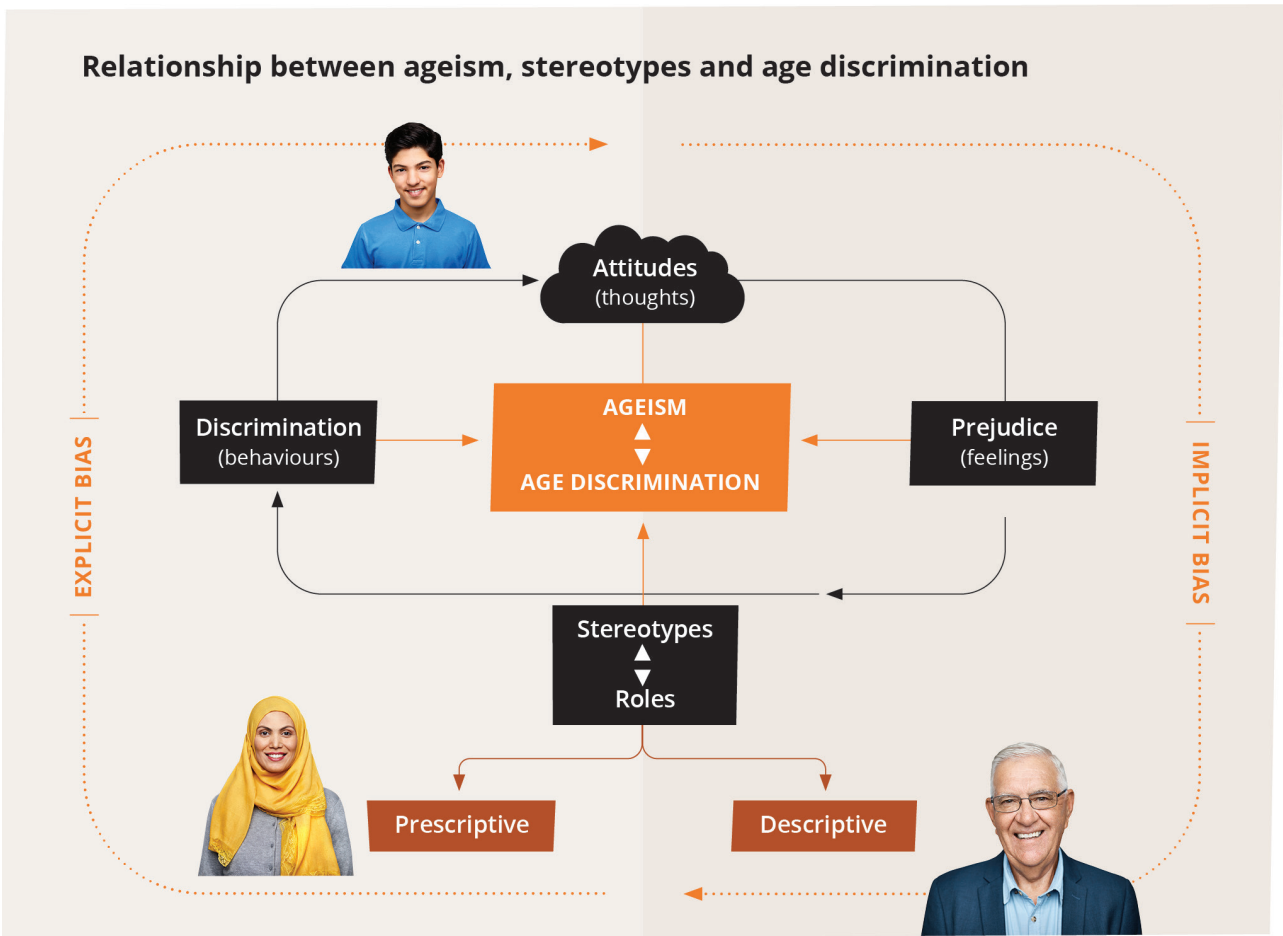
(b) Connection between labels, roles and milestones

Stereotypes of the labels and life roles connected with the 3 age groups build a picture of the adult [lifespan](#) where young adults are seen as inexperienced and still learning, middle-aged people are regarded as at their peak and older people are assumed to be declining in health, skills and abilities.¹⁰²

Interconnection between labels, roles and milestones



[Chapter 4](#) explores the impacts on people of the age-based stereotypes arising from the roles assumed for their age group. The roles associated with the 3 age groups underpin the milestones expected at each life stage. Some in each age group identify with certain elements of the stereotyped roles and milestones, some feel excluded from them, others see them and reject them, and some say they do not care about these perceived expectations.



3.8 How Australians see themselves in relation to age

Many Australians feel that their age has little to do with how they see the world and their place in it. Many participants expressed views that, 'age is irrelevant', 'age is just a number' or stated that they do not 'feel [my] age'.

However, the research suggests that participants do identify with age-based groups, both in the survey data and focus group discussions.

'I would describe myself as a student, a mentor, and a child.'

Young adult

'I am 40 and I believe I am in the middle-aged adult group as I feel I have started to pay more attention to my finances and planning ahead for a good retirement. Also love investing time in my relationships and moreover trying not to fret over small stuff.'

Middle-aged person

'I'm a big believer that age is all but a number and should not be the sole factor in anyone's status or role in life ... while most of us have a fairly linear path in life, there are plenty of people out there that experience events in an out-of-order sequence that means they carry completely different roles.'

Young adult

'Age is only a number, it's how you perceive it, getting older is never good it's how you take it and make the most of it and of course we hope to be still alive, we don't know when our time's up.'

Middle-aged person

'Age really is irrelevant. It's about accepting people of all age groups and respecting their opinions also.'

Older person



'I associate with the older group, but only recently as I generally felt quite young ... however, health issues in the last few years have dragged me screaming into the older group. The desire for a quiet life has entered my thinking, when once, not so long ago, [it would] not have entered my head.'

Older person

(a) Changing self-perceptions across the lifespan

The stereotypes and qualities people identify with themselves vary over the adult lifespan.¹⁰³ The research indicates that self-perception improves with age.¹⁰⁴

Overall:



Young adults are the most likely age group to be negative about themselves.



Middle-aged people show a tendency to be in the middle of both other age groups, particularly in relation to their levels of agreement with negative statements.



Older people are the least negative about themselves and tend to be the age group who are most positive about themselves.¹⁰⁵

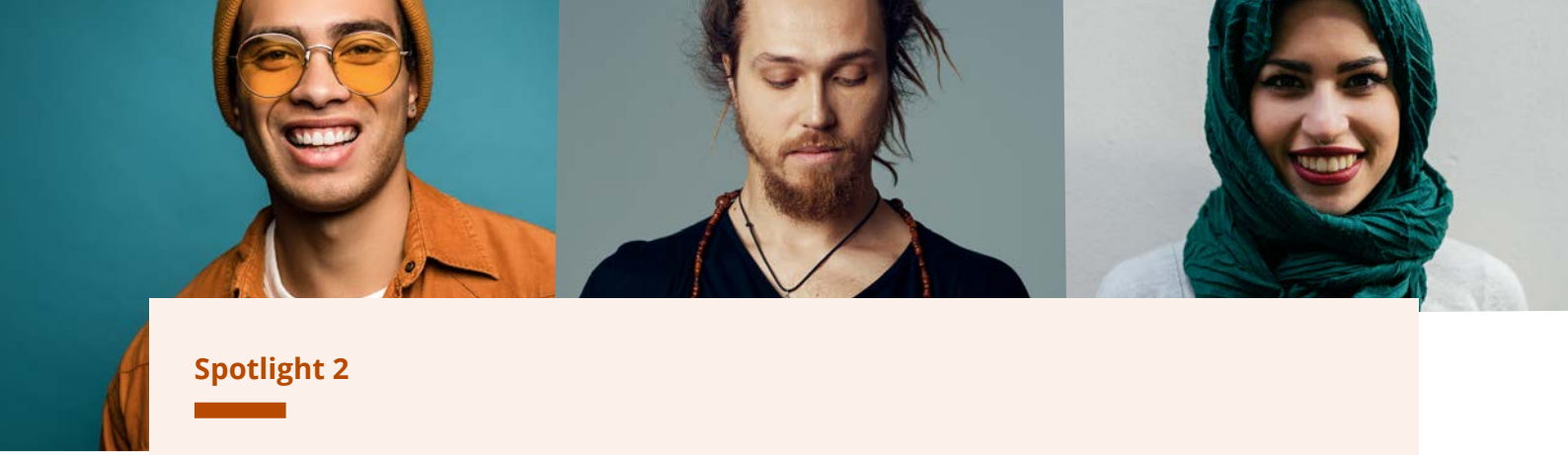
While the data highlights that there are many common attitudes across the age groups, some differences emerge.

This shifting pattern of agreement with positive and negative statements across age groups highlights that self-perception improves across a range of markers as people get older.

3.9 Possible future themes to explore

The survey data indicates that similar negative perceptions are held about both middle-aged people and older people. The scope of the data does not allow for conclusions to be drawn about possible causes. Further exploration may be useful to build an understanding of the extent to which middle-aged and older people are seen as an amorphous group. For example, once people reach middle age, are they already perceived as being similar to older people?

In line with views of what is defined as 'middle age' blurring, there is also a view of middle age as perhaps starting at a later age. This is connected to a perception that the young adulthood life stage is extending. In tandem with increased health-span, as well as increasing **lifespan**, there is an accompanying perception that middle age is expanding to capture those who have passed traditional retirement age – some refer to this group as the 'young old'.¹⁰⁶



Spotlight 2

What's ageism got to do with youth leadership?

This spotlight examines the views of one focus group held with young adults engaged in a political or social issue. The aim of this group was to discuss youth leadership at both a societal and personal level, including how the group felt youth leadership could be encouraged and barriers to achieving it. Relevant insights and comments from other focus groups are also included.

Ageist stereotypes frequently underpin narratives about youth leadership. Traditionally, it is a role associated with 'experience' and the accumulation of skills over a lifetime, not attributes young adults are deemed to hold. This is also evident in some of the attitudes young adults hold about themselves.

'I value relationships with older people as they have so much knowledge and life experience. I feel the older the person, the more meaningful the interaction becomes, whereas the younger the person, the less I can learn from them.'

Young adult

'... many older or middle-aged people can bring a lot of life experiences to the roles, that younger people are lacking.'

Young adult

This ageism is inherent in language, including popular discourses about leadership. We talk of 'young' leaders, never 'mature' or 'older leaders', for leadership is, by default, considered to be the role of those in older adulthood. These assumptions can serve to lock young adults out of traditional forms of power.

More than three-quarters of Australians believed that both middle-aged (76%) and older people (76%) are 'worth listening to on issues', and significantly fewer (59%) thought the same of young adults. This perception is evident across all age groups and is found among young adults themselves. Most Australians also believed that young adults were the age group least suited to leadership roles.

Media coverage of 'young leaders'

When young adults are presented as leaders, their youth or age is noted, so that it shows their exceptionalism, in the same way a paraglider in his 90s is considered extraordinary, or some students are referred to as 'mature age' – labelling roles with age-related epithets highlights that there are certain ages that are seen as appropriate ages to do these things. Examples include the coverage of Greta Thunberg and Malala Yousafzai, who are often portrayed negatively in the media.

'Young people definitely get hindered by the people who don't agree with their stance, they get mocked as a silly child – "what the hell do you know". They get belittled and that is very hard to argue with, if you think they're a stupid kid then why would they agree.'

Young adult

Young adults taking on leadership positions and speaking or organising about issues that will affect them are often portrayed in the media as disruptive activists.

'The stories paint young people as extremely capable and active; they are capable of changing the world or destroying it, but also at the same times are victims of the political and societal structures and norms which exist.'

Young adult

They may also be seen as strategic, as in the case of 'young climate activists' working with law firms to mount challenges against coal mines on behalf of young people everywhere.¹⁰⁷

Some research suggests that, as society ages and people live longer, the voices of 'the young' should be heard 'to counterbalance the voices of the old'.¹⁰⁸ This argument, which seeks to redress a perceived imbalance in who speaks and who listens, assumes that positional, social and economic power is held by 'the old' by virtue of their age, and that young people are silenced and disempowered by virtue of theirs. It assumes that all older adults have institutional power or are powerful, a stereotype challenged by the 'dodderly but dear' stereotypes of old age, and by the age discrimination experienced by middle-aged workers.

These stereotypes and attitudes inform narratives that children, young people and future generations will be the ones most affected by climate change. The right to protest, right to have a say in policies that affect people across their lifespan, and to participate in social processes, apply to all adults and young people. Ageism may interrupt this, so leadership can become another intergenerational equity stereotype – young people being robbed of a future by selfish, conservative older people.

'Young people would be more keen to change the system whereas older people want to keep the system. Younger people are more willing to break things to make it better.'

Young adult

'It makes it hard because when you have controversial topics, you don't have leaders with backbone to stand up for it.'

Young adult

Though some young adults also expressed awareness that the issues might not be about age, but other forms of power.

'The fossil fuel industry denies climate change because it doesn't suit them financially.'

Young adult

What are the solutions?

Most Australians do not agree that today's older generation is leaving the world in a worse state than it was before.¹⁰⁹ When the Commission considered data from other research which suggests most Australians also believe life will be worse for young people in the future, a complex picture of intergenerational connections emerged.¹¹⁰

These seeming contradictions suggest that most Australians are aware of the scope of the problems that might beset future generations, but do not see it as a sign of intergenerational tension, blame or responsibility.

'To be fair there are some older people who are very good. A lot of senior members [at my organisation] are very passionate and hard working towards pushing the climate agenda. People of all ages should unite around issues – it's right versus wrong not old versus young.'

Young adult

Instead, intergenerational cooperation, a consistent finding in this research, is again the main solution offered by young adults. Young adults acknowledged that this can be difficult.

'Old people, even if they don't necessarily agree and want to make active change themselves, they should be willing to listen and understand younger generations. They should be more sympathetic than the stereotype would suggest they are.'

Young adult

While they also recognised the difficulties of 'talking up' to those in power.

'The problem is also the barrier of older people not being as willing to be told that they are wrong by the younger generation. Understandably in their minds they are so significantly older, with more life experience, it's genuinely hard to conceive how someone a third of their age could say you are completely wrong about this massive thing.'

Young adult

The solution offered by the young people in the focus group was strong intergenerational cooperation between current (older) leaders and the next generation of (younger) leaders to achieve change. Young adults thought it important that they were mentored appropriately and that there be a transfer of knowledge between older people and young adults, so that they would be ready to step up and lead when the time comes. An Indigenous participant spoke of one such effective example.

'We work with schools to connect local Elders and knowledge holders with the schools, we use tech to connect them so young kids learn about the language and culture that they're losing, and Elders learning about tech. It's been really successful. If you can find ways to collaborate with people who are like minded then you can make change, doesn't matter how old you are.'

Young adult

They saw mentoring and guidance, and collaboration between the ages as being key to continuing success, both of their personal causes and at a broader societal level. This transfer of knowledge can go both ways, with people at either end of the age spectrum having something to offer the other.

'I feel like as people get older there might be less of a gap between the generations. I know as I get older, I know how to use technology, I care about the environment. So I feel like as people get older there will be less of a difference as well. Then the old people will know technology, everyone will be a bit more similar.'

Young adult

Young adults did not want to be prioritised for leadership positions. They want to work alongside middle-aged and older people on issues including the environment, mental health, medical and human rights and equality – and have high aspirations to achieve change in their lifetime.



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CHAPTER

4

Life trajectories

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Key points

Social relations are traditionally organised around a conventional life trajectory with discrete age-related stages and milestones which mark a successful transition from youth to adulthood:

- Young adulthood is the time for growth and expansion.
- Middle age is the period of consolidation.
- Older age is for retirement and enjoying life.

Many of the roles and milestones are age-related and informed by ageist assumptions and stereotypes.

Demographic changes, such as increasing longevity and changing social, cultural and economic conditions, are disrupting this trajectory. Many Australians have challenged this traditional path and intend to follow diverse trajectories.

The milestones of life trajectories, whether traditional or changing, are also fundamental human rights: a home, education, work, family. People are achieving these milestones at different stages and ages – and this can be liberating or not, depending on what happens when the expectations bump against structures and institutions that are driven by ageist assumptions and policies.

Finding 6

Age stereotypes have traditionally underpinned a life trajectory which is being increasingly disrupted.

4.1 What is a traditional life trajectory?

Ageing involves a series of transitions through specific life stages – a pathway with discrete steps and roles. Life is full of such transitions, from childhood to puberty to young, middle and older adulthood.¹ This pathway, or trajectory, is marked by goals and milestones, which traditionally measure progress and success. Completing an education, finding employment, marriage or partnering, buying a home, establishing a career, parenthood, working, funding a comfortable retirement, becoming a grandparent: these are some of the conventionally accepted milestones of a traditional life pathway.

These milestones are also usually associated with specific ages. For example, education is for youth, raising families for middle age, older age for retirement. Some milestones are regulated by policies and laws, such as the age at which we can get a driving licence, get married, start working, receive an age pension. Social structures also reflect this. Schooling and education are organised for young people, the workforce for people aged under 65 and, for older people, there are newly established communities for the 'elderly' and retired.²



From babies to centenarians, we're all part of it, all going through our various stages of growing up.'

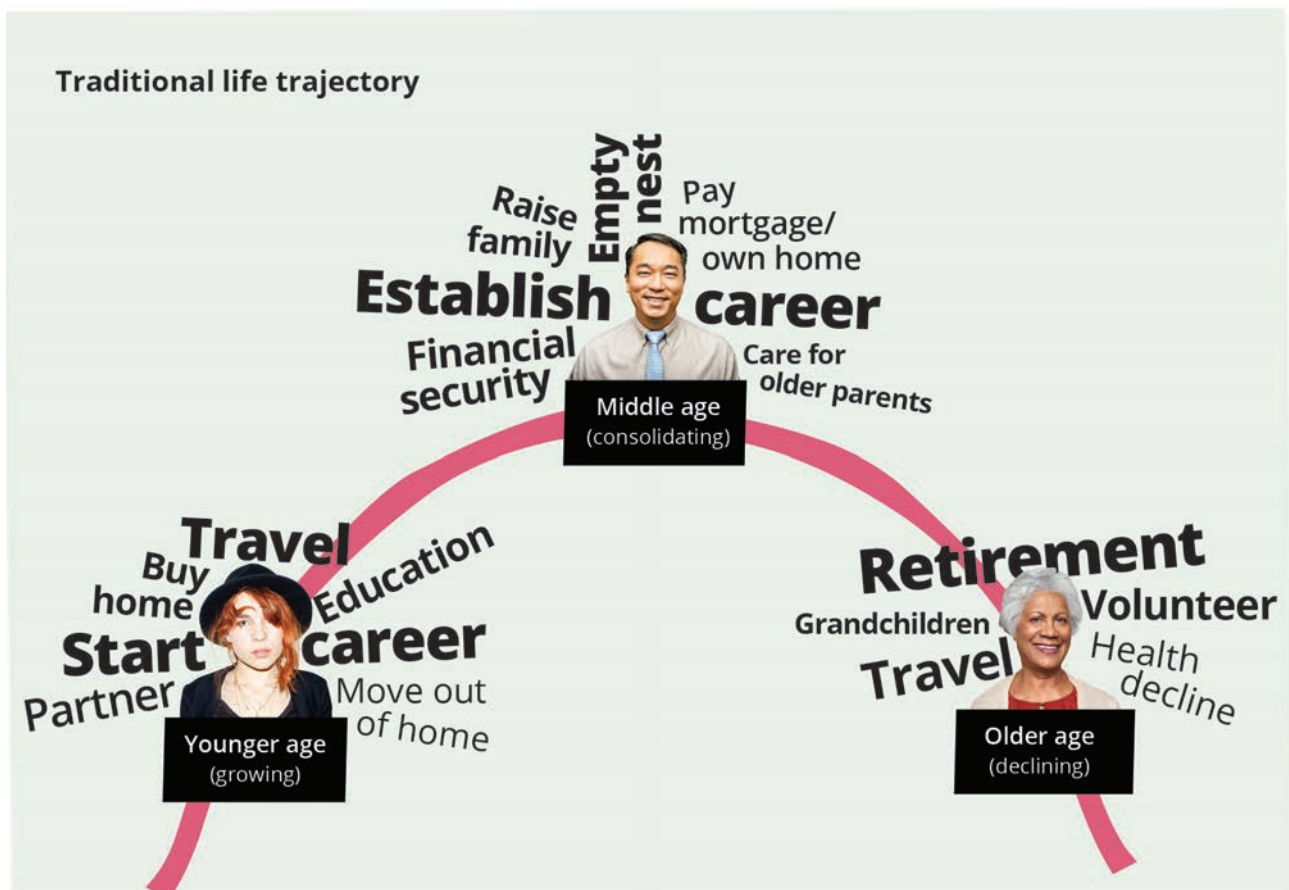
Older person

We also measure our worth and value as individuals against these milestones, whether we choose to accept them, aspire to them, or reject them. If they are accepted as age specific, and we do not reach them 'in time', or as expected, then how does that affect our individual self-worth? And what does it mean for social cohesion and inclusivity if groups of people cannot reach these milestones?

This chapter explores how Australians understand this trajectory and identifies the associated goals. It captures what Australians think of these milestones, their relevance to 21st century Australian life, and what may facilitate, or impede their attainment. Does age have anything to do with it? If yes, how? If not, then what does? Does ageism play a role in how we understand this trajectory? And what impact does this have on people?

4.2 Stages of a traditional life trajectory - linear and continuous

The conventional view of the lifespan has 3 distinct stages. It begins at youth and young adulthood, builds to a peak of prime middle age, before falling into gradual decline and decay. It is a continuum that people move through as they age, and can be visualised as:



People traditionally follow this broad, linear trajectory as they move through life stages, from schooling to employment to retirement, at specific ages. Each stage is linked to identifiable milestones and expectations.

(a) Young adulthood – the building stage?

Traditionally, the period of young adulthood is for building. The milestones of this stage are often understood to include finishing an education or training, entering a career, marriage or partnership, buying a house and beginning a family. Statements by some participants reflect this.

‘Hopefully they are completing an education and setting themselves up for a good career and future.’

Older person

‘Very exciting – they’re planning for which direction in life they will take! Family? Career? Or maybe spiritual?’

Middle-aged person

Conversely, others see it as a period of carefree irresponsibility.

‘Younger adulthood is a time where the pressures placed on you are significantly less. You have a chance to pursue interests and hobbies that may be deemed as futile or selfish. It’s a chance to focus on friendships and work out who you really are. It’s quite a self-focused stage.’

Young adult

‘I associate myself most with the younger generation, because although I am 30, I have few responsibilities in terms of a family of my own and am independent and single. I largely do what I want and when I want and am in a position where I can take a greater risk because there is less to lose.’

Young adult

‘They still have the concept that life is easy and things are at their feet.’

Middle-aged person



(b) Middle-age – a period of consolidation?

Many participants viewed middle age as a period when ‘financial expectations loom large – to pay off a home, pay for family’, and a ‘period of trying to consolidate your assets more than anything else’.³ Middle age is the stage of raising families, progressing careers, strengthening finances and then freedom when children leave home. Australians across all age groups agreed with this view.

‘Middle age to me is the time at which you solidify your career, settle down with a family, establish financial security, and develop a routine and family unit for a larger lifestyle. You probably drink less, focus on family and work issues more, and become less sociable.’

Young adult

‘I would say middle age is, you see people wanting to settle down, buy a house, make more substantial plans for family, similarly with career also, middle-aged people are more conservative than jumping around. Build career with a certain assurance. I’ve noticed they start to become much more thoughtful.’

Middle-aged person

Family commitments also define middle age.

‘At my age, most people I know have similar roles, however they may have either younger or older children and this can impact on their priorities and reduce or increase their own personal “me” time. I think there is the expectation to be settled and have your own home, happy and stable family and be content with what you have achieved. At this point it would be unusual to be starting a family or venturing into a completely new career, far removed from anything you have done in the past.’

Middle-aged person**(c) Older age – grandchildren and retirement?**

In a traditional life trajectory, older age means retiring from paid work, taking up volunteer work and enjoying hobbies, travelling and grandchildren.

‘I remember being a mum and working and coming home and if kids want to play you’ve got to cook dinner put washing on, whereas the time-rich grandparent, when I look after my granddaughter I’m not cleaning, she’s got my undivided attention.’

Middle-aged person

‘[Older people] are financially stable. The world’s their oyster. They do what they want, go on more holidays, socialise a lot, things like that.’

Older person



◀ All through life there are expectations and a certain stereotype of what you should have achieved by that age.'

Middle-aged person

4.3 What do Australians think about this trajectory?

Many Australians across a range of age groups recognised and agreed with these traditional stages and milestones.

'... everyone is at different stages in their life and you adjust differently depending on your age.'

Young adult



'Being young, the focus should be on education and setting up a career. Middle age should be focusing on the career path, accumulation of wealth and assets and looking after family.'

Older person

Participants accepted that each stage has age-determined expectations and challenges. They discussed these roles in terms of what age groups should and should not be doing.

'Young adults are starting out in life, with the expectations of living a full life. Middle-aged adults are (sometimes) a bit more sensible, having lived more years. I like to think by middle age we're all a bit wiser! Older adults experience the wearing-down of the body and mind which can lead to health issues, both physical and mental.'

Older person

Not all participants accepted the value of these roles. Some people saw these roles as stereotypes; powerful, but stereotypes, nonetheless.

'I thought it was interesting, as I was reflecting about roles, society, the pressures of society, you can't help but feel influenced by stereotypical roles that you see recurring throughout life, in the workplace or your personal life. It inherently does affect the way you see life ... the stereotypes are reinforced through your experience.'

Young adult



They questioned the validity of attributing value to people based on age-determined and constraining roles.

'It's limiting – older people are doing amazing things for instance. It's fine if you acknowledge general patterns but ascribing specific characterisations to groups results in generalisations being made about the capacities of these groups. Characterising them based on these capacities is reductive and perpetuates discourses about society.'

Young adult

Economic and social circumstances were often seen as far more important than age when determining roles and social value.



'The roles I have may not be similar to the roles that other people of a similar age may have. Depending upon whether you are financially independent or on struggle street, whether you are enjoying your work or is it a chore? There are people similar to my age who have already retired and playing golf but that's not my cup of tea. Finally, to me age is just a number.'

Middle-aged person

Some saw them as socially constructed roles that people should, or are expected, to aspire to.

'I don't think it's driven so much by age, but naturally the types of things you give and take at different ages change. When younger you take more peoples' time and parents' money, but when older you're taking opportunities to make money by starting businesses or investing in things. And what you give back may just naturally become a flipside by raising kids and investing in your own kids.'

Young adult

'Some expectations are ok as one would hope that someone who has been working for 30 years should be financially ok due to good decisions made. There is a reasonable expectation that a 50-year-old male should be a valued member of the community who puts time into others.'

Middle-aged person

For some young adults, societal expectations and roles created stress and anxiety.

'I do feel like there's an expectation to either be studying or having a full-time working role and that we have to know what we want to do and have set goals as to when that needs to be achieved.'

Young adult

‘It makes me feel a lot of anxiety and pressure to have to know what we want to do for the rest of our lives so close to the start of them, and also really worried that I’ll make the wrong choice and hate life further down the track.’

Young adult

(a) The trajectory is about success

In group discussions, the Commission heard widespread acknowledgment across all age groups that the life trajectory is still based on expectations and markers of success, which remain broadly unchanged over time.

Some participants identified relationships as one such expectation, especially for young adults.

‘... up until recently I thought I’d be in a long-term relationship and have settled down. I also thought I would only have one job and would be in something steady. I thought the relationship would be there because there were no signs that it would end. I thought that I would be in a steady job because that’s what would be expected of someone my age.’

Young adult

Perceptions of a successful middle age were marked by stability and having clear plans for the future.


‘I believe the expectation at my age is to have a stable career and a well-cared for family. These expectations make me feel successful, as I have achieved my goal of a stable career in trade and have a loving supportive family that I will always care for.’

Middle-aged person

‘Middle-aged adults are usually past the exploring and partying stage of life of young adults and are more focused on the future ahead ... usually ready to settle down and get their life plan in order.’

Middle-aged person



 You get judged on whether you own a home yet, are you in a long-term career, do you have kids, are you married?

Middle-aged person

Security was also important.

'At middle age, I feel you are expected to have both short- and long-term goals and possessions ... with long term goals or purchases there is a certain stigma that by middle age you will have the house with the white picket fence, a couple of kids and a dog – this resonates with where I am at this stage of life. By middle age you are expected to have a financial plan in place that will set you up so you can enjoy old age comfortably. Sometimes I feel a bit pressured to “get all your ducks in a row” regarding the future, but you still want to enjoy life and make the most of every day in the present.'

Middle-aged person

Interestingly, it is middle-aged people who connected most strongly with the roles assumed of their age group, especially those around juggling work and family responsibilities. They were least likely to question the roles associated with their age group, despite feeling stressed.

'Family commitments, domesticity, money issues (housing, employment etc.) the need to work. Many in this bracket have significant stresses, including work-life balance issues, insecure employment, high cost of childcare, exorbitant housing costs, helping ageing parents.'

Middle-aged person

Although some reported feeling judged for not having met these milestones.

'I am constantly asked why I still have a mortgage when I was married for 20 years, and my husband made good money. I am looked down on and pitied that I do not and have not travelled.'

Middle-aged person

Similarly, a successful older age was signified by having financial security and more free time.

'Time and money. The older adults no longer have the stress of mortgage payments and can indulge in their interests more with no longer working.'

Older person

(b) The traditional trajectory is more relevant to older adults

Some participants (particularly older adults who had met many of these milestones) were more accepting of the conventional trajectory. The more people felt that they had met these milestones, the more they accepted these markers of 'success' and believed it was a product of individual work and agency.

'My career has been established and I'm now coming towards the latter stage of life. I've achieved what I have wanted to achieve, I'm happy to say that. I am starting to reflect on my life, and the things I've done.'

Middle-aged person

'I feel that I am in control of my life, I have the resources to do what I want and do not need to conform to tedious social norms.'

Middle-aged person

'I run a business and see myself as being in the middle of my life, whereas a lot of people my age are looking to slow down. I'm very comfortable with who I am at this stage of my life but consumed with excitement as to what lays ahead.'

Middle-aged person

'Well, I believe at my age people are expected to own their own home and to be financially secure. [I feel] good as we own our own home and are financially secure, because we are workers and are great budgeters. It doesn't just fall in your lap; you have to work.'

Older person

These older people tended to be those who had reached the prescribed milestones along the way. Older people who hadn't reached the milestones, for example through divorce or by not owning a house, were less accepting of the traditional trajectory.

'We assume all middle-aged people have a family and are married. They don't anymore. Particularly women who have never married or had children, what [society] could do is acknowledge that not everyone goes through school, uni, gets married, has a family, grows old – because it's not what happens. A huge number of people either choose not to or haven't done it through no fault of their own.'

Older person

Others spoke of the impact of not having reached these milestones.

'We should have bought a house by now but having a stepdaughter we paid child support for and she lived some distance [away], we did a lot of travelling which is where most of our money went. We will purchase a house within the next 12 months. I think then I will feel like I am doing things I should for my age. It makes me feel incomplete, like I am not good enough, what have I done wrong to be in this situation ... I feel like people view you differently that you haven't conformed and achieved the great Aussie dream of owning your own home.'

Middle-aged person

This belief is also reflected in research which indicates that people measure their value through roles and in identifying and reaching milestones, and that this intensifies over a lifetime: 'Valued people pitch much of their life effort to identifying, achieving and growing their roles ... And strength for older people is that they have usually lived long lives full of valued roles.'⁴

Older age may be accompanied by a loss of roles and opportunities that define value.

‘Everyone of course has multiple roles (partner, worker, carer, volunteer etc) and these can apply across age groups, but the reality is that as we get older the extent of our roles and capacity to perform them inevitably decrease.’

Middle-aged person

‘Although I don’t think older adulthood is the same as a death sentence, I see it as a phase in which many of the opportunities that were afforded to you previously disappear. I see this as a stage where things are coming to a close. Health issues may come to a fore.’

Young adult

Not reaching these milestones is not always perceived as a failure or loss.

‘I don’t personally buy into the idea that age means expectation, but I do understand that inevitably things change as you get older, and people look at you differently based on what you have not done at certain times in life ... For me, personally, I don’t carry those expectations or let anyone’s opinion bother me in that regard. That makes me feel quite empowered – I look at some people that really worry about what people think about them at their age, and just think about how much extra unnecessary burden they’re carrying around with them.’

Young adult

‘Today I’ve totally adapted and won’t change my early decisions if I could. A new stage and phase in life means moving forward. That’s just life. If I could have prevented personal tragedy and loss, I would have, but that’s not how things work. Apart from that, I’m perfectly happy with how things turned out in life.’

Older person



(c) The trajectory is recognisable, but not necessarily accepted by all

While many people in every age group recognised the existence of a traditional life trajectory, not everyone agreed that their lives had followed this path – whether through choice or circumstances.



'I think there are expectations among those I know that I would go to university and act in certain ways, however I do not feel these apply to everyone my age and I imagine they would differ greatly for different people.'

Young adult

'Society expects you to conform to a set of expectations based on your age. Personally, I do not believe in that for I like to live my life based on my rules.'

Middle-aged person

'[I am] where I was hoping to be at this stage of my life apart from losing a very large business some years back. Truthfully, I judge myself by where/ what I am not by where/ what others think I should do.'

Older person

The focus groups provided a forum for participants to explore the roles and milestones associated with adulthood across the lifespan. Participants discussed youth as a time spent learning, middle age as accruing, and old age as relinquishing. Some accepted these roles as normal and fair; for others, they were limiting stereotypes that did not reflect the full gamut of possible roles and experiences.

Some participants mentioned that personal factors, such as divorce, remarrying and starting over, ill health or bereavement, had affected their ability to reach traditional milestones, such as home ownership.

'Being classed as middle-aged there are certain expectations. My partner and I have been married before, so we're starting from scratch again. You have to bypass social expectations and focus on yourself and what's around you, not get caught up in the hype.'

Middle-aged person

'I remarried when I was 50 and had to financially start over as a youngster.'

Older person

'I thought I would be chasing after a big career, bigger house, cars etc. but a big change in my life has made me appreciate what I have rather than chase after something and forgetting to smell the roses along the way. I guess almost everyone has gone through a life changing moment in their life by now and maybe that has made them realise what is more important in life.'

Middle-aged person

'At the moment, my life is quite different as I lost my husband of 47 years last November ... the major difference now is that I am a single person, not part of a duo.'

Older person

Few Australians questioned the relevance or importance of education, work, financial security and relationships, whether through marriage or partnership, having children or grandchildren. They did however challenge the assumption that these should be, or could be, accomplished at a prescribed age. The following section explores this further.

Key milestone stereotypes:

- Young adulthood is seen as the time for gaining an education, travelling, starting a career, marrying or partnering, buying a house, starting a family and increased independence.
- Middle age is regarded as the period of consolidation. At this stage people are raising a family, progressing a career, strengthening financial security and launching adult children into independence.
- Older age is viewed as being about enjoying – retiring from paid employment, volunteering, taking up hobbies, travelling, caring for grandchildren and increased dependence.

4.4 Challenges to the traditional life trajectory and disrupted life roles

This traditional life trajectory, with its three-stage adult lifespan, is changing. Australians told the Commission that this has been disrupted by social, cultural and economic conditions which have weakened adherence to a three-stage lifespan, linear trajectories and the assumption of fixed, discrete generations. Stereotypes and life trajectories are socially, culturally and historically constructed, and linked to the creation of generational labels and institutional segregation of society by age.⁵

This has 2 key implications. First, it reveals that the ages at which these milestones should or can be reached have shifted – that is, these milestones are no longer seen as linked to specific ages. Secondly, the roles associated with these milestones are also outdated stereotypes. Many of the age-related stereotypes that have defined the 'successful' lifespan and trajectory, such as marriage, having children, home ownership, hard and fast retirement, and education, are, according to many Australians, redundant or irrelevant.

This section details what Australians believe about these stereotypes.



All age groups have their own challenges. Growing up during the golden years after WW2 is much different from growing up in current times.'

Older person

4.5 Life is changing

Many participants considered that what it means to be a certain age is changing. They saw life as more complex than it once was and with different expectations. For some, these changes were positive, with options and opportunities available at all stages of life, and more flexibility for self-expression. This was especially true for young adults and older people, where participants gave numerous examples of people who do not fit into the traditional boxes.

‘There is more flexibility to this ... the boundary between young adulthood and middle age is blurred and become less concrete.’

Young adult

‘I’m not really keen on role theory which classifies people, puts them in boxes and just sees them as acting out various standardised performances.’

Older person

‘I feel we don’t want to wait to retire like our parents did but leave work so we can start living. We are more active and worldly than our parents and feel like we can live forever. We focus on the important things including our grandkids, activity, learning new things, working out ways to give back to the community all the while I try and build the most magnificent vegie garden. But I want to sit and chat and learn new things with like-minded people. I worry what the world will be once I am gone.’

Older person

Did you know?

There were more than 6,400 centenarians in Australia in 2019–2020. There are projected to be 40,900 centenarians by 2060–61.⁶

(a) Living longer, healthier lives

One reason for this change is increased life expectancy. Over the last century, the average Australian lifespan has grown by 30 years. A child born in Australia in the early 1900s could expect to live, on average, to about age 55.⁷ By 2017–19, life expectancy at birth was 80.9 years for males and 85 years for females.⁸ The life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has also increased, but by less and there is still a gap of 6–7 years in comparison to non-Indigenous Australians.⁹

As some participants reflected:

‘Previous generations didn’t really live long lives. These days everybody just about lives to 90 at least and well beyond that sometimes.’

Older person

'For some older Australians, this longevity has positive outcomes and possibilities, and does not necessarily mean decline and decay.'

'Older people are living a lot longer these days. I think back in the day when you hit 60 and retired you just stopped. Now you don't stop, you travel and you know life isn't over.'

Older person

'We're working longer, staying fitter longer, we're more active right through our 60s and 70s. For my great grandmother that wouldn't have been an option, she would not have still been going to the gym at 60.'

Older person

Did you know?

People are also living healthier, longer lives. In Australia in 2015, men aged 65 could expect to live 17.1 further years in full health, up from 16.2 years in 2011. Similarly, women aged 65 could be expected to live another 18.4 years in full health in 2015, up from 17.5 years in 2011.¹⁰

Not all older adults are living fewer years in ill-health.¹¹ Research shows that life expectancy and years lived in full health increase as socioeconomic status increases,¹² and many Australians are very aware of the connection between health and wealth.

'Most older Australians enjoy a healthy, balanced lifestyle, but unfortunately not everyone has that luxury. This generation reaches out to either support or share experiences. The family circle is growing, but the social circle is contracting. Most also have to be frugal, as retirement funds need to last until the end of their time.'

Older person

'We have a few more health problems but we self-fund those health issues. But I don't see that older people are a burden on society like some of the media portray us.'

Older person

However, for some Australians, longer lifespans may also have other, demanding consequences, such as longer caring responsibilities, especially for women.

'I never thought I would be looking after my husband. I am 70 and looking after parents and grandchildren.'

Middle-aged person

There is also a perception that older age entails illness, which a minority see as a drain on resources.

'It's only when they become old and frail and need hospital care, that's when [older people] become a burden.'

Older person

For some younger Australians, longevity also creates pressure to make decisions with lifelong consequences.

Did you know?

Research undertaken by the UK International Longevity Centre indicates that as life expectancy increases, so does productivity: by output 'per hour worked, per worker and per capita'.¹³

This suggests that there may be a 'longevity dividend', as improvements to health and increased life expectancy result in wider economic and productivity gains so that life expectancy may be a 'powerful determinant of productivity'.¹⁴

For a number of middle-aged and older Australians, longevity means that the concept of age and ageing is changing.

'The older I get, the more that old age gets older. Now 60 doesn't sound so old anymore. My husband is 64, his mother is 94 and still living on her own. To me she is old and my husband is not, he's still working, we've got a 10-year-old.'

Middle-aged person

'If you're 14 and someone says what is old, they are going to say 60. If you are 40, 60 is a little on the young side. If you're 60, then 75 is not so bad. We are looking after my wife's parents, 99 and 93, who are still living in their own home. I used to think 60 was old, now it's not.'

Middle-aged person

'I'm in the older adulthood age group but I still feel middle aged and still have my 95-year-old mum. So I look on her as the older adult and I'm the middle! But I'll be 70 in 14 months, so I guess that is older adulthood.'

Older person



We're having to decide what we want to do for the rest of our lives and then either being criticised or congratulated for not making or making that decision. There is the pressure to move out and be more independent and become that adult that people expect you to become even though we have no idea what we're doing at all. Comparing it to how long we do live, it's a lot of decisions to make in a really small period.'

Young adult



Some Australians saw that, as life trajectories change, so do their roles and understanding of age.

'I think the lines between the types of roles you are expected to have at various ages have become blurred. For example, mothers have increasingly become older in age than they were previously.'

Middle-aged person

This is consistent with a growing body of evidence suggesting that, as years are added to the average lifespan, many people in countries such as Australia are 'interrupting' the traditional life course, for example, by remaining a student through their 20s and delaying marriage and children, or by becoming a student in their 60s, or having children later in life or taking a gap year in mid-life.¹⁵ It also indicates that so many of the milestones that have been accepted as age-related or age-specific are in fact stereotypes and have very little to do with age.

'We can all be carers of either children or elderly parents. We can make a community contribution either through work, service, sport or volunteering. We can be supportive of each other at various times.'

Older person

What does this mean for the model of youthful exploration, stable middle age and declining older age? How does it affect people at all ages and the roles associated with the life trajectory, and what does this fluidity and change reveal about ageism? In discussions, a participant noted:

'I think change just inherently takes time. It's not just going to change, it's just the way it is. It's like a generational shift, right. A lot of these ideas that we see slowly changing we'll pass them on to the generation below us and I think that's how change actually occurs, slow changing of mindsets between generations.'

Young adult

The key milestones are changing, and people of all age groups agreed that some milestones of adulthood are now more difficult to achieve, primarily home ownership and stable employment.

For example, participants recognised that 'workplaces have totally changed' and people are working longer hours.

'Middle-aged people are expected to work longer hours for no overtime. They work from home, in the car, always on a call. We never had that. More mental health problems because of this pressure.'

Older person

'Technology has bought more data and knowledge, but people are expected to do more.'

Older person

It increased pressure on some age groups.

'Middle age is harder than for previous generations. Medical and housing costs are exorbitant, and this creates pressures.'

Older person

'It's the age of consumerism – that's how I see it. Pressure to buy more means pressure to work more hours.'

Older person

(b) Employment

Did you know?

Gig economy workers are skewed heavily towards those in younger age groups. As with young adults, gig workers are 3.3 times more likely to be students. People aged 25–34 are the age group with the highest proportion of gig workers.¹⁶



Participants generally agreed that the expectations placed on young and middle-aged people had changed, particularly in employment, but this was due to external factors.

Older participants thought that secure ongoing work is more difficult to find, and that young people are more affected by precarious employment.

'I think it's harder to get jobs ... We could just walk into a job. It's a lot more competitive.'

Older person

'Young people these days have to have more than one career. It's a disposable society now.'

Older person

'A lot of young people I have come across have had a multitude of jobs, whereas I am retirement age and I have had 4 jobs in my entire life.'

Older person

Though some middle-aged people spoke of the risks of unemployment after 50.

'If you get made redundant it will be harder to get another job, age does matter ... That age is 50.'

Middle-aged person

Did you know?

While there is an increase in people employed in fixed-term contracts across all age groups in the workforce between 2001 and 2017, this shift was most marked in people aged 25 to 34 years. Permanent part-time work has also increased across age groups, but particularly for workers under 45 years and those aged 55–65. Casual contracts declined over the same period, for all age groups except the very youngest workers.¹⁷

Did you know?

The perceived age of an 'older worker' is becoming younger over time. In 2021, research by the Australian HR Institute and Australian Human Rights Commission, the *Employing and Retaining Older Workers Report 2021* recorded an increase in survey respondents nominating people aged 51–55 as an older worker.¹⁸

Did you know?

Australians are increasingly working to older ages. In 2019:

- 75% of people aged 55–59 participated in the labour force (working or looking for work) – this is up from 70% in 2009 and 60% in 1999.
- 59% of those aged 60–64 years participated in the workforce – up from 50% in 2009 and 33% in 1999.
- 20% of people over 70 did some paid work.¹⁹

4.6 Extended ‘carefree youth’?

‘I didn’t get any sense of them being any different to the way I was when I was young, apart from the things like innovation, tech, social media etc. Young people essentially pretty much are the same and they will be the people who lead the country for generations going forward.’

Middle-aged person

Many Australians see young adulthood as a time of carefree youth, few responsibilities, a commitment to education and developing the skills for a future of work and family building. What happens to young adulthood if people are living longer lives? Does it lead to a period of extended youth, as some research suggests?²⁰ Does it lead to a protracted period of travel, partying and freedom from responsibility? Does it make the traditional markers of adulthood harder to reach? Is early adulthood still considered to be the stage to finish education, start a career, buy a house, enter marriage or partnership, and have children? The picture that emerges from the focus groups is nuanced and complex, suggesting that age-related roles are changing for everyone, although some retain the expectations of traditional stereotypes.

(a) More agency

Some participants saw young people as having more agency in creating their future through studying, pursuing a career and establishing family life free of traditional expectations.

‘I think today’s younger generation, at least when comes to education and career, they go by their heart not by the trend or what is being pushed on them.’

Middle-aged person

‘... younger adults [are] following their passions in work rather than, say, taking over the family business.’

Older person

However, the perception of wide-ranging choices is seen as negative as well as positive.

'There is a lot of choice, it was a bit more structured in our days, you knew where you were going. Everybody could get a job when they left school. Now they really need their higher school certificate.'

Older person

'Peer pressure is stronger.'

Older person

'[It's] too complicated, too many choices, no security.'

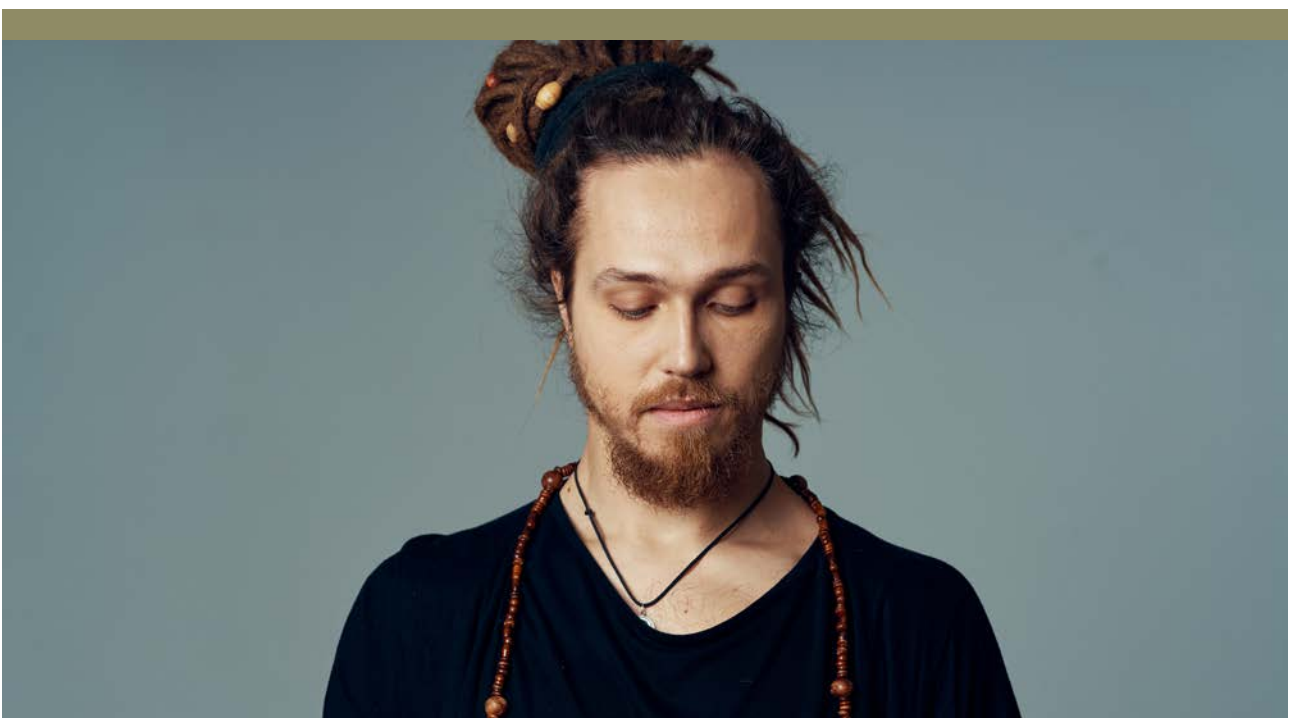
Older person

(b) Are relationships still a thing?

Some younger participants reported that they still felt pressured or were expected to get married and establish families.

'People can't accept that [not having children] is a choice rather than a biological or physical reason. So my roles are not as conventional as would be expected. It can make you feel alienated and isolated and, at times, question your choices. But I have to remember I am happy with the life I have!'

Young adult



'Pressure – you've got save for a house, you've got to have kids. It's that pressure put on people, and people may not have those goals or want different things out of life.'

Young adult

'I would have expected to have a job by now but everything else is pretty much how I would have wanted my life to go. When I was younger, I thought I wanted kids, but now I don't think that is something that I feel the need to do... I'm fine with that, other people's expectations don't really bother me, if they want to have kids etc. that's fine, but I don't like when others pressure you to do that too.'

Young adult

Some middle-aged and older people also reported experiencing this pressure.

'If no kids why no kids? Why not children or career? Must there always be stereotypes? If you've chosen to be stay-at-home dad there is a label against that, you're boxed in.'

Middle-aged person

'I think my role is different to most people my age. Most people have grandkids at my age ... I always get asked if I have kids or grandkids then most people give you a sad look. [I feel] a bit angry to be judged for not having kids and asked why.'

Middle-aged person

Whereas, for a few older people, the pressure to marry and raise children resulted in divorce at a later stage in life.

'You got married, had kids raised the family, they left home and you got divorced. That's what happened to me.'

Older person

Did you know?

Research from the Australian Institute of Family Studies shows that:

- Fewer Australians are getting married. In 2017, the crude marriage rate was 4.6 marriages per 1,000 Australian residents, the lowest rate ever recorded.²¹
- First time brides and grooms are getting older. In 1971 the median age at which men got married for the first time was 23.4 years, and women 21.1 years. By 2017 this had risen to a median age of 30.4 years for men, and 28.8 for women.²²
- Fewer people are living with a partner. The proportion of persons who were living with a partner has declined since 1981 across all age groups. Between 1986 and 2001, the fall in the rate of partnership was more apparent for younger age groups. Between 2001 and 2016, the rate of partnership fell slightly for the age groups under 40, but the fall was greater for the older age groups, except those 65 years and older.²³

(c) Families

Establishing a family and raising children remain desirable milestones for many Australians;²⁴ what has altered is the age at which this is now happening.

'I'm 31 and I am seeing a lot of people my age who are waiting before having children. People are waiting longer in life to take in some of those responsibilities.'

Young adult

'I'm middle aged, 52, but lucky to have a 10-year-old son who makes me feel younger running around with him and mixing with his friends' parents who are younger ... until I found out I am older than their parents.'

Middle-aged person

Even though few young adults in their 20s have children, the majority plan, or would like, to become parents at some stage.²⁵ This perception is supported by data that shows Australians are delaying having families and children. Women are having children later. In 1991 most married women had their first child when in their 20s.²⁶

Did you know?

In 1981, 15% of new mothers were aged 30 and over.

In 1991, this figure rose to 23%.

In 2017, 49% of new mothers were aged 30 and over.²⁷



A number of female participants discussed expectations of motherhood.

'We get pigeonholed into roles we just take on, more so from a woman's perspective I think – am I a wife or am I me? Everybody is different in the way they look at it. I don't think age plays a huge factor as you can be a wife at any age, a mother from 16 up to 45/50/60. It's about the individual person and how you perceive your role. But you get stereotypes, for example, "you're a woman in your 50's so children should be out of your hair" – but that may not be the case.'

Middle-aged person

Did you know?

The proportion of women having no children has steadily increased from 9% in 1986 to 16% in 2016.²⁸

(d) What empty nest?

Did you know?

More young people live with their parents during their early adulthood.

In 2016, 43% of 20–24-year-olds were living with their parents, compared to 36% in 1981.²⁹

In 2016, 17% of 25–29-year-olds and 7% of 30–35-year-olds lived with their parents. In 1981, the figures were 10% of 25–29-year-olds and 4% of 30–35-year-olds.³⁰

A persistent traditional key milestone of adulthood is moving out of the parental home and gaining financial independence through stable employment. Many participants suggested that this is not something that is as easily achieved now and provided a variety of reasons for this. Some identified external factors, such as the higher cost of housing and a more precarious labour market.

Others pointed to more spendthrift younger adults who did not know how to save or struggle. Others noted the high cost of tertiary education and training and the need for more qualifications.

'I think about the huge opportunities young people have but also about high youth unemployment, Newstart far too low, an inadequate technical education system and discriminatory tertiary education policies as well as issues like drug use. School funding is inequitable and needs an overhaul.'

Middle-aged person

In Australia, there has been a decline over recent decades in the proportion of people who own or are buying their own home. While this is evident across all ages, it is clearest in younger age groups. Fewer young adults own their home (outright or mortgaged) today compared to previous generations.³¹ For example, in 1981, 64% of people in their early 30s owned their home with or without a mortgage. By 2016, this figure had fallen to 41%. In contrast, in 1981, 76% of people in their early 50s owned their home; by 2016, this figure was 66%.³²

Did you know?

More middle-aged Australians are renting. In 2017, more Australians aged between 45 and 49 were renting (23%) than owned their own home (18%), although 52% of this age group had a home loan. This highlights a significant social change from 2007, when 28% of this age group owned their home and 18% were renters.³³

4.7 Retirement is changing

'It's not the ageing that is the problem, but the cost.'

Older person

Did you know?

The number of older workers is rising, average retirement age is rising, and pension eligibility age is rising, for both men and women.

In the period 2001–2004, 63.6% of men retired before the age of 64. By 2016–18, this had fallen to 51.4%. The percentage of men who retired aged 64–67 increased from 16% to 29.4% over the same period.³⁴

In 2001–2004, most women (83.3%) retired before age 64; by 2016–2018, this number had fallen to 64.6%. The percentage of women retiring after age 67 increased from 10% to 17.4% over the same period. The sharpest increase was seen in the percentage of women retiring between the ages 64–67 during this period, almost tripling from 6.7% to 18%.³⁵

Australians are living longer and working longer. In 2018–19, there were 3.9 million retirees, with an average retirement age of 55.4 years. Another half a million people intend to retire within 5 years.³⁶ Coupled with the longer lifespan, this suggests that more Australians will work longer but will also spend many years in retirement.

Did you know?

The Australian retirement age will increase to 67 by 2023.³⁷

For some people, longer retirement is a ‘wonderful time of life’.

‘I probably do more things because I am older. I have the financial resources to do these things. I have travelled all over the world, flown planes, helicopters, things I could not have done in my younger years because I lacked the finances to do them. In my middle years I had the responsibility to stay alive for my family. In my later years, I can take more risks.’

Older person

‘[Retirement] is a good feeling when you are our age, debt free. We don’t have that burden. We can do what we want.’

Older person

But for others, a traditional retirement is either not feasible or desirable.

‘Older people are actually working a lot longer than what they used to. No hard and fast retirement age anymore.’

Middle-aged person

‘In terms of finance and for providing for a comfortable retirement, I am happy to keep working. I think there is an expectation for myself to retire (coming from my daughter whose friends’ parents have retired and are doing things together such as ballroom dancing!). However, it’s not my cup of tea, I am still active and like being around young people ... I think I still have a lot to offer and don’t want to be thrown on the scrapheap ... I am in my mid-60s, but I don’t feel it.’

Older person

For some Australians, working longer is an economic necessity, as not everyone has the financial means to plan for a long, secure retirement.

‘Where once a person of my age would have been retired, possibly for many years by now, these norms are being tested as retirement age becomes older, government pensions are not so readily available, people want more material goods.’

Older person

Some Australians saw this as a result of policies that favour younger people.

‘If you’re someone who is retired, you probably think things aren’t that fair at the moment. If you’re trying to live off your retirement savings, the government not changing the deeming rate is making it harder in retirement. Younger and middle-aged group get the first homeowners grant, so there is a bit of a bias from that perspective.’

Older person

Although this was contradicted by other viewpoints.

‘Dysfunctional privatised aged care system, public health system overloaded with Third World waiting times. Too many people getting the aged pension with consequential inequitable distribution of resources. Self-funded retirees getting too much of a free ride.’

Middle-aged person

Some women referred to earning years disrupted by child-rearing and unpaid work, resulting in lower superannuation and retirement savings.

‘I’m ok financially, but I don’t have a lot of super. I had to stop work when I married.’

Older person



'I couldn't get a loan to buy a house – I was a single woman, and even though I had a job, banks wouldn't give loans.'

Older person

In 2018–19, 55% of retirees in Australia were women. The population of retired women has increased more than men. In 2016–17, 39% of women over 45 were retired, growing to 43% in 2018–19. During the same period, the population of retired men increased from 36% to 37%.³⁸ On average, women retire sooner than men, and they retire with fewer savings and less superannuation.³⁹ Over the course of a lifetime, women earn less than men, and often have caring responsibilities for longer.

'My friends travel a lot, people have downsized so they've managed to have a house without a mortgage, many of them. Not all of them, some are on aged pension, and some women are part of the group for whom it is pretty awful.'

Older person

Economists have reported that rearing children accounts for a 17% loss in lifetime wages for women. Once children are born, men's paid workloads and incomes typically remain stable, while women may work part-time and experience a decline in salary and superannuation. The loss of earnings is cumulative and irreversible over a woman's lifetime, regardless of subsequent paid employment.⁴⁰ Older women are likely to experience more persistent poverty. More than one in 5 (20.7%) women over 65 experience poverty in 7 or more years over a 10-year period, compared to 16.5% of similarly aged men.⁴¹

'When I started work, I worked in a bank and I wasn't allowed to be in superannuation, because I was a female. There wasn't equal pay in those days. To be in superannuation, I had to be 25. At that age, in those days, you were getting married and having kids, so when you did go back to work, you only had a few thousand in your super. And because I was only working part-time, as a single mum, I had to rely on the government. It was a struggle. And it still is a struggle.'

Older person

Gender creates inequalities and discrimination in older age, as the impacts of inequalities accumulate over a lifetime. Ageism amplifies other forms of prejudice and the impacts of policies that exclude and marginalise.⁴² Ageism can also amplify the cumulative impacts of other forms of prejudice and discrimination, exacerbating disadvantage and inequality.⁴³

Did you know?

The typical JobSeeker recipient is now an older woman not a young man. In the 1990s, 2 in 5 JobSeeker recipients were men under 35. In 2019, this had decreased to one in 6. By 2019, half of recipients were 45 years or older, with 15% aged 60 or above – with more females than males. Women over 60 made up 8% of all JobSeeker recipients across age groups.⁴⁴

Did you know?

Income inequality has increased among retirees: by 11% among all retirees, and by 17% among retirees aged 65 and over.⁴⁵

4.8 Age has little to do with the life trajectory, but ageism has a lot to do with it

The Commission heard that people of all ages are moving in and out of roles that are not age-determined, marked by fluid careers and later parenthood, but challenged by economic uncertainty and access to resources.

People are still attached to goals and expectations, such as education, careers, relationships and families. They want secure housing and employment, but question that these achievements should be age-related. Australians recognise that attachments to age-specific roles and goals are in fact stereotypes.

These changing views on ages and life stages challenge the ongoing relevance of the traditional life trajectory, and its associated age-specific roles and milestones.

In the words of one participant:

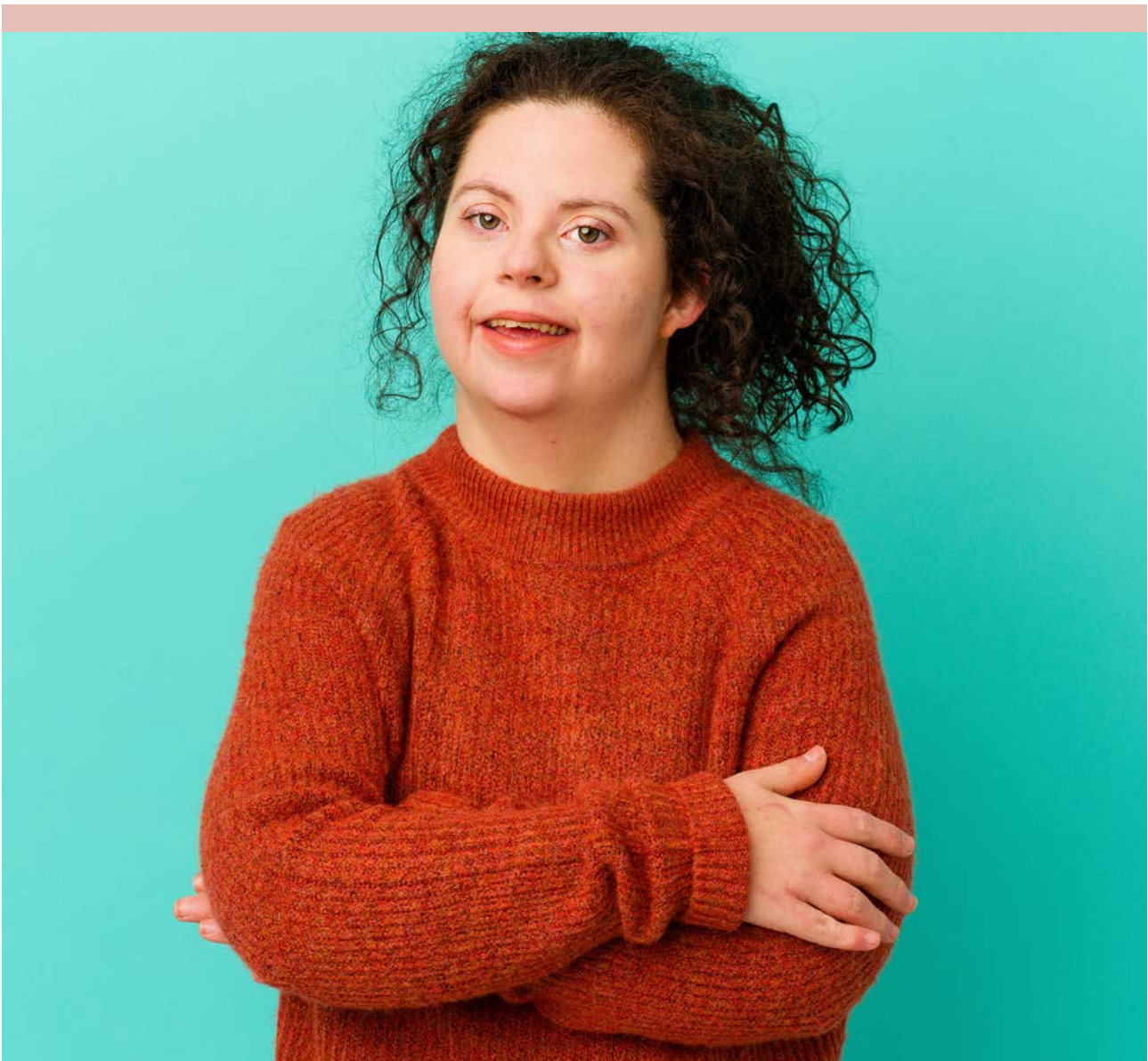
‘Our perceptions of the roles we should have are largely contextual and socially constructed ... and while there may be a gradual shift towards a more liberal way of viewing phases of your life ... a lot of traditional ideas are engrained in societal norms and values, through media constructions and the way we interact.’

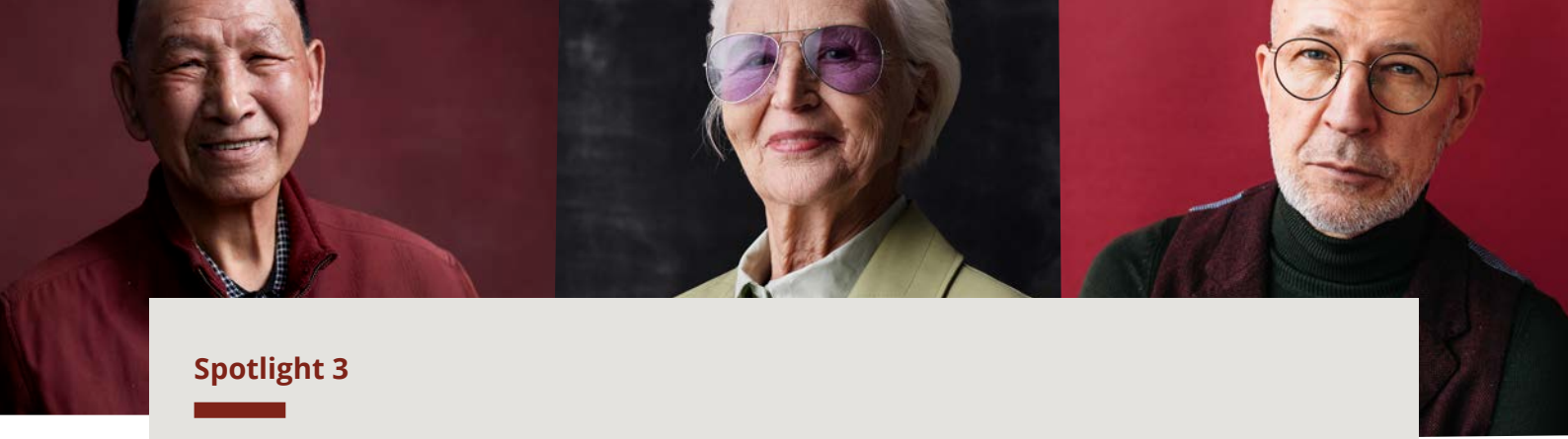
Young adult

Australians recognised that the possibilities offered by longevity and changing life trajectories are also tempered by other factors, such as wealth, health and gender. The following chapters explore how Australians understand fairness, and whether this has anything to do with age and ageism.

Did you know?

IPSOS research for the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety found that employment is an area where a number of research participants felt that ageism is at play.⁴⁶ Older people in particular felt that they are less valued. In addition, a minority felt that resourcing and support for older people is insufficient and indicates the value placed on older people (for example, elder abuse in residential aged care).





Spotlight 3

What's ageism got to do with elder abuse?

WHO defines elder abuse as 'a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person. Elder abuse can take various forms such as financial, physical, psychological and sexual. It can also be the result of intentional or unintentional neglect.'⁴⁷

The Australian Institute of Family Studies considers that ageism may be considered to be a societal risk factor for elder abuse.⁴⁸ Some international researchers who have explored the relationship between ageism and elder abuse state that, '... ageism brings a negative view of the older people and a negative perception of the aging process and can be a risk factor, not only of avoidance, denial or subordination of behaviours (Sheets, 2005) but also of mistreatment, neglect or elder abuse situations.'⁴⁹

Some researchers have suggested that the limited roles with which older people are identified can underpin attitudes that are risk factors for elder abuse.⁵⁰

Other researchers have sought to build understanding of the broader societal drivers of elder abuse by investigating the role that age-based stereotypes play.⁵¹

The perception of older people as having high warmth traits and low competence traits can '... explain how the acceptance and endorsement of societal stereotypes about older adults on dimensions of warmth and competence lead to emotion-driven, discriminatory behaviours ranging from neglect and abandonment to emotional, physical and financial harm.'⁵²

The research suggests that this mixture of seeing older people as having high warmth and low competence traits can lead to feelings of pity or sympathy, which can lead to 'passive harm', for example in the form of neglect. The research also suggests that when some older adults, usually those considered to be in the so-called old-old age group (the oldest end of this age spectrum), are stereotyped as being low in both warmth and competence traits, this negative view can elicit feelings of contempt or disgust, and underpin 'active harm', such as physical abuse.⁵³

These researchers identified some of the same stereotypes of older people found in the Commission's research, for example, assumed rigidity and inflexibility, low attractiveness, unproductiveness, illness, asexuality, dependence, isolation, loneliness and difficulty adapting to new roles.⁵⁴

Negative stereotypes apply across a range of settings, including healthcare, the workplace and everyday life. They can manifest as a lack of societal concern for older people, which risks increasing their marginalisation and leading to limiting older peoples' access to opportunities, resources and fundamental human rights.⁵⁵

Did you know?

A 2021 report by Council on the Ageing Australia (COTA) found that 4% of older Australians reported experiencing elder abuse themselves; and 47% of these spoke to someone or sought assistance. In addition, 12% reported knowing someone else who has experienced elder abuse; 59% of whom spoke to someone about it or sought some assistance.⁵⁶

Exploring attitudes about ageing

Ageist attitudes can be seen as a societal risk factor for elder abuse. The Commission's research also found that Australians tend to identify older people with more warmth characteristics and fewer competence characteristics.

To explore this further, the Commission held 2 additional focus groups, one with middle-aged people and one with older people. These discussions explored attitudes towards older people, such as those around seeing them as needing protection versus as having autonomy. The aim was not to discuss experiences of or explicit attitudes about elder abuse, but to explore attitudes that may head in that direction. Relevant insights from other focus groups are also included here.

Participants linked increased age with a decline in physical health and cognitive ability. This underpins a view that older age is associated with vulnerability and dependence.

'We probably don't talk about it specifically as such. It's a natural thing that as you see your parents decline somewhat you don't have the same expectations you used to.'

Middle-aged person

'I can see with my dad, he needs a mobility scooter, and he just needs a lot of other things like, the seat on the toilet seat must be higher; it's all those things. And he is only 73.'

Middle-aged person

Family relationships: adult children and their parents

As outlined in Chapter 5, when exploring intergenerational relationships at the explicit level, most Australians reject the idea that older people are a burden or obligation. Instead, this is seen as a responsibility that is natural and something that you 'just do'.

'I think it's human nature to respect your elders. It's in my heart to contribute and help them as much as I can, knowing they need the help. Everyone should be helping each other.'

Middle-aged person

'Your parents wiped your backside, brought you up, made you school lunches, you need to give a bit back as you get older. They're your family, your blood.'

Middle-aged person

'My role is looking after my parents. I feel responsible for them. My parents depend on me. Each day I ring them, and I try to do as much as I can.'

Older person

'I do expect to make sure my parents are ok, I have a brother who lives down the Coast and he is unable to come up a lot to help, which I don't expect him to do. So it takes the pressure off him knowing that I will follow through every day with making sure they are happy, my family is happy which makes my life easier to cope with all the everyday tasks. This makes me so happy and content. I want to be able to help everyone, it is the way I have been brought up. Being positive and not feeling negative.'

Older person

'I'm fortunate to have my 95-year-old mother still living – she's about 40 minutes away so I try to visit her once per week. I would like to volunteer within the area but have not done so to date – but regard my attentions to my mother as volunteering, as well as always being ready to help friends in various activities.'

Older person

A few participants acknowledged that caring for older family members can be difficult at times.

'Now as a full-time carer for my elderly mother due to complex medical issues, one being dementia related, I feel good. After all she brought me into the world and now it's my turn to repay her.'

Middle-aged person

A number of participants acknowledged that the amount and nature of support they provide for their parents is related to their parents' cognitive capacity and felt that their parents' autonomy should be respected as far as possible.

'If they are capable of making good decisions, I am happy for them to keep on going but I see that people start to lose the ability to make good decisions as they get older. It's important to me to help them.'

Middle-aged person

Others raised examples of conflict with other family members, such as their siblings or adult children, in relation to caring for their parents.

'My brother makes all the decisions. I've come back from seeing [my mum] and I've noticed she has lost weight and aged a lot since I last saw her. I ring her 2-3 times a week and, if I think something isn't right, I call my brother.'

Middle-aged person

'I fight to the death that my mum retains independence and my sister fights to the death to turn decisions over to the nursing home.'

Older person

'I support my parents a lot and my son always says that they need a carer. But that takes too long to organise, and my parents are more comfortable with me. Then he wants me to come and do something for him, but I have to try and explain that I am needed by my parents. I do try and help everyone in the family out, but it can be difficult to try explain and make my son understand that I need to help my parents and then help him.'

Older person

One participant stated that media presents a blurry line between projecting older people as needing protection versus having autonomy.

'There is a [media] split 80/20 between being protective of older people who may be victims, frail and poor and comments on older people being independent and finding happiness and health at this stage of life.'

Older person

There were indications that a few participants also blurred the lines between caring and taking over.

'I go around to my mum's and say "why are curtains closed, why have you got blankets, turn on the air conditioning".'

Older person

Stereotypes about older people and benevolent ageism

Some researchers link this pattern of stereotyping older people as likeable but vulnerable and needing assistance to a paternalistic view of them, which can result in benevolent ageism.

Benevolent ageism occurs when older people are perceived as vulnerable and therefore needing protection.⁵⁷ When the desire to express care for an older person crosses over to limiting their autonomy due to an assumed lack of ability or frailty, this can have negative impacts.⁵⁸

Some of the attitudes explored indicate that perhaps benevolent ageism is a force that is at play.

Family relationships: parents and their adult children

'I think the role of a parent changes throughout the ages, but you always have that role of caring and being there for your family.'

Young adult

Older participants discussed the complexities of navigating changing relationships with their adult children, and this can lead to tensions from both ends.

'Older people find it hard not to be a parent, so it gets right up the nose of (adult children). They are living in their own house on their own, you have to learn to step back, not tell them how to parent children, how they live, career options. You must step back otherwise they resent it.'

Older person

'Parents as they get older find it hard to let go.'

Older person

'My children say I interfere too much, but I see that I have a responsibility to make sure they are happy and healthy.'

Older person

'I've only got the one daughter, and she wants to know everything that is going on. She probes with lots of questions about what is happening. She expects to know everything that is happening in my life and, if she doesn't know things, she gets annoyed.'

Older person

Participants with adult children expressed a range of views around providing financial and other support to them, such as caring for grandchildren.

'Although my children are older [late teens/young adult], they are my number one priority.'

Middle-aged person

Most participants stated that they want to offer support to their adult children, in whatever ways they are able to. Providing assistance, including financial, was often expressed as an active choice they were making.

'My roles and responsibilities at this time are very similar to other people of a similar age. Supporting the wife, children and grandchildren. Keeping their lives interesting and helping them financially if possible.'

Older person

Some participants mentioned offering support for their family members as an expectation that works both ways.

'Sometime their children would expect them to help them out financially and stuff like that. Maybe that's our expectations that they'll help not just with childcare but get set up to buy a house or whatever. It's our expectations that the older generation will help them with that.'

Middle-aged person

Some saw intergenerational wealth transfer as a matter of taking turns across generations and age groups. There was a sense that eventually everyone will be an older person, so will have their turn at fulfilling responsibilities connected with older age.

'It might be considered that old people leave a legacy of property or wealth to others and usually it is family. So, the role of that older person was to nurture something that will eventually be shared. The younger person actually has exactly the same role but may not fully realise it at that point in time.'

Middle-aged person

A minority of participants mentioned a sense of blurred boundaries between them and their adult children. For example, one expressed that her adult children feel a sense of ownership over her finances and assets.

'I just bought a bigger house, and it didn't go down well with the family ... they thought I was wasting their inheritance.'

Older person

Another participant discussed financial expectations by their adult children in terms of the stereotypes the Commission found that young adults are perceived as entitled and lack financial management skills.

'We had hard lives growing up as kids, me and my partner, so we were harder on them as kids, but they still just have no respect, no idea how money works, just want everything and give nothing back.'

Young adult [close to middle age]

While some participants expressed a sense that their adult children have a continuing sense of entitlement to their time, resources and assets, most viewed providing assistance to adult children as a choice they were making within their means.

Some rejected the idea that this was something they feel pressured to do.

'[I want to] spend money [on my children] now making memories now rather than [them] waiting for mum and dad to pop off and leave a bucket of money.'

Older person

It was a common theme among older adults that they wish to retain their independence for as long as possible. When the concept of burden was discussed, it was mostly older people who stated they want to avoid being a burden on their children.

Supporting adult children by caring for grandchildren was mentioned frequently. This was not seen generally as a burden, but as an opportunity to assist adult children, and to build relationships across generations within the family.

'I see babysitting as an opportunity not a burden; it's a joy to have them.'

Older person

'I am a proud grandparent and absolutely adore my only little grandson. I spend a great chunk of time picking him up from school and looking after him on those days. Those 2-plus days are my fun days, as the 2 of us always do something special together... I saw myself surrounded by grandchildren, but I will only have one, which I'm extremely grateful for.'

Older person

'The weight of mortality also grows heavier, occasionally invoking wistful melancholia, but that is offset and tempered by the joy of watching or helping new life spring through our grandchildren.'

Older person

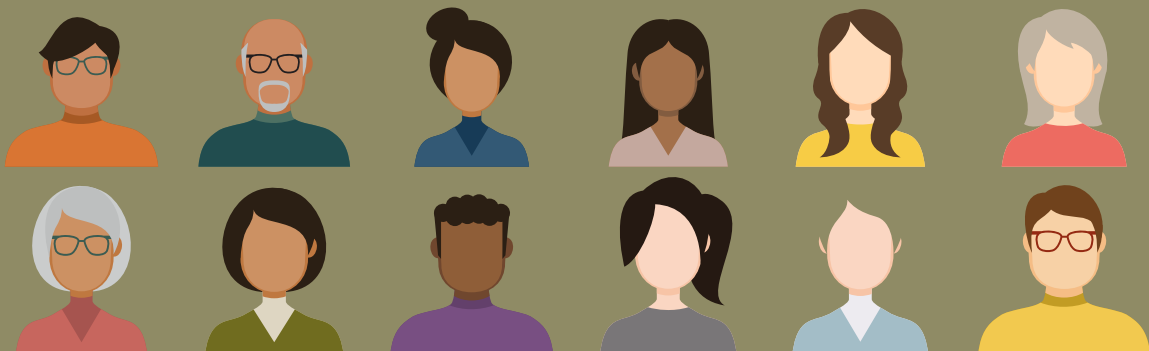
'My family is of utmost importance. I'll do anything humanly possible for them. Definitely [there is] the expectation to help with my grandson, but that's not a chore, just a great pleasure.'

Older person

Some older people raised the issue of their time being taken for granted. This assumption that older people have bountiful leisure time at their disposal to meet the needs of others is underpinned by stereotypes of their not having meaningful workplace roles or assumptions that their own priorities are unimportant.

The Commission also observed indications of family conflict around caring and decision-making to support parents, as well as attitudes around ongoing financial and other forms of assistance for adult children.

These is an indication that community attitudes towards older people which cast them as likeable but declining can perhaps be seen as a societal factor underpinning an environment where negative attitudes can lead to the range of behaviours that constitute elder abuse.



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CHAPTER

5

**Fairness and
equality matter**



CHAPTER

5

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Finding 7

Fairness and equality matter across the generations.

Key points

Australians of all ages understand the challenges faced by people in other age groups.

Australians considered that all age groups make a valuable contribution to the economy and to the community, and that no one generation had more than their fair share of assets and resources.

Australians want to share what they can and provide support across generations. They viewed responsibilities and obligations as applying across generations, with no single generation being more of a burden or having less responsibility than other generations.

Where tensions exist, they are about perceived and real inequities in wealth and access to resources, and these tensions are also informed by stereotypes about generations.



70%

Most (70%) Australians did not agree that today's older generation is leaving the world in a worse state than it was before.



20%

Less than 20% agreed that any age group was a burden on their family or a burden on society.

5.1 What Australians have in common across age groups

'Everyone has opportunities to succeed. I think it comes down to how you go about life ... if you get out there and work hard. If you come from a poor or very wealthy family, obviously that's going to affect you a bit. But everyone has pretty much the same opportunities. It's down to the individual to take those opportunities if they want something.'

Young adult

A popular perception of Australians and Australia is of a society marked by equality and fairness, the land of the 'fair go', where opportunities are available to all. While the Commission heard from participants across all age groups that success was a matter of hard work, of taking opportunities, this was also challenged by other participants who cited the impacts of changing economic and social conditions, and personal circumstances. The ensuing discussions focused on the issues of intergenerational contracts, burdens and obligations, and these findings form the basis of this chapter.

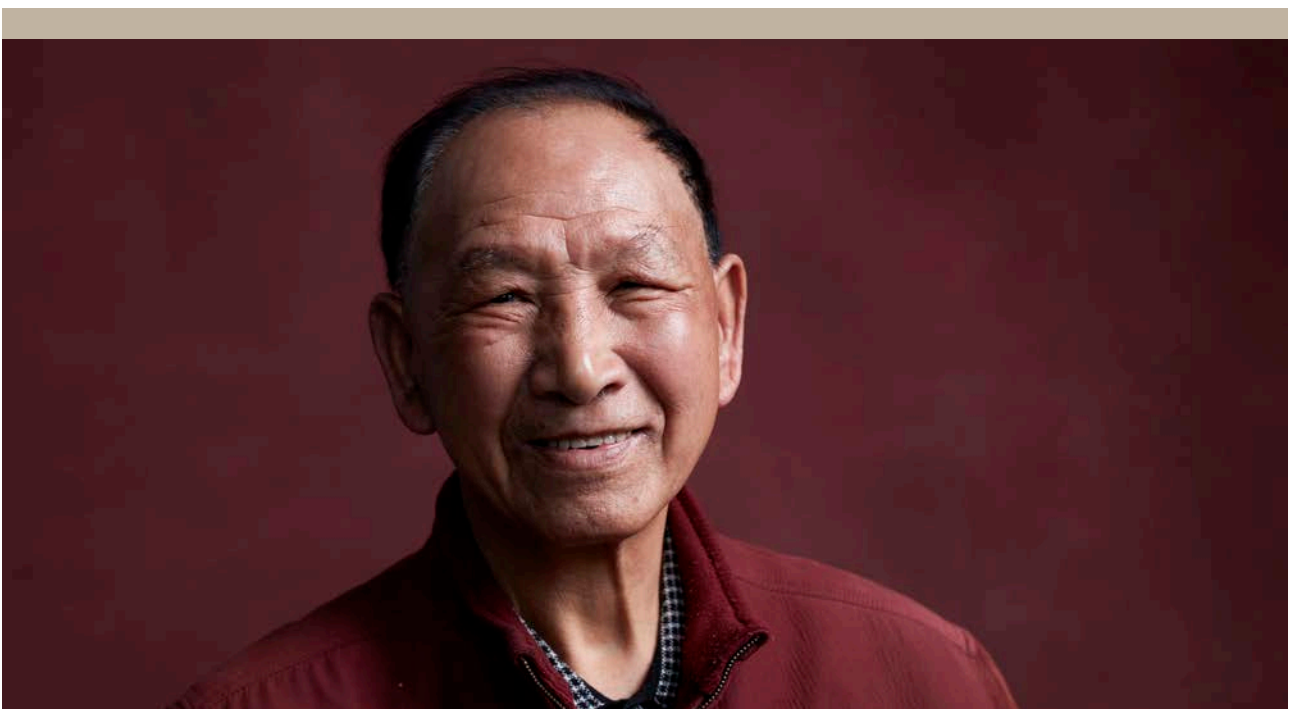
(a) Equality matters: fair share of assets

Asset-rich 'Baby Boomers' and precariously employed and housed 'Millennials' are staples of media stereotyping.

Narratives such as this suggest that some generations are economically better-off than others, with a bias in favour of people in older generations. Such stereotypes present generations as internally homogenous and involved in a competition for limited resources, a practice that has been coined by some theorists as 'apocalyptic demography'.¹ This is in line with research that suggests that globally, '... social problems are increasingly viewed through a generational lens in ways that potentially foment intergenerational resentment'.²

These 'generational wars', are, according to many Australians, created and perpetuated by the media.

Instead, this research suggests that most Australians believe that no age group has more than their fair share of assets, public health or government benefits.³



'I think the media tends to sensationalise the stories about these groups, and often seems to create some sort of conflict or blame among these groups (e.g., older generations making it hard for younger people versus young people demanding too much).'

Young adult

'The headlines I saw would pit age groups against each other, like why is the government putting funding towards the youth employment when it is the older people who struggle to find employment?'

Middle-aged person

'I feel they are generalising mostly with the most shocking negative story being run with. The groups should not be portrayed as distinct as there are overlaps from each group. Maybe there is a voyeuristic interest in reading a negative story that makes some people feel better about themselves.'

Older person



Fewer than half of survey participants across age groups considered that any age group has:

More than their fair share of assets



39%

in relation to older people



35%

in relation to middle-aged people



24%

in relation to young adults

More than their fair share of public health



32%

in relation to older people



16%

in relation to young adults



15%

in relation to middle-aged people

More than their fair share of government benefits



33%

in relation to young adults



25%

in relation to older people



15%

in relation to middle-aged people

It was felt that access to housing, health, education and economic security were about fairness and equality, and not only age.

'I don't think issues of unfairness come primarily from age. A lot of it has to be socioeconomic.'

Young adult

'Life is different for everyone. Finances, health and stability drives our age groups' lifestyle.'

Older person

Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) research indicates that older people are wealthier than middle-aged people: 'By 2010 the median wealth of the 65 to 74 age group had overtaken the median wealth of those aged 45 to 54. This reflects the very strong growth in median wealth between 2002 and 2018 for the 65 to 74 age group.'⁴

The same research suggests that this is because wealth accumulates over a lifetime, through employment, savings, home ownership and superannuation balances. But is this another trajectory that is being disrupted? Rates of home ownership (one of the pillars of wealth and retirement in Australia), are decreasing across all age cohorts.⁵ While the reasons for this are beyond the scope of this research, participants also consistently raised access to home ownership and precarious employment as contributing to inequality, making it harder for younger people to enjoy the same level of perceived affluent retirement as previous generations.

'If you want to get to adulthood in the same way that my parents did, you certainly have to be pretty proactive, because things are difficult in some senses.'

Young adult

'It's much, much harder these days compared to older people who found it much easier. Everything seems constructed to benefit older people or middle-aged people rather than young people. There's a lot of factors operating against them in society. The employment area is particularly precarious. It affects me because it affects my son.'

Older person

This narrative was also questioned by some older participants, who spoke of their own difficulties in buying a house.

'The price of a house is so expensive, but they forget it was expensive then. We didn't earn as much. It took a long time.'

Older person

'It took 2 generations to pay off a house.'

Older person

Did you know?

2021 Per Capita research has found that the lifetime cost of owning a home has increased by 130% over the last 30 years.

- A house bought in 1970 cost a 'Silent Generation' family an average 11.2% of their gross income over the course of their mortgage.
- A house bought in 1985 entailed an average repayment cost of 19.5% of gross incomes over the life of the mortgage.
- A family who bought a house in 2000, with an estimated 9 more years left on their mortgage, will spend an estimated 25.5% of their gross income on repaying the loan.⁶

The focus on intergenerational tension may conceal the policies and frameworks that potentially contribute to these changes.

'I don't think the media paints a realistic picture or connects them [the age groups] in any way because we are mostly all concerned about the same thing but [the media] makes it out to be that we are all fighting different battles. I don't think it's useful because it divides an already divided group of people, which then fuels hate and discrimination towards each other because of the different stories we see in the media.'

Young adult

It also elides the differences within age groups.

'Some older people are relatively well off and some are facing financial difficulties – rise of homelessness among older people. Harder to generalise, [it's a] question of resources, not just a question of age but a question of economic means.'

Middle-aged person

A few participants stated that not all older people experience financial security, particularly older women.

'New poor and new homeless are older women – not everyone who is old is well off.'

Older person

Regardless of the reasons given, there was agreement across age groups that achieving housing and employment-related markers of adulthood and success had changed, and that this has implications for how people live. These different milestones are being realised with new political and economic circumstances, and this is linked to a concept of emerging adulthood and an extended period of young adulthood.

(b) Our connections and relationships

**Finding
8**

**The generations have much in common,
but there are also tensions.**



Age is not the main criterion people use when choosing friends. More than half of Australians (57%) believe they have more in common with people outside their age group than within it.

'In my opinion, age is completely irrelevant to a friendship and is never something I've considered in any of my friendships.'

Young adult

Younger adults agreed with this statement more than older adults did, and middle-aged adults disagreed the most – only 37% agreed with the statement that they 'have more in common with [my] own age group'.⁷ Instead, for people in middle age, connections across a range of ages were seen as easy, despite negative media stereotypes.

'I have friends older and younger, if you have common interests and bonds, it's not hard to take that step.'

Middle-aged person

'The media amplifies our differences, but this is not so in reality. I have friends of all ages, genders and get along with a variety of people. This is not reflected in media, which is more negative.'

Middle-aged person

Many of these relationships are forged in the workplace.

'Through my work, I have a number of relationships with people of different age groups. I find that in spite of our age differences, our interests in what is going on in the world, along with shared experiences can often unite us unexpectedly.'

Young adult

'I cannot say that I have had meaningful relationships with groups other than my own age, until I entered middle age, when I started to value the skills and energies of people in my subordinate teams at work. For many years thereafter, I took some pride, and derived much joy, from identifying, selecting, nurturing and counselling young talent and in moulding that talent into functionally capable teams at work.'

Older person

Australians identified work, raising families or volunteering as important sources of intergenerational connections. Some spoke of the importance of these connections as a way of exchanging knowledge.

'There is an obligation for a collaborative approach so what they've learned is not lost.'

Middle-aged person

Australians are far more likely to focus on positive and fulfilling relationships with people of other generations, rather than on divisions.

'I do tend to gravitate towards people who have similar interests. For instance, I am less likely to be friends with someone who has a family and is big on family issues.'

Young adult

‘There is a lot of value in interacting with young people. I know lots of lovely young people and you’re proud to know you’ll leave the world to them eventually.’

Older person

It was not only young adults who questioned age-related assumptions about relationships. Older people also spoke of the relationships with the younger adults in their lives, and of the importance of these connections.

‘I have a happy and respectful relationship with the young and middle-aged groups. We depend on each other, share our knowledge and experiences.’

Older person

‘I have much younger friends, older friends, same age friends and friends of the opposite gender – it is all about the connection with people rather than age or gender.’

Older person

These connections are strong: not even the COVID-19 pandemic had a demonstrable impact on how we see each other and our connections.



70%

Most (70%) adults said the pandemic had not changed the way they see people of other ages.



20%

23% of young adults said it had made them feel closer to people of other ages, as we had ‘faced something together’.⁸

'There are commonalities that we share across life stages in terms of basic things we can relate to one another with. A lot of my colleagues are significantly older, one is 70, we go out and have drinks and have a great time taking the piss out of people we work with. We find things we enjoy, make fun of, share common experiences ... you can always find commonality.'

Young adult

'I do think that people from different age groups can have the same roles ... because we all have the same decisions to make, and they can for the most part be made whenever we happen to come across them.'

Young adult

Shared goals are important, and age becomes irrelevant when people unite for a common cause.

'When we unite in search of a higher cause, for example, the bushfires, I got to see the Rural Fire Service – the composition is diverse, it's all walks of life and age groups, all united in this desire to help the community. And I reflect on that community and the way we came together ... there is an idea there is something bigger than us that it is worth coming together for. It helped us recognise there are bigger forces at play than just what exists in our own world.'

Young adult

'I've gone travelling and ended up with a group of young ones, 20 or 22, going down the Mekong River, I was by myself and there was a whole group of them. When you're travelling, everybody pulls together.'

Older person

All age groups were seen as contributing to the economy and community in different but valuable ways.



Did you know?

Intergenerational connections can help combat ageist attitudes.⁹

Surveyed Australians who often spend time with young adults as friends were:¹⁰

- more than 3 times as likely to agree they are 'good listeners' (46%) than those who never spend time with young adults in this way (13%)
- 3 times more likely to say they 'have a great work ethic' (51%) than those who never spend time with them in this way (17%)
- more than twice as likely to say they are 'polite and respectful' (49%) than those who never spend time with them in this way (21%).

The data supports that spending time often with young adults also decreases negativity towards them. For example, only 37% of the total sample surveyed who often spend time with young people as friends agree that they are selfish/self-centred, compared to 67% of those who never spend time with young adults as friends.

Spending time with older people in family and social settings also correlates with increased positivity towards them. This finding concurs with other research on the role of fostering intergenerational relationships in countering ageism.¹¹

Did you know?

The 'invisibility' of older people is connected to reduced opportunities for intergenerational interaction.

IPSOS research conducted for the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety also found that there is a perception of older people as being invisible and that part of this invisibility is due to the absence of older people in the workforce, meaning that there are fewer opportunities for younger and older people to interact.

Participants (aged 18–55) also noted that there are limited opportunities to interact with older people in daily life, unless they lived near older family members and had strong relationships.¹²

(c) Australians want to share what they can and give support across generations. It's not about burdens and obligations

Many Australians saw levels of responsibility and expectations as key differences across the age groups. While these views are predicated on the assumed roles associated with the 3 adult age groups, these were not homogenous.

'I think the expectations of society is one of the major differences in the 3 age groups as well as life experiences.'

Young adult

'The older generation has a lot to offer. Take the word obligation out, it's about sharing the wealth of what they've learned along the way. If we don't pass these things back to generations, we lose our identity and who we are.'

Middle-aged person

'I don't think it's driven so much by age, but naturally the types of things you give and take at different ages change. When younger you take more people's time and parents' money, but when older you're taking opportunities to make money by starting businesses or investing in things. And what you give back may just naturally become a flip by raising kids and investing in your own kids.'

Older person





**It is just generalisations.
If one person in the
generation does it then
the whole generation
supposedly does it?’**

Young adult

Although this was not a universal view, most Australians do not consider intergenerational relationships and expectations to be burdensome. Instead, they spoke of how important and valued their roles made them feel, and the pleasure and joy these relationships provided.

Yes there is an expectation from my wife and children to be the glue in the family and to help solve problems and provide assistance as practicable. I feel very important, happy and supportive.

Older person

My family is of utmost importance. I'll do anything humanly possible for them. Definitely [there is] the expectation to help with my grandson, but that's not a chore, just a great pleasure.

Older person

However, some acknowledged that caring responsibilities could be onerous, and there were relationships that elicited ambivalence.

'My wife and I are committed to providing the best quality of life for her parents who at 98 and 93 years old can sometimes be quite demanding. As a realist I know our responsibilities will be unburdened somewhat after their passing and our own lives will become more focused on our future and retirement. We may decide to relocate or travel more or just stay here but at least we get to choose.'

Middle-aged person

'Wishing [my mother with dementia-related illness] the best outcome before her time passes. Doing [her] washing, cooking, taking her to appointments etc is hard work but comes out as a positive as well for me. Anyway, everyone is different.'

Middle-aged person

'I have family relationships with my parents and extended family and am friends with some of their friends. I have family relationships with some older adults, but a lot of this is love and obligation. I enjoy their wisdom and stories, but sometimes find their intolerance annoying.'

Young adult



(d) Australians reject the concept of generations ('I'm an individual')

Generations are ways of categorising people based on when they were born or 'came of age', and are often used to explain how people behave, think and feel.¹³ Generational categories referred to in this report include Baby Boomer (born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) and Millennials (1981–1996).

In this study, few, if any, participants identified with a particular generation, and those who did tended to do so only after prompting. These were most likely to identify as 'Boomers'.

'This generation, the Baby Boomer generation, is the first generation where women and men have both worked. We have superannuation, lots of money to spend and advertising targeting us. We're lucky to be Baby Boomers, it's the best generation.'

Older person

'I am a Baby Boomer and influenced by growing up in the 60s and 70s, having a free university education, being able to buy a house and to keep up with technological changes.'

Older person

Instead, many Australians emphasised their individuality and their rejection of generational generalisations.

'We are all individuals. Yes, you may have certain characteristics of Gen X or Y based on your age group, but it does not mean that the roles are the same. Some like to be married young, some don't. Some like to go to university and some prefer to be a tradesperson. Some like to settle down by a certain age and have a family and some prefer to kick their shoes and have a wanderlust.'

Middle-aged person

This dismissal of generational pigeonholes is consistent with research which questions the belief that people can be '... reliably classified into generational groups, and, importantly, that there are demonstrable differences between such groups.'¹⁴ Participants attributed perceived differences between age groups mostly to factors such as 'life experience' and 'perspective'.

'I believe that life experiences make the differences in [age] groups.'

Middle-aged person

'Each of the age groups has different needs and wants purely because of their age.'

Older person

Generations may be an obvious and convenient way of categorising and explaining age-related differences, but they are not necessarily valid or benign. Their use glosses over the complexities of dynamic historical and social conditions and the changes wrought by age and ageing, and conceal the 'complexities inherent to both individuals and the environments in which they operate.'¹⁵ They are deterministic and ahistorical, suggesting 'that historical context only influences individuals up to a certain (early) point in their development'.¹⁶ When this language is normalised and used by institutions and policy-based organisations it can also legitimise 'the use of generational labels and associated age stereotypes in discourse and decision-making.'¹⁷

While some participants spoke of the changes they had seen over their lifetime, none of these could be seen as having impacts only on one generation.

'Reflecting on all the events and all the advancements that have changed our lives in that time: from moon landings to wars; from recessions to booms, from reference books to computers, from living friends to passed friends, from social ignorance to more inclusive equality, from a letter with a stamp to social media, from conservation cruelty to climate change, from bandages to heart transplants. These are just a few examples of evolution in my lifetime and it's my guess that those experiences would have others consider me as old.'

Older person

Did you know?

The National Seniors Association (NSA) 2021 report, *Worry about the younger generation: Older Australians intergenerational solidarity*, found considerable empathy and care in the way older Australians spoke of current and future challenges for younger people. In particular, they identified:

- the impacts of structural changes contributing to housing unaffordability, access to education, irregular employment and climate change
- that portrayals of intergenerational conflict over resources are unfair to both older and younger Australians.¹⁸



◀ If you talk to young ones, they will say it's the old ones sucking the oxygen. If you talk to the middle-aged, they will say it's the young. If you talk to old [people] it's both of them! To me everyone is pulling their weight, no one is an oxygen thief. Young ones are doing their bit. Each group does their own bit.'

Older person

(e) Intergenerational empathy

Given the narratives heralding intergenerational conflict (section 5. 1), a significant finding of this research was the degree of empathy that all age groups expressed about what the different age groups experience. Most people in every age group understood the challenges faced by people in other age groups.

In particular, the challenges confronting young adults featured in all discussions, such as the perceived negative impacts of social media.

'When I was at school, the internet had just started being used, we didn't have apps and smart phones and things. Social issues these days – kids are getting bullied a lot more because they have access to electronic devices. Even if you leave school the bullying follows you because of these devices and things like Facebook. Younger kids have a lot more social issues than we did.'

Young adult

'Personally, I think it's harder to be younger. Social media and everything so in your face. When I was younger, I was very naïve to what was going on in the world, just lived within my own means and what was happening in my own world. Now with social media we are deeper integrated in one another's lives than we ever have been. They're constantly comparing themselves.'

Middle-aged person

'Young adults also have struggles of their own. Real estate has become a luxury and social media throws challenges that older generations didn't have to deal with. This generation seems to be entertained by technology, weekend gatherings and semi virtual relationships.'

Older person



Social and economic challenges were also mentioned.

'More needs to be done to support folks in their young adulthood because they're the future. The job market, education, life in general is quite tough and getting expensive. There is so much pressure on young folks ... it's not easy.'

Older person

'I feel sorry for the younger generation. It's so confusing, so hard to get a job, buy a house, so much going on, youth suicide. Maybe it has always happened, and we didn't hear about it.'

Older person

Some challenges were seen to affect specific age groups.

'If you are older, if you are 70 or 80, you can't easily go back into the workforce. Older people are more dependent, in a situation like that. Things can be tougher for them. If they are on a pension, there is not much they can do about that ... but every age group has challenges.'

Young adult

'There is a lot of pressure on the young adults today, so they deserve to have some time out. Middle-aged adults also have a lot of pressure with bringing up families today ... middle-aged adults need to enjoy life too.'

Older person

This is one aspect of the broader empathy but also intergenerational contract within families. For some, this means providing financial assistance.

'It's about wealth. If your parents are wealthy and they are able to support you, I don't think it's wrong for them to do that. I think it varies from situation to situation. It varies from family to family because some families are wealthier than others. But if your parents are not earning as much, I don't think it's fair for you to expect them to help you or pay for certain things.'

Young adult

'It's a matter of resources. Some are in a better economic position and can help younger people.'

Older person

'I spend responsibly and have a good life. The kids will be looked after when I leave this earth. And I'd say tis the same for my friends - they will make sure their kids are looked after too when they're gone.'

Older person

'I think it's a good thing to leave your children something. It's a blessing to be able to do that.'

Older person

For a few participants, the intergenerational bargain meant building a multigenerational home.

'For me logistically, I'm at a place I thought they'd be gone out of the house. Now we're actually thinking about building ... more of a multigenerational home and including older parents that might have to stay as well. Years ago, you'd think, "yeah they're 18, they're gone". I know they might not want to stay with me, but they just can't afford not to stay with us.'

Middle-aged person

People in every age group displayed an understanding of the challenges that people in other age groups face.

'I guess old people in some senses are vulnerable, but there are some good protections these days. A big thing now is super, so I guess as people come into retirement, I guess they will be financially more prepared. There are elements that are harder – nursing homes and things seem pretty rough at the moment. I think there is definitely a focus on making older adulthood easier, especially as people live longer.'

Young adult

One young woman spoke of her comparatively more comfortable life and opportunities, aware that she had escaped the pressures and expectations her mother had experienced.

'When I have conversations with my mum, I realise there was nothing that was there for her. She had so little – there was pressure to study, straight to Uni and then after Uni find a job. Whereas for me it been easier. I started work at 15, I was earning my own money at 15. Most of my friends were also working at 15. I think it's easier to come up these days.'

Young adult

Overall, Australians did not accept that age groups could be burdens or obligations but suggested that each age group has valid expectations of each other, and that this is part of the intergenerational contract.

'It depends on your family situation. If I had the funds, I would certainly help my kids buy a house, but I don't think it's fair to expect my kids – I would never rely on my kids and I would never want them to help me out in my life. But if I had the funds, I would quite happily help them out. They are my kids. I would never expect them to help me out – maybe when I am 90 and need a retirement home, maybe then. Other than that, no.'

Young adult

'My energies nowadays are focused towards helping my children establish strong careers and financial stability as they raise their own children.'

Older person

Most Australians agreed that responsibilities and obligations are intergenerational – no one generation was seen as having less responsibility or as being more of a burden on another generation. However, some tensions were evident. These are discussed in the following section.

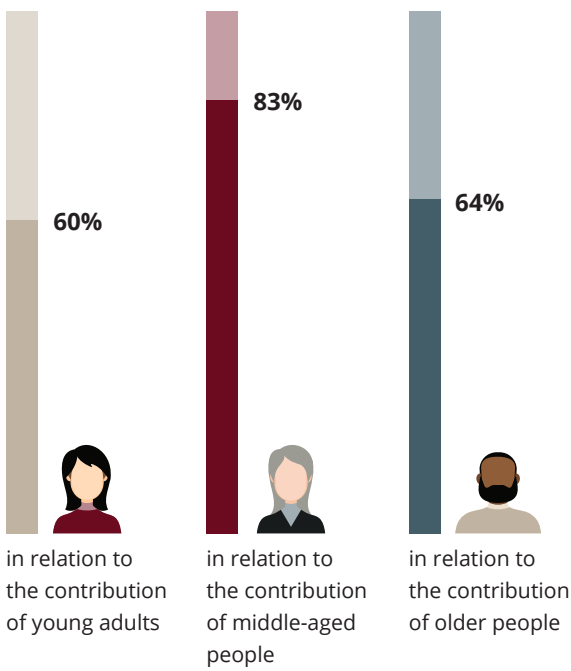
5.2 What creates division and conflict

(a) Conflict is a stereotype

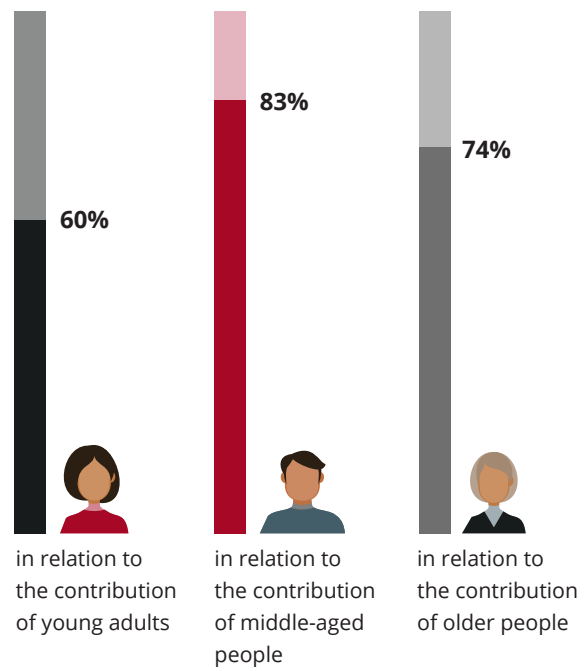
This research suggests that age-related conflict and division exist but are not prevalent in Australia.

Most participants felt that all age groups:

'Make a valuable contribution to economy'

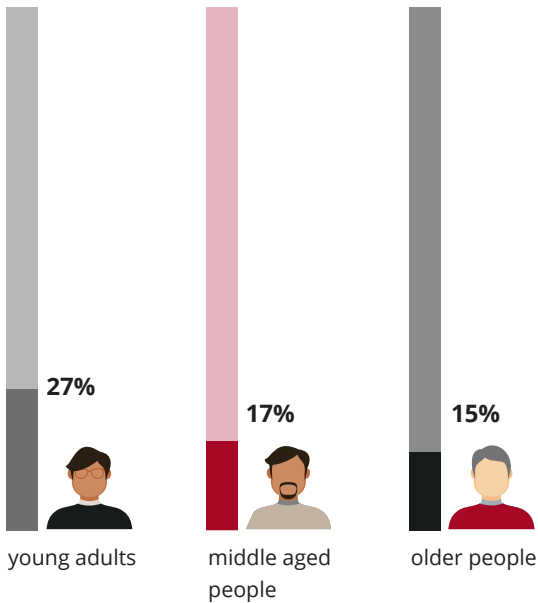


'Make a valuable contribution to community'

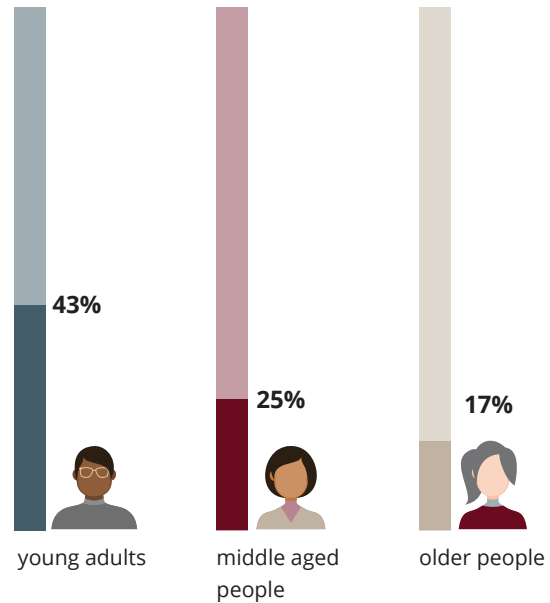


And disagreed with the statements that:

'If they have the same work skills, young adults should be prioritised over older people for employment opportunities'



'Today's older generation is leaving the world in a worse state than it was before'



(b) Acceptance of (some) ageist stereotypes

While participants focused on the connections across age groups and within families, and shared purposes and values, some tensions emerged during the discussions.

One participant considered intergenerational conflict as the norm; an expected and inevitable part of age relations.

'Of course, there is conflict between age groups, and that is the nature of life. I had an expectation when I was in the workforce that younger people would pressure me from behind to get older people out of the way so they could get into the chair. It's always been that way, unchanged for millennia.'

Older person

Most tensions across the generations also arose from stereotypes, such as that of entitled or lazy young adults.

'There is a lot of opportunity for young people, and I think that is also perennial. Opportunity and reward for young people have always been the same and is a matter of those who pursue and seize it versus those who don't and lean on the government.'

Older person

Others mentioned hard-working older adults who deserve the rewards of their hard work and frugality.

'I think the younger ones think they can just live for the day. They don't worry about the future or putting money aside. But our generation always saved, we worked hard, we put money away, so we'd always have money. I know for my husband and I the whole time we've been married we've never had a problem with bills because we've always budgeted, we've always both worked 2 jobs and that's what we did.'

Older person

'A lot of young people are passionate about [climate change]. It is their future, and they want to protect it and they are quite vocal about that. A lot of people think that the older generation really don't care and are not thinking of the future. There is that bit of tension there.'

Young adult

'I think we can't really blame them or give the fault to them, because we only really started talking about climate change or global warming in the past 10 years. That's because we started seeing the effects in more recent times, to be able to understand the consequences of it.'

Middle-aged person

'My daughter does. She blames me. It accumulates doesn't it, it's not just our generation that did it. It has a whole lot of factors that should be blamed, not just us.'

Older person





**I don't think
there are
conflicts per se,
just different
opinions.'**

Middle-aged person

Another tension was the perception of generational indifference to the existential threat of climate change.

Some Australians saw levels of responsibility and expectations as key differences across the age groups. These views are predicated on the assumed roles associated with the 3 adult age groups.

'I think their level of responsibilities makes the groups different. Young adults often just have themselves to think about, whereas middle-aged adults have [to] think about their families. The older adults sometimes wish their families would think about them.'

Young adult

'Levels of responsibility and wealth. Developing independence. Some, lots or no responsibility for family members. Life wisdom.'

Older person

Some people defined differences across age groups as stereotypes linked to the perceived vulnerabilities of each life stage.

'I think young people have more fun and take more risk, middle-aged people try to find security, and that older people are in some ways suffering and ignored.'

Young adult

'I think we do see some instances of young people blaming older people, but I think a lot of the focus is on solving the problem as opposed to putting blame on one group. I think old people, pensioners and those sorts of people do worry about energy bills, I think there is some conflict there, but people try to be more forward looking about it.'

Young adult

In line with the broad acceptance of a traditional life trajectory, some people defined differences in the context of what they perceived to be natural at the 3 adult life stages.

'[Differences in] the amount of freedom and responsibility placed on individuals; the degree of risk which is manageable; physical and psychological capacities.'

Young adult

Others thought that there were different needs associated with each life stage.

‘Different sections of life have different meaning and purposes. The way of living is different.’

Middle-aged person

‘Each of the age groups have different needs and wants purely because of their age.’

Older person

A few young adults thought that ‘freedom’ meant different things to people at varying life stages.

‘I think the activities at each point in life is what really differentiates the age groups. For example, during your young adult years you’re a bit more free to do what you like but at the same are working a lot to save and prepare for children that come with being a middle-aged adult. During middle age you’ve managed to establish more of a family but you’re trying to keep it all together (financially and successfully raising children), which may mean less time going out and more time at home. Finally, during the later years, you’ve managed to raise your kids and again have more freedom – but may struggle to necessarily know what to do with yourself now, and have to find happiness in other ways (i.e., not work).’

Young adult

While a range of views were expressed on differences between the age groups, Australians generally rejected the idea of explicit intergenerational conflict.

‘In person, when you are interacting with people, it’s a lot more human and personal and people are less likely to form those stereotypes or act in that way. People for the most part want to get along.’

Young adult

When tensions or disagreements were articulated, they often referred to economic or social conditions that were seen to drive generational inequality.

‘In some sense it’s a class divide. There is some truth – there a fair number of older people who are relatively wealthy, but I don’t think its universal. Older people tend to have more money, and younger people less, but not all so. Money can cause some tension. It doesn’t apply to everyone in every age group, but there’s is some tension there.’

Young adult

‘Rising costs ultimately disenfranchise a whole generation. Everyone over the age of 55 refers to us as the avocado generation, as if all we care about is avocado on toast. They think “I didn’t have the avocado toast I saved for a house instead” – yeah great but houses were a fraction of the price. It’s like they forget the conditions were very different and we live in a very different time economically, socially and culturally.’

Young adult

Yet Australians are aware of how these changing conditions will affect their options, choices and lives, and of the possible tensions that may arise from this. There was an awareness among some adults that their children face a different future to theirs, with different options.

The Commission heard a few older adults discussing staying in their homes and building bigger houses to facilitate multi-generational households. This was seen as one solution to increased housing costs, younger adults staying at home longer for reasons including education and housing unaffordability, and to address the responsibilities for older parents.

The Commission heard criticisms of policies that are seen to fund the lifestyles of one generation against another.

‘Unfairness comes from socioeconomics not age.’

Young adult

‘I think there is some genuine conflict around things like negative gearing. Young people are opposed to that because they see it as making property more expensive.’

Young adult





There is not that much conflict, in comparison to how it is portrayed in the media, and how this divide is portrayed. It is important to be conscious of that. There is a lot of manufactured division and controversy and conflict. It is something that was very clear to me.'

Young adult

'I think it's unfair to expect young people to support their parents, or vice versa. It's very situational. I think these issues should be dealt with on a much bigger scale, with government policy. A lot is about government policy. People's ability to support their parents or their children differs a lot, I think it's unfair to have expectations.'

Young adult

'There will be others who have trod a different path, sometimes through no fault of their own.'

Older person

Participants across age groups acknowledge that there is more at play here.

'You can't look at things just through the prism of age. There are other factors intersecting it, some people have more, and some don't.'

Older person

Many Australians question the ageist stereotypes and attitudes that underpin assumptions about fairness and equality.

Where tensions exist, they are about perceived and real inequities in wealth and access to resources. These tensions are also informed by stereotypes about generations.

Australians dismiss the idea of generations and the assumption of conflict generated by intergenerational obligations and burdens. Instead, they prioritise shared values and commitments, and demonstrate an awareness of the 'alternative causal stories'¹⁹ beyond stereotypes of 'self-interested, unfairly resourced older generations',²⁰ and self-indulgent, spendthrift young people. So, while there may be no 'generation war', there is some tension, fomented by narratives that reinforce age-based stereotypes.

5.3 Age should have nothing to do with it, but ageism does

Age and ageism are complex concepts. People may believe that 'age has nothing to do with it', and it shouldn't. However, the evidence suggests that ageism rather than age has more to do with their choices and rights, expressed through exclusion, stereotyping and inequality. It drives discrimination. It is mobilised to spur narratives of intergenerational conflict and competition for resources, particularly through media accounts of scarcity and greed, at the expense of the shared values and connections that unite most Australians.

Many challenged these portrayals, focusing instead on the complex demands of changing roles and socioeconomic challenges.

‘Ensuring inclusion and diversity in the world is paramount to me.’

Middle-aged adult

Australians across all age groups understood that this conflict was media driven, and that stories that pitted one generation against another were overstated.

For many Australians, the media played a crucial role in these age-based divisions.

‘The stories about older people and about younger people are not for young adults. They are attack pieces – reactionary, trying to make these claims to get people to read and click on headlines.’

Young adult

Age is not the issue – ageism is. Age should not affect how human rights are realised. Age should not influence the roles people can have at different stages of life, or the value ascribed to these roles; but when age is a proxy for ageism it can have devastating consequences on how people can realise their rights to employment, to housing, to healthcare, to education.





Spotlight 4

What's ageism got to do with age discrimination?

Ageism and age discrimination are connected but different concepts.

Ageism affects all adults, albeit in different ways, as they move through life stages and roles. Ageism can be manifested through stereotypes and attitudes that affect individuals and can underpin age discrimination.

Age discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another person in a similar situation, because of their age. It entails ageist practices and behaviours, which in turn arise from ageist stereotypes, attitudes, and assumptions.²¹

Discrimination can manifest differently according to the age group and the perceptions and stereotypes that are used.²²

Ageism and other forms of discrimination

People can also experience discrimination because of attributes other than age. When ageism intersects with sex, race, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, health, socioeconomic status or social class, it can compound disadvantage,²³ and amplify inequality. Ageism is 'not only harmful, but it can also 'exacerbate other forms of disadvantage such as those related to gender, race and disability, compounding their effects on health and wellbeing.'²⁴

For example, older persons with disabilities experience discrimination and disadvantage not only because of disability, but also because of ageist stereotypes and assumptions.²⁵

In another example, there is evidence that the interactions between ageism and sexism in the health system can result in older women receiving different access to treatment and preventative care than older men.²⁶ Similarly, in the labour market, women are more likely than men to be affected by the 'disadvantages of being too young or too old.'²⁷

According to WHO, while there may be 'as many intersections as there are forms of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination', there is limited research exploring the intersection between ageism and other forms of bias.²⁸ In Australia, organisations such as the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA) have called for research that considers how ageism affects people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.²⁹

What does the law say about age discrimination in Australia?

The *Age Discrimination Act, 2004* (Cth) (the Act) outlines the areas of age discrimination covered by legislation in Australia including access to education, employment, accommodation and services.³⁰

The Act aims to 'promote equality before the law for all people, regardless of age; eliminate unlawful age discrimination in the community; act as a catalyst for attitudinal change; and provide individuals with an avenue to make complaints of discrimination.'³¹

The Act also contains the specific objective of responding to 'demographic change by removing barriers to older people participating in society ... and changing negative stereotypes about older people.'³²

The Act makes it unlawful to treat people unfairly because of their age in many areas of public life, including employment, education and accommodation. It also covers services, such as banking and insurance, services provided by government departments, transport or telecommunication services, professional services, such as those provided by lawyers, doctors or tradespeople, and services provided by restaurants, shops or entertainment venues.³³


Discrimination based on age can be subtle or overt, and could include situations where a person, because of their age has been:

- refused employment
- dismissed
- not offered or denied a promotion, transfer or other employment-related benefits
- given less favourable terms or conditions of employment
- denied equal access to training opportunities
- selected for redundancy
- scaled back work hours against their wishes
- questioned about retirement or an expectation that the employee will retire
- allocated menial tasks
- bullied or harassed based on their age.

What participants said about age discrimination

Though the Commission's research focused on capturing ageist attitudes, some participants did make statements about discrimination. These were mainly focused on the areas of employment, service provision and healthcare.

In focus groups, young adults made a clear connection between ageism and age discrimination, and saw that it applied to the workplace and to older people. They did not see it as applying to other age groups and other contexts. Some young people conflated ageism with age discrimination, particularly in the context of work and discrimination at work.



'It's discrimination, a workplace thing.'

Young adult

'I've definitely heard of ageism – it applies more to professional environments. At [my work] we would hire specific age groups ... people think [older] people are not computer literate.'

Young adult

When middle-aged participants discussed how their age group was affected by ageist attitudes, they also described discrimination in employment and in the workplace.

'[It's] harder to get a job over 55.'

Middle-aged person

'The opportunities [are] more geared towards the younger section which makes sense however, the discrimination towards the older segment is really surprising and unfair.'

Middle-aged person

This is consistent with recent COTA research that found a third of older Australians have experienced some form of age-related discrimination, most commonly as employment-related discrimination (26%), and that this measure has increased significantly from 22% in 2018.³⁴ Those who had experienced employment-related discrimination were most often told they were too qualified, that they were too old (31% compared to 21% in 2018) or were simply refused employment.³⁵

Ageism can be experienced as assumptions about physical, cognitive and social abilities, lack of respect, being ignored and receiving unwanted 'help'.³⁶ The Commission's survey data shows most people across all age groups reported experiencing ageism as 'having assumptions made about me'. While this may sound quite broad, during the focus group discussions, participants suggested such assumptions have impacts on people's ability to work, feel included and receive services, and can often influence the healthcare that they receive.

'There is discrimination against younger people. My [family member] is not yet 30, running his own business, and it is such a struggle to get people to accept he has the knowledge, skill, drive and determination to act as a supplier to other business. I stepped in and represented the business and doors opened.'

Older person

In the workplace

Older and younger workers experience ageism and discrimination of different kinds, which have diverse impacts on their ability to obtain and retain work.

The Commission’s survey data found that middle-aged adults are more likely to report being turned down for a job or position (35%), compared with 29% of younger adults and 17% of older adults.³⁷

International research suggests that even though young adults are less likely to report experiencing discrimination in the recruitment process, they are more likely to report being ignored or condescended to in a workplace environment.³⁸

The Commission’s 2016 *Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination against Older Australians and Australians with Disability* found that age discrimination can occur throughout the employment cycle, resulting in older Australians feeling ‘shut out’ of recruitment, receiving fewer professional development opportunities, or perceiving that they are targeted for redundancy during periods of organisational restructure.³⁹

These findings are supported by extensive global research showing that while employers may consider older workers to be loyal and reliable, with strong interpersonal skills, they are also likely to view them as rigid, resistant to learning and to using new technologies, and as less competent and productive than younger employees.⁴⁰

‘In the workplace, old people are set in their ways, they don’t like change. Not all of them, just a few I have come across that don’t like to change.’

Young adult





The older you are, compared to a younger person, you're knocked back for jobs. Employees labelled as 'older' are seen as not being quick or smart enough, whereas the younger are supposedly smarter and brighter and can think on their feet quickly and also [are seen as more] cost effective by employer.'

Middle-aged person



Did you know?

A 2017 report by the University of South Australia found that there is a strong, persistent perception that older workers are not suitable for employment. More than a third of workers over 50 have experienced age discrimination in the workforce.⁴¹

Even though the Act prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of age,⁴² unchecked age-based stereotypes can and do inform hiring and recruitment practices.⁴³ They can underpin workplace policies about who is offered training and professional development, and assumptions about who is offered redundancies.⁴⁴ Ageism informs attitudes about a person's competence and whether they are considered to be a 'good fit' for the organisation.⁴⁵

In this way, ageist attitudes and assumptions can result in discrimination, and become a barrier to participation, access, and equality.

Did you know?

The 2021 joint Commission and Australian HR Institute survey, *Employing and retaining older workers*, found that:

- Almost half (46.7%) of Australian businesses say they are either reluctant to recruit older workers or 'may be' reluctant.
- In 2021, 28% of Australian businesses define older worker as aged 61–65, and 17% consider those aged 51–54 to be older workers.
- Despite this, 12.3% said more than half their workforce is aged over 50 (an increase of 6.3% since 2018).⁴⁶

Older workers take much longer than younger workers to find new employment.⁴⁷ In Australia, unemployed people aged over 55 spend on average 68 weeks looking for work, more than twice the length of time out of the workforce for those aged 15–24, and older workers are more likely to experience long term or permanent unemployment.⁴⁸

This trend was also reflected in statements by participants.

'If you are older, if you are 70 or 80, you can't easily go back into the workforce. Older people are more dependent, in a situation like that. Things can be tougher for them. If they are on a pension, there is not much they can do about that.'

Younger person

Did you know?

Older people are exiting Jobseeker to the Age Pension, rather than a job.⁴⁹ The increase in the age pension qualifying age to 67 is likely to reinforce JobSeeker functioning as a pre-age pension payment for some older Australians.

Inclusion and exclusion

Ageism and age discrimination affect people's access to employment opportunities and their right to work. Excluding people from the workforce affects their economic security and, potentially, their ability to realise other rights.⁵⁰ Ageism and age discrimination contribute to, and have impacts on, lack of inclusion.⁵¹ In the focus groups, this was raised in relation to older age.

'In the news the elderly do not have a great deal of input. Commentary, political views and considerations are inclined to be by the middle-aged groups, the young are more inclined to activism and are concerned about government decisions and lack of immediate action. The elderly seem to be older than they really need to be, almost in care to prepare for the inevitable.'

Older person

The perception that older people do not have many meaningful life roles, or that they are limited to roles of declining importance, can contribute to their exclusion and experiences of discrimination, as they are, 'estranged from positions of power and authority, encouraged into the shadows where they assume volunteer positions and suffer an increased dependence on the magnanimity of others'.⁵² This perception was also evident in the focus groups.

'In social discussions on politics, young people's views are brushed aside at times I think that also applies to old people too. People my age think "old people are close-minded or racist and young people are open-minded" but some old people might see that as political correctness or craziness. Young people, and to some extent old people, are pushed to the side in those discussions.'

Young adult

'Older people seem to be excluded both by media and governments. The media and government are more sympathetic towards younger and middle-aged people.'

Older person

One older participant mentioned that older people, particularly women, become, 'invisible, like in a shop, not [being] served'. Another older person expressed feeling marginalised.

'[They] see us as unimportant, irrelevant sometimes – not everybody – but I do get the sense we haven't got a voice with a lot of things.'

Older person

Older adults can experience ageist attitudes as social exclusion and being condescended to or ignored. Valuing or devaluing the roles attached to each age group⁵³ can create age-based barriers which limit people's access to resources and opportunities and result in age discrimination.

Did you know?

Goal 3 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals aims to 'ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for people of all ages.' It can assist in the fight against age discrimination within health systems so people can enjoy their basic human right to the highest attainable standard of health and wellbeing as they age.⁵⁴

Health

Age discrimination in health can manifest in indirect ways. Older people, for example, are often assumed to be being unwell or unhealthy, and perceived as a burden on the healthcare system, and this was reflected in how participants discussed the portrayal of older people in the media.

'The majority of articles had to do with health. The majority of people over 65 are portrayed as having health issues.'

Older person

'I think that's when they think you are old, so automatically you have health issues.'

Older person

There is substantial international research that suggests ageism may inform who receives treatment and healthcare. A systematic review of healthcare papers showed that in 85% of 149 studies, age determined who received certain medical procedures or treatments.⁵⁵ Older people tend to be excluded from clinical trials, experience health rationing because they may be deemed too old for treatment or have symptoms, such as those indicating depression, dismissed as a normal feature of ageing.⁵⁶

Other studies show that young adults tend to be given preference over older adults in access to some treatments (for example transplants) and on waiting lists.⁵⁷ Other research suggests that younger people are seen as more deserving of, and receiving more, psychosocial support or mental health services.⁵⁸

Institutional ageism and discrimination

Ageism can be institutional, meaning ageist biases, assumptions and stereotypes are embedded in policies and legislation and in the way organisations and services operate. When institutional norms and strategies support stereotypes, this can lead to systemic age discrimination. Age stereotypes, including negative self-perceptions, are associated with many individual and societal impacts across healthcare, employment, education and training, and in policy settings.⁵⁹

A comprehensive body of research suggests that ageism is present in health and long-term care, in the workplace, the media, the legal system and other settings, such as housing, technology, financial institutions, emergency services and statistics and data.⁶⁰

'I was told I was too old to insure my car. I was told I shouldn't be driving a car like that at my age. I was told I was too old. My wife is younger than me and she had to insure it in her name.'

Older person

Some older participants spoke of struggling to afford health insurance premiums, which were seen as unfairly expensive for older people, but also a necessity as they aged.⁶¹

'The older you get, the more health problems you have, and the more expensive insurance gets, but if I stop paying, I could never get it again and would have to wait for years if I needed surgery.'

Older person

Research by WHO suggests that institutional ageism also affects younger people, particularly at work 'in terms of pay and benefits; the legal system where crimes committed by younger people tend to be perceived as more severe transgressions [deserving] harsher punishment than those committed by older offenders; and in politics where there is a tendency to deny or dismiss the voices and initiatives led by younger people.'⁶²

The relationship between ageism and age discrimination indicates that both must be challenged interpersonally and systemically.

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- 3 Chart 8, Appendix 255.
- 4 Roger Wilkins, Ferdi Botha, Esperanza Vera-Toscano and Mark Wooden, *The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 18* (Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research, HILDA Report, 2020).
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- 6 Matt Lloyd-Cape, *Generation Stressed: House Prices and the Cost of Living in the 21st Century* (Per Capita, Discussion Paper, July 2021) 5.
- 7 Chart 44, Appendix 275. Only 43% of participants agreed that they have more in common with people within their own age group than outside it. More younger adults (49%) agreed with this statement than older (43%). Connections within age groups were stronger among younger people – middle-aged people were the least likely to agree that they 'have more in common with [their] own age group' (37%).
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- 13 Cort W Rudolph, Rachel S Rauvola, David P Costanza and Hannes Zacher, 'Generations and Generational Differences: Debunking Myths in Organizational Science and Practice and Paving New Paths Forward' (2020) *Journal of Business and Psychology* 1.
- 14 'Generational categories are highly deterministic, suggesting that individuals "coming of age" at a particular time (i.e., members of the same cohort) all experience aging and development uniformly. With so many other demonstrable age-related and person-specific factors (e.g., social identities, personality, socioeconomic status) that have bearing on individuals' attitudes, values, and behaviors, as well as how these interact with contextual and environmental influences, the prospect of generations overriding all such explanations is implausible. Assuming otherwise wipes away a tremendous amount of potentially useful detail and heterogeneity.' Rudolph W Cort, Rachel S. Rauvola, David P Costanza and Hannes Zacher, 'Generations and Generational Differences: Debunking Myths in Organizational Science and Practice and Paving New Paths Forward' (2020) *Journal of Business and Psychology* 1.
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- 61 World Health Organization, *Response of the World Health Organization to the Call for Inputs by the Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of all Human Rights by Older Persons on 'Ageism and Age-Discrimination'* (2021).
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CHAPTER

6

**Conclusions and
ways forward**



CHAPTER

6

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6.1 What the research found

The Commission's research on ageism across the adult lifespan in Australia found that ageism affects all adults, albeit in different ways and across all age groups. This is consistent with international research findings that ageism affects people across age groups, including in early life stages.¹

The data builds a picture of the prevalence and nature of ageism in Australia. Ageist attitudes underpin many of the stereotypes and assumptions people hold about life roles, including at work and in relationships, and about ageing itself. Ageism can manifest through attitudes that affect individuals, are present across institutions and can underpin discrimination.

(a) There is limited research on the impacts of ageism on younger people

The Commission found that all age groups hold ageist attitudes and reported experiencing ageist attitudes, including young adults.

International and domestic research on ageism against older people highlights that this form of ageism is underpinned by assumptions that older people are somehow lacking due to their age.² It leads to age discrimination and impedes the realisation and full enjoyment of rights by older people.³

Ageism against younger people is far less researched and theorised. In line with preliminary findings by the Commission, there is evidence emerging that ageism can have negative impacts on young adults, for example in relation to employment, health and social care, and inclusion, and contributes to perceptions of an intergenerational divide.⁴

(b) Life roles and life trajectories

More people are following, or intending to follow, diverse life trajectories. Not all young women marry and have children in their 20s; middle-aged people are not all paying off mortgages and contemplating an empty nest. Some older people are studying, starting new businesses or even taking up extreme sports.

These are activities and milestones that may have once been accepted as essential and age specific, but, as the research participants discussed, this should no longer be the case.

(c) Ageism and intergenerational relationships

The Commission found that the 3 age groups have more things in common than things that separate them. Australians are predominantly aware of narratives that focus on intergenerational conflict. However, the data demonstrates that they view these as media driven rather than as an accurate reflection of how Australians regard other age groups and relationships between the generations.

While some signs of tensions were observed, the research highlights that, overall, there is a strong sense of intergenerational empathy across the 3 age groups. This provides evidence of a strong foundation for building intergenerational relationships and cohesion as a basis for countering ageist attitudes.

Increasing life expectancy and age-diverse societies mean it will become imperative to identify develop and implement strategies that counter ageism across age groups and support intergenerational cohesion.⁵

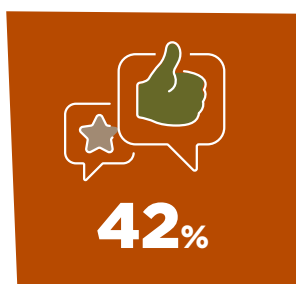
Did you know?

The Commission survey asked respondents (n = 2,440) to rate 8 possible strategies they thought would be most effective to combat ageism in Australia:⁶

- If ageing itself was seen as a more positive experience.
- If younger and older people had more opportunities to mix socially.
- If there was more educational/awareness of the positive aspects of each age group.
- If people were more aware of ageist language and behaviours.
- If younger and older people had more opportunities to mix in the workplace.
- If different age groups were more accurately portrayed in the media.
- If people were more aware of inaccurate age-based stereotypes.
- If ageism got more attention in the media.

Of these, the highest percentage of respondents (42%) agreed that 'if ageing itself was seen as a more positive experience', this would be the most effective way to counter ageism. Older people were more likely (53%) than other age groups to agree that this would be effective (compared to 44% middle-aged people and 33% young adults).

Top 3 strategies to counter ageism



If ageing itself was seen as a **more positive experience**



If there was more **education/awareness** of the positive aspects of each age group



If young adults and older people had more opportunities to **mix socially**

This suggests that a multifaceted approach could be used to counter ageist attitudes in Australia.

(d) Why do these findings matter?

These findings reveal that, like many of the attitudes that are usually considered to be universal, age-specific truths are in fact based on attitudes that perpetuate age-based stereotypes and assumptions. Ageist attitudes underpin expectations and opportunities about what is appropriate at age-related milestones.

This is potentially discriminatory. Challenging the idea of age as the defining criterion can reveal other factors and 'isms' that determine access to resources and fairness, and influence people's lives. Age, (like gender, childhood, race and disability, for example) does not 'of itself make certain rights hard to enjoy.' Instead, it is the ageism inherent in having a 'particular view of age' that limits the full enjoyment of these rights.⁷

Ageism can change how we view ourselves, can pit one generation against another, can devalue or limit the ability to benefit from what younger and older people can contribute and can reduce opportunities for health, longevity and wellbeing while also having far-reaching economic consequences.⁸ If ageism underpins policies and frameworks which determine access to basic rights such as housing, employment, education, and health, then it may lead to discrimination.

6.2 Ways forward

The key findings in this report highlight that ageist attitudes can underpin age discrimination. The following discussion suggests possible ways forward.

(a) Reducing ageism and age discrimination

One of the aims of the *Age Discrimination Act 2004* (Cth) is to eliminate discrimination against persons on the ground of age in many areas of public life. The relationship between ageism and age discrimination suggests that this needs to be approached systemically and interpersonally.

The scope of the research focused on ageism in the form of attitudes, in order to highlight the role they can play in ageist behaviours and also in underpinning age discrimination. More research could usefully be done to test strategies for reducing discrimination by tackling ageism.

There is a body of research on the experiences of older Australians when attitudes cross over to become behaviours, resulting in age discrimination. However, much less is known about the prevalence and nature of age discrimination across the adult lifespan, particularly in relation to young adults.

(b) Policies and laws to reduce ageism⁹

The WHO *Global Report on Ageism* proposes a number of strategies to reduce ageism:

- Creating a clear social norm that ageism is socially unacceptable. Being aware of the stance of one's community has been shown to impact the extent of prejudice one expresses, even when attitudes are stated privately and there is no possibility of criticism.
- Requiring people to change their behaviour, which can eventually also change people's underlying attitudes.
- Increasing diversity in the surrounding population (for example, in the workplace), which helps to shape the physical and sensory environment. This, in turn, can affect the degree of implicit bias that individuals exhibit.
- Laws regulating discrimination in the workplace can increase the presence of representatives of the protected groups, as well as prohibit the use of demeaning visual depictions of a particular group, which can lower implicit bias against members of that group.¹⁰

(c) Education and intergenerational initiatives

Another 2 strategies which are effective in reducing ageism are educational activities and intergenerational interventions.¹¹

A meta-analysis by Cornell University for WHO found that combining education with programs to foster and support intergenerational relationships is the most effective strategy in combatting ageist attitudes.¹²

Educational activities which challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about all age groups can reduce prejudice and bias and strengthen empathy, and can be included in both formal and non-formal education.¹³

The Commission's research identified 'if ageing itself was seen to be a more positive experience' as the top strategy to counter ageism. Taking an approach that includes both education and fostering intergenerational connections would contribute to implementing this strategy.

This supports the Cornell University finding that the best way to counter ageism is to combine educational activities with initiatives to foster intergenerational connections; and suggests it could form the basis of an anti-ageism campaign. This is consistent with previous research which concluded that amalgamating these 2 strategies is the most effective way to counter ageist attitudes.¹⁴

Interventions which bring people of different generations together can improve intergenerational relations and help reduce ageist prejudice and stereotypes, especially interpersonal ageism. Evidence suggests that such strategies are effective in reducing ageism against older people and show promise for reducing ageism against younger people.¹⁵

In relation to investigating potential campaigns and other strategies to counter ageism, it may be useful to review the effectiveness of strategies to counter other 'isms', which have a longer history of education campaigns and strategies, such as those to combat sexism and racism.

(d) Possible areas for further research

The prevalence and nature of ageism across the adult lifespan is less researched and understood than other forms of discrimination, such as sexism and racism.

The Commission's findings are a preliminary step towards building understanding of ageism in relation to young adults, middle-aged people and older people in Australia.

The research provides a basis for understanding how Australians view age and ageism and is a foundation for further research to remedy the gap in understanding ageism across age groups. The scope of this report is to provide a snapshot of ageism in Australia. It suggests issues that can be explored further in targeted research to identify how ageism drives inequality and perpetuates narratives of intergenerational conflict, which in themselves have the effect of stereotyping relationships across generations in terms of divisions.

While it is beyond the scope of this research to draw firm conclusions about ageism as a driver of elder abuse, this is an area that warrants further research.

There is also a need for further research in ageism and its relationship with other forms of discrimination across the lifespan, and how it exacerbates – or is exacerbated by – other inequalities. For while there may be, as the WHO has stated, 'many intersections as there are forms of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination', there is limited research exploring the intersection between ageism and other forms of bias.¹⁶

This research also found that while 70% of Australians overall did not agree that today's older generation is leaving the world in a worse state than it was before, young people were less likely to disagree with this statement. This topic provided the clearest indication of any tension across the generations and warrants further research.

The data indicates that the impacts of ageism are cumulative over the life course. This is an area that warrants further exploration in the Australian context. Developing a more detailed picture of ageism towards younger adults is key to establishing the prevalence of this problem and its impacts.¹⁷ For example, while there is research on specific types of ageism, such as benevolent ageism and self-directed ageism in relation to older people, little is known about whether and how young adults are also affected by these manifestations of ageist attitudes.

The Commission found a disconnection between attitudes about age, ageing and ageism in people across the adult lifespan. This can be considered in light of early research on ageism towards older people as a prejudice based on fear of one's future self, including our mortality.¹⁸ As this does not address ageism towards young adults, it is another area that warrants further examination.

There is also limited existing research available in relation to ageism and middle-aged people. The Commission found similar threads of negative perceptions of both middle-aged people and older people. As the scope of this research does not allow for conclusions to be drawn about possible causes, further exploration may be useful to build an understanding of the extent to which middle-aged and older people are seen as an amorphous group. For example, once people reach middle-age, are they already perceived as being the same as older people?

The Commission observed signs that what is defined as 'middle age' is perhaps blurring, that middle-age is perhaps starting at a later age. This is connected to a perception that the young adulthood life stage is extending. In line with increased health-span, as well as increasing lifespan, there is an accompanying perception that middle age is expanding to capture those who have passed traditional retirement age – some refer to this group as the 'young old'.¹⁹ These areas that may also warrant further exploration.

(e) Starting conversations about ageism

The data indicates a high level of acknowledgment that ageism exists and that this is a problem in Australian society, although there is less awareness of exactly what constitutes an ageist attitude. The research also illustrates a significant degree of intergenerational empathy and underlying positive attitudes towards ageing. The Commission found indications that spending time with people from other age groups can increase positivity and decrease negativity across the generations.

These and other findings also provide a sound foundation for exploring opportunities to reset a national conversation around ageism: who experiences it and to what extent, the forms it takes and what can be done to counter it. There is fertile ground for initiating conversations to increase awareness of the nature and prevalence of ageism in Australia, including who it affects, what it looks like and how ageist attitudes impact people across the adult lifespan.

Promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms is important to achieve a society for all ages. As Article 12 of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing states, 'the reciprocal relationship between and among generations must be nurtured, emphasised and encouraged, through a comprehensive and effective dialogue.'²⁰ The importance of addressing ageism as a multigenerational challenge is also supported by other research that talks of international cohesion and resource allocation between age groups.²¹

A human-rights-based approach can help to address the social, cultural and economic factors that contribute to age discrimination. This can involve identifying, exploring, and questioning policies, practices and media narratives that marginalise and continue the discrimination and exclusion of people because of their age. This will in turn challenge age-based stereotypes that categorise people and discount diversity within broad age groups.

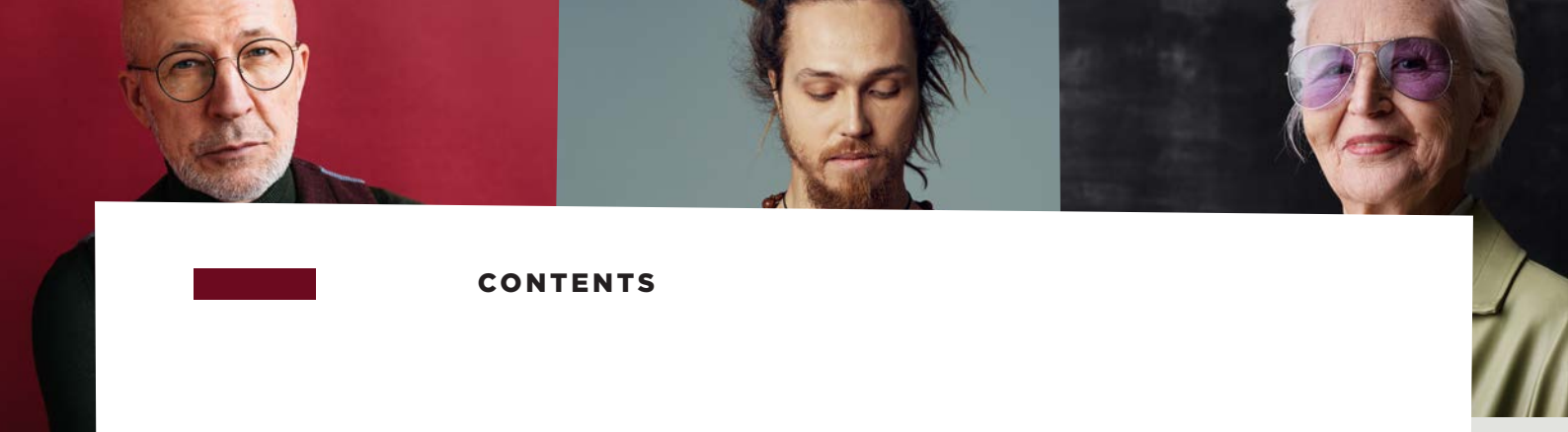
Overall, the Commission found signs of strong intergenerational connections and commonalities across the age groups that provide a sound foundation for strategies to counter ageism in Australia. As noted by WHO, strategies to address ageism need to work on an intergenerational level, as well as across age groups and for each generation.²²



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- 22 World Health Organization, *Global Report on Ageism* (2021) xv.



Appendices



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Appendix 1 – Survey instrument

Audience

- 2,400 Australians.
- Nationally representative by location/gender.
- 200 per each 5-year age cohort.

Screener

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

This study is being conducted by Quantum Market Research, an independent third-party research agency, on behalf of a federal government-funded organisation to learn more about Australian opinions and attitudes.

Please be assured that your responses to this survey are anonymous and strictly confidential. Your anonymous responses will be grouped and reported in aggregate only (i.e. we will never use your individual responses on their own). The results from this survey will be used for research purposes only. If you would like further information about the research or its findings, an email address will be provided at the end of the Survey.

The survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. We thank you for your time and look forward to receiving your feedback.

You can opt out of the Survey at any time by exiting the Survey. Incomplete responses will not be included in the data that is used to analyse this survey.

If you experience any discomfort or distress relating to any of the questions, please contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 for support.

By completing this survey, we interpret this as your consent to participate in this research.

Do not use your Back or Forward browser buttons while you are taking this survey.

About privacy

All data and information collected from the Survey will be stored appropriately and in accordance with the Privacy Act 1988 and the Australian Privacy Principles. All responses are anonymous and confidential. Quantum upholds the requirements under the Australian Privacy Principles and also adheres to the AMSRO Privacy (Market and Social Research) Code 2014. If you would like further information on Quantum's privacy policy or wish to make a complaint, please email surveys@qmr.com.au.

About Quantum Market Research

In order to verify the legitimate nature of this research project, you can visit the Research Society website and look up Quantum Market Research in the Research Society Company Directory to verify that we are a legitimate market and social research company. This can be found at <https://researchsociety.com.au/research-company-directory>.

ASK ALL**Q1.** Please enter your age [OPEN – AUTOCODE BELOW]

Under 18.....	1	TERMINATE
18-24.....	2	200
25-29.....	3	200
30-34.....	4	200
35-39.....	5	200
40-44.....	6	200
45-49.....	7	200
50-54.....	8	200
55-59.....	9	200
60-64.....	10	200
65-69.....	11	200
70-74.....	12	200
75+ 13.....	200	

ASK ALL – SC**Q2.** Do you identify as...

Male	1
Female	2
Other (please specify):	3

ASK ALL – SC**Q3.** Where do you live?

Sydney	1
Other New South Wales	2
Melbourne.....	3
Other Victoria.....	4
Brisbane	5
Other Queensland.....	6
Perth	7
Other Western Australia.....	8
Adelaide.....	9
Other South Australia	10
Hobart.....	11
Other Tasmania.....	12

Australian Capital Territory.....	13	
Northern Territory	14	
Outside Australia.....	98	TERMINATE

ASK ALL - SC

Q4. This survey is about your attitudes and perceptions about people.

People are often referred to by broad age groups, such as being 'older', 'middle aged' or 'younger'.
If we consider these broad age groups:

- Young adult
- Middle-aged person
- Older person

Do you agree that these three broad age groups exist?

Yes.....	1	
No.....	2	TERMINATE

Survey - Introduction

ASK ALL

Q5. In your opinion, at what age does someone become a young adult?

OPEN NUMERIC

ASK ALL

Q6. At what age does someone become middle aged?

OPEN NUMERIC

ASK ALL

Q7. At what age does someone become an older person?

OPEN NUMERIC

DATA CHECK – AGES GIVEN MUST BE IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER E.G. MIDDLE AGED MUST BE OLDER THAN YOUNG ADULT, OLDER PERSON MUST BE OLDER THAN MIDDLE AGED

QUESTIONS BY AGE GROUP

RANDOMISE ORDER OF THREE SECTIONS (YOUNG ADULTS, MIDDLE-AGED PEOPLE, OLDER PEOPLE)

Now we're going to ask you some questions about people of different ages. You will be asked about each age group separately.

Please remember that your answers to the following questions are confidential. There are no right or wrong answers – it is your honest feedback and opinions that are important to us.

YOUNG ADULTS

This section is about your perceptions of **young adults**.

As a reminder, you said you believe that young adulthood starts at [AGE] and finishes at [AGE], which is the age at which you said someone becomes middle aged.

RANDOMISE ORDER OF Q8 & Q9 – SOME RESPONDENTS SHOULD SEE POSITIVE STATEMENTS FIRST, SOME SHOULD SEE NEGATIVE STATEMENTS FIRST

ASK ALL

Q8. Please look at the following statements about young adults and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that **young adults...?**

RANDOMISE, SINGLE RESPONSE PER ROW	Completely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neutral	Mostly agree	Completely agree
Tend to be up to date with new technology	1	2	3	4	5
Are capable of understanding complex topics	1	2	3	4	5
Make a valuable contribution to the Australian economy	1	2	3	4	5
Are interesting to spend time with	1	2	3	4	5
Make a valuable contribution to the Australian community	1	2	3	4	5
Have a great work ethic	1	2	3	4	5
Are good listeners	1	2	3	4	5
Are polite and respectful to others	1	2	3	4	5
Are energetic and dynamic	1	2	3	4	5
Are worth listening to on the issues that affect society	1	2	3	4	5
Are a diverse group of people with varied opinions and interests	1	2	3	4	5
Are flexible and open to new ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Deserve respect because of their age	1	2	3	4	5
Are happier than other age groups	1	2	3	4	5
Have meaningful friendships and relationships	1	2	3	4	5

ASK ALL

Q9. Now please look at this second set of statements about **young adults** and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that young adults...?

RANDOMISE, SINGLE RESPONSE PER ROW	Completely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neutral	Mostly agree	Completely agree
Receive more than their fair share of government benefits	1	2	3	4	5
Are more likely to take days off work for physical sickness	1	2	3	4	5
Are more likely to take days off work for mental health	1	2	3	4	5
Take up more than their fair share of the public health service	1	2	3	4	5
Are a burden on their family	1	2	3	4	5
Are a burden on the rest of society	1	2	3	4	5
Have too much say in the way society is run	1	2	3	4	5
Are often lonely or isolated	1	2	3	4	5
Expect to have things handed to them on a platter	1	2	3	4	5
Don't understand the pressures that people of other ages face	1	2	3	4	5
Are bad at managing their finances	1	2	3	4	5
Are lazy	1	2	3	4	5
Are too sensitive	1	2	3	4	5
Complain a lot	1	2	3	4	5
Are forgetful	1	2	3	4	5
Are selfish/self-centred	1	2	3	4	5
Have it easier/better than people of other age groups	1	2	3	4	5
Have more than their fair share of assets/material possessions	1	2	3	4	5
Think they're always right	1	2	3	4	5
Are less likely to contribute at work	1	2	3	4	5

ASK ALL - SC

Q10. How positively or negatively do you feel overall towards young adults?

- Entirely negative 1
- Mostly negative 2
- Neutral..... 3
- Mostly positive..... 4
- Entirely positive 5

ASK ALL

Q11. Over the past few months, life has looked different for many of us due to COVID-19 (coronavirus). For this question, please think about 'normal' life, before any restrictions were implemented.

How often do you *usually* spend time with young adults in each of the following settings, in 'normal' life?

RANDOMISE, SC PER ROW	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
In my home e.g. immediate family				
In my extended family				
As friends				
In my workplace				
In social settings				
Serving me in a retail setting				
In a healthcare setting e.g. doctors, nurses etc				
As people providing a service e.g. teachers, mechanics, plumbers etc				

ASK ALL - SC

Q12. Now let's think about the media representation of young adults. By media, we mean any kind of TV, film, music, news, social media or similar that you read, listen to or watch. Do you feel young adults feature in the media...

- Not enough 1
- About the right amount..... 2
- Too much 3

ASK ALL - SC

Q13. Now let's think about how young adults are portrayed in the media. Do you feel they are portrayed...

- Entirely positively 1
- Mostly positively..... 2
- Equally positively and negatively..... 3
- Mostly negatively..... 4
- Entirely negatively 5

ASK ALL

Q14. Thinking across the types of media you engage with, which words from the following list would you say are...

- a) Often used to describe young adults in the media
- b) Seldom or never used to describe young adults in the media

Please choose up to 5 words

PROGRAMMER NOTE: ROTATE ORDER OF Q14A AND Q14B, REMOVE WORDS CHOSEN IN FIRST QUESTION FROM LIST FOR SECOND QUESTION

CARDS TO DRAG & DROP (RANDOMISE ORDER)

- Invisible
- A nuisance
- Care-giver
- Funny
- Risk-taking
- Volunteer
- Friendly
- Lonely
- Worke
- Competent
- Afraid
- Skilled
- Knowledgeable
- Irresponsible
- Principled
- All the same
- Happy
- Victims
- Ambitious
- Attractive
- Independent
- Carefree
- Strong
- Unhealthy
- Powerful
- Upbeat
- Naïve/gullible
- Depressed
- Wise
- Needy

MIDDLE-AGED PEOPLE

We are now going to ask you **two questions** about your perceptions of **middle-aged people**. As a reminder, you said middle age begins at [Q6] and ends at [Q7].

RANDOMISE ORDER OF Q15 & Q16 – SOME RESPONDENTS SHOULD SEE POSITIVE STATEMENTS FIRST, SOME SHOULD SEE NEGATIVE STATEMENTS FIRST

ASK ALL

Q15. Please look at the following statements about middle-aged people and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that **middle-aged people...?**

RANDOMISE, SINGLE RESPONSE PER ROW	Completely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neutral	Mostly agree	Completely agree
Tend to be up to date with new technology	1	2	3	4	5
Are capable of understanding complex topics	1	2	3	4	5
Make a valuable contribution to the Australian economy	1	2	3	4	5
Are interesting to spend time with	1	2	3	4	5
Make a valuable contribution to the Australian community	1	2	3	4	5
Have a great work ethic	1	2	3	4	5
Are good listeners	1	2	3	4	5
Are polite and respectful to others	1	2	3	4	5
Are energetic and dynamic	1	2	3	4	5
Are worth listening to on the issues that affect society	1	2	3	4	5
Are a diverse group of people with varied opinions and interests	1	2	3	4	5
Are flexible and open to new ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Deserve respect because of their age	1	2	3	4	5
Are happier than other age groups	1	2	3	4	5
Have meaningful friendships and relationships	1	2	3	4	5

ASK ALL

Q16. Now please look at this set of statements about **middle-aged people** and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that middle-aged people...?

RANDOMISE, SINGLE RESPONSE PER ROW	Completely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neutral	Mostly agree	Completely agree
Receive more than their fair share of government benefits	1	2	3	4	5
Are more likely to take days off work for physical sickness	1	2	3	4	5
Are more likely to take days off work for mental health	1	2	3	4	5
Take up more than their fair share of the public health service	1	2	3	4	5
Are a burden on their family	1	2	3	4	5
Are a burden on the rest of society	1	2	3	4	5
Have too much say in the way society is run	1	2	3	4	5
Are often lonely or isolated	1	2	3	4	5
Expect to have things handed to them on a platter	1	2	3	4	5
Don't understand the pressures that people of other ages face	1	2	3	4	5
Are bad at managing their finances	1	2	3	4	5
Are lazy	1	2	3	4	5
Are too sensitive	1	2	3	4	5
Complain a lot	1	2	3	4	5
Are forgetful	1	2	3	4	5
Are selfish/self-centred	1	2	3	4	5
Have it easier/better than people of other age groups	1	2	3	4	5
Have more than their fair share of assets/material possessions	1	2	3	4	5
Think they're always right	1	2	3	4	5
Are less likely to contribute at work	1	2	3	4	5

OLDER ADULTS

This section is about your perceptions of **older people**.

As a reminder, you said you believe that older adulthood starts at [Q7].

RANDOMISE ORDER OF Q17 & Q18 – SOME RESPONDENTS SHOULD SEE POSITIVE STATEMENTS FIRST, SOME SHOULD SEE NEGATIVE STATEMENTS FIRST

ASK ALL

Q17. Please look at the following statements about older people, and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that **older people...?**

RANDOMISE, SINGLE RESPONSE PER ROW	Completely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neutral	Mostly agree	Completely agree
Tend to be up to date with new technology	1	2	3	4	5
Are capable of understanding complex topics	1	2	3	4	5
Make a valuable contribution to the Australian economy	1	2	3	4	5
Are interesting to spend time with	1	2	3	4	5
Make a valuable contribution to the Australian community	1	2	3	4	5
Have a great work ethic	1	2	3	4	5
Are good listeners	1	2	3	4	5
Are polite and respectful to others	1	2	3	4	5
Are energetic and dynamic	1	2	3	4	5
Are worth listening to on the issues that affect society	1	2	3	4	5
Are a diverse group of people with varied opinions and interests	1	2	3	4	5
Are flexible and open to new ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Deserve respect because of their age	1	2	3	4	5
Are happier than other age groups	1	2	3	4	5
Have meaningful friendships and relationships	1	2	3	4	5

ASK ALL

Q18. Now please look at this set of statements about **older people**, and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that older people...?

RANDOMISE, SINGLE RESPONSE PER ROW	Completely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neutral	Mostly agree	Completely agree
Receive more than their fair share of government benefits	1	2	3	4	5
Are more likely to take days off work for physical sickness	1	2	3	4	5
Are more likely to take days off work for mental health	1	2	3	4	5
Take up more than their fair share of the public health service	1	2	3	4	5
Are a burden on their family	1	2	3	4	5
Are a burden on the rest of society	1	2	3	4	5
Have too much say in the way society is run	1	2	3	4	5
Are often lonely or isolated	1	2	3	4	5
Expect to have things handed to them on a platter	1	2	3	4	5
Don't understand the pressures that people of other ages face	1	2	3	4	5
Are bad at managing their finances	1	2	3	4	5
Are lazy	1	2	3	4	5
Are too sensitive	1	2	3	4	5
Complain a lot	1	2	3	4	5
Are forgetful	1	2	3	4	5
Are selfish/self-centred	1	2	3	4	5
Have it easier/better than people of other age groups	1	2	3	4	5
Have more than their fair share of assets/material possessions	1	2	3	4	5
Think they're always right	1	2	3	4	5
Are less likely to contribute at work	1	2	3	4	5

ASK ALL - SC**Q19.** How positively or negatively do you feel overall towards older people?

- Entirely negative 1
 Mostly negative 2
 Neutral..... 3
 Mostly positive..... 4
 Entirely positive 5

ASK ALL**Q20.** Over the past few months, life has looked different for many of us due to COVID-19 (coronavirus). For this question, please think about 'normal' life, before any restrictions were implemented.

How often do you *usually* spend time with older people in each of the following settings, in 'normal' life?

RANDOMISE, SC PER ROW	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
In my home e.g. immediate family				
In my extended family				
As friends				
In my workplace				
In social settings				
Serving me in a retail setting				
In a healthcare setting e.g. doctors, nurses etc				
As people providing a service e.g. teachers, mechanics, plumbers etc				

ASK ALL - SC**Q21.** Now let's think about the media representation of older people. By media, we mean any kind of TV, film, music, news, social media or similar that you read, listen to or watch. Do you feel older people feature in the media...?

- Not enough 1
 About the right amount..... 2
 Too much 3

ASK ALL - SC

Q22. Now let's think about how older people are portrayed in the media. Do you feel they are portrayed ...?

- Entirely positively 1
- Mostly positively 2
- Equally positively and negatively 3
- Mostly negatively 4
- Entirely negatively 5

ASK ALL

Q23. Thinking across the types of media you engage with, which words from the following list would you say are...

- a) Often used to describe older people in the media
- b) Seldom or never used to describe older people in the media

Please choose up to 5 words for each answer

PROGRAMMER NOTE: ROTATE ORDER OF Q23A AND Q23B, REMOVE WORDS CHOSEN IN FIRST QUESTION FROM LIST FOR SECOND QUESTION

CARDS TO DRAG & DROP (RANDOMISE ORDER)

- Invisible
- A nuisance
- Care-giver
- Funny
- Risk-taking
- Volunteer
- Friendly
- Lonely
- Worker
- Competent
- Afraid
- Skilled
- Knowledgeable
- Irresponsible
- Principled
- All the same
- Happy
- Victims
- Ambitious
- Attractive
- Independent
- Carefree
- Strong
- Unhealthy
- Powerful
- Upbeat
- Naïve/gullible
- Depressed
- Wise
- Needy

Self-perception

RANDOMISE ORDER OF Q24 & Q25 – SOME RESPONDENTS SHOULD SEE POSITIVE STATEMENTS FIRST, SOME SHOULD SEE NEGATIVE STATEMENTS FIRST

SHOW ALL:

Now we're going to show you this set of statements for the final time. This time, please tell us how much you feel they apply to yourself.

ASK ALL – RANDOMISE, SC PER ROW

Q24. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements...

Please read each statement carefully before you answer.

RANDOMISE, SINGLE RESPONSE PER ROW	Completely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neutral	Mostly agree	Completely agree
I tend to be up to date with new technology	1	2	3	4	5
I am capable of understanding complex topics	1	2	3	4	5
I make a valuable contribution to the Australian economy	1	2	3	4	5
I am interesting to spend time with	1	2	3	4	5
I make a valuable contribution to the Australian community	1	2	3	4	5
I have a great work ethic	1	2	3	4	5
I am a good listener	1	2	3	4	5
I am polite and respectful to others	1	2	3	4	5
I am energetic and dynamic	1	2	3	4	5
I am worth listening to on the issues that affect society	1	2	3	4	5
I have a diverse range of opinions and interests	1	2	3	4	5
I am flexible and open to new ideas	1	2	3	4	5
I deserve respect	1	2	3	4	5
I am happier than people in other age groups	1	2	3	4	5
I have meaningful friendships and relationships	1	2	3	4	5

ASK ALL

Q25. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements...

Please read each statement carefully before you answer.

RANDOMISE, SINGLE RESPONSE PER ROW	Completely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neutral	Mostly agree	Completely agree
I receive more than my fair share of government benefits	1	2	3	4	5
I am more likely than others to take days off work for physical sickness	1	2	3	4	5
I am more likely than others to take days off work for mental health	1	2	3	4	5
I take up more than my fair share of the public health service	1	2	3	4	5
I am a burden on my family					
I am a burden on the rest of society	1	2	3	4	5
I have too much say in the way society is run	1	2	3	4	5
I am often lonely or isolated	1	2	3	4	5
I expect to have things handed to me on a platter	1	2	3	4	5
I don't understand the pressures that people of other ages face	1	2	3	4	5
I am bad at managing my finances	1	2	3	4	5
I am lazy	1	2	3	4	5
I am too sensitive	1	2	3	4	5
I complain a lot	1	2	3	4	5
I am forgetful	1	2	3	4	5
I am selfish/self-centred	1	2	3	4	5
I have it easier/better than people of other age groups	1	2	3	4	5
I have more than my fair share of assets/material possessions	1	2	3	4	5
I think I'm always right	1	2	3	4	5
I am less likely to contribute at work	1	2	3	4	5

ASK ALL – SC

Q26. Which of these statements applies to you?

- I feel a lot older than my actual age..... 1
 I feel a little older than my actual age 2
 I feel my age..... 3
 I feel a little younger than my actual age 4
 I feel a lot younger than my actual age 5
 Age isn't something I think about/I don't 'feel' any age 6

ATTITUDES TO AGE**ASK ALL – RANDOMISE, MC PER ROW**

Q27. Which age group of people do you associate most closely with being the following...?

Please choose as many age groups as apply for each option, or choose the 'age is irrelevant' option if you feel that applies

	I associate this most closely with:			
	Younger Age group	Middle-aged Age group	Older Age group	Age is irrelevant [SC]
An employer / manager	1	2	3	4
An entrepreneur	1	2	3	4
A student	1	2	3	4
A leader	1	2	3	4
Being unwell	1	2	3	4
Purchasing goods and services	1	2	3	4
Making financial decisions	1	2	3	4
Using new technology	1	2	3	4
Getting a promotion at work	1	2	3	4
At the height of their competence	1	2	3	4
Physically attractive	1	2	3	4
Sexually active	1	2	3	4

ASK ALL - SC

Q28. Ageism is defined as stereotyping, prejudice, or discrimination against people on the basis of their age. Ageism can affect people at any age.

Do you feel ageism exists in Australian society?

- Yes, directed at older people only..... 1
- Yes, directed at younger people only 2
- Yes, directed at people across a range of age groups..... 3
- Ageism does not exist in Australian society..... 4

ASK ALL - SC

Q29. Do you feel ageism is currently a problem in Australian society?

- Yes, but only when directed at older people 1
- Yes, but only when directed at younger people..... 2
- Yes, ageism is a problem whoever it is directed at..... 3
- Ageism is not a problem in Australian society 4

ASK ALL - RANDOMISE, SC PER ROW

Q30. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

RANDOMISE, SINGLE RESPONSE PER ROW	Completely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neutral	Mostly agree	Completely agree
Making jokes about age is more socially acceptable than making jokes about things like race or gender	1	2	3	4	5
In their youth, people who are now older adults were probably just like today's young adults	1	2	3	4	5
When I think about getting older, I can't see any positives	1	2	3	4	5
People should embrace getting older, rather than fearing it	1	2	3	4	5
I have more in common with people in my own age group than people outside it	1	2	3	4	5
It's wrong to make judgements about someone based on their age	1	2	3	4	5
It's embarrassing when people don't act their age	1	2	3	4	5
Today's older generation is leaving the world in a worse state than it was before	1	2	3	4	5
If they have the same work skills, younger adults should be prioritised over older people for employment opportunities	1	2	3	4	5

ASK ALL - SC

Q31. Do you feel ageism has affected you within the last five years? E.g., do you feel you have been treated differently because of your age?

- Yes, often..... 1
- Yes, sometimes..... 2
- Yes, once or twice..... 3
- No, never 4

ASK THOSE SAYING YES [CODES 1-3] IN Q31 – SC

Q32. In what way(s) do you feel you have been affected by ageism in the last five years? Please choose all that apply.

- Turned down for a job/position 1
- Refused or passed over for a promotion 2
- Not received training at work 3
- Ignored or talked down to in a workplace environment..... 4
- Ignored or talked down to in a retail environment..... 5
- Ignored or talked down to in a social environment..... 6
- Not taken seriously by a doctor or healthcare professional when reporting a physical health issue..... 7
- Not taken seriously by a doctor or healthcare professional when reporting a mental health issue..... 8
- Subjected to jokes about my age / ageing 9
- Been condescended/talked down to 10
- Been 'helped' without being asked 11
- Have had assumptions made about me 12
- Been prevented from doing something I wanted to do..... 13
- Refused service or had difficulty buying a product 14
- Verbally insulted 15
- Other (SPECIFY)..... 16

ASK ALL

Q33. For the following questions, please remember this survey is anonymous and none of your answers will be linked to any personal details.

Do you feel you may have ever stereotyped or made assumptions about any of the following age groups of people because of their age?

- Young adults 1
- Middle-aged people 2
- Older people 3
- None of the above..... 4

SC, ANCHOR

ASK THOSE CHOOSING ANY OF CODE 1-3 IN Q33

Q34. You said you feel you may have stereotyped or made assumptions about some people because of their age.

How often would you say you do this for each age group you mentioned?
 ONLY SHOW AGES MENTIONED IN Q33

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Young adults	1	2	3
Middle-aged people	1	2	3
Older people	1	2	3

ASK ALL - MC UP TO THREE - RANDOMISE

Q35. Which of the following do you think would be most effective to combat ageism in Australia?
 Please choose up to three options

- If different age groups were more accurately portrayed in the media 1
- If ageism got more attention in the media 2
- If people were more aware of ageist language and behaviours..... 3
- If people were more aware of inaccurate age-based stereotypes .. 4
- If people of different ages had more opportunities to mix socially 5
- If younger and older people had more opportunities to mix in the workplace 6
- If there was more education/awareness of the positive aspects of each age group 7
- If ageing itself was seen as a more positive experience 8
- Other (specify) 9

ASK ALL - SC

Q36. Has COVID-19 (coronavirus) affected the way you feel about people of ages other than your own?

- It's made me feel closer to people of other ages – we've faced it together..... 1
- It hasn't changed the way I feel about people of other ages..... 2
- It's made me feel less close to people of other ages – it's highlighted our differences..... 3

Final questions – About you

ASK ALL

Q37. You're nearly finished – thanks for your responses so far. Now there are just a final few questions about you. During a typical week, how often do you watch, read or otherwise consume the following types of media?

RANDOMISE, SINGLE CODE PER ROW	Every day	Every couple of days	Weekly	Less often	Never
Watch Free to Air TV (e.g. Channel 7, Channel 9, ABC, SBS, GO!, MATE etc)	1	2	3	4	5
Watch Pay TV (e.g. FOXTEL)	1	2	3	4	5
Watch TV programs on streaming services like Netflix, Stan, Apple TV etc, excluding movies	1	2	3	4	5
Listen to the radio	1	2	3	4	5
Read newspapers (either paper copies or online)	1	2	3	4	5
Use social media, including things like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tiktok	1	2	3	4	5
Read magazines such as Take That, Taste, Women's Weekly, GQ, New Idea, Better Homes & Gardens, National Geographic, New Scientist, Open Road etc. (either paper copies or online)	1	2	3	4	5
Watch Movies (Rent, download, stream or go to the movies at a cinema)	1	2	3	4	5
Other time online or on apps – e.g. watching YouTube, reading online content, using educational apps, etc.	1	2	3	4	5

ASK ALL – SC

Q38. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Primary school 1
- Secondary school 2
- Trade qualification 3
- Diploma / Certificate 4
- Bachelor's degree 5
- Masters / Doctorate or above..... 6
- Prefer not to answer 7

ASK ALL - SC**Q39.** Which best describes your current employment type?

Full-time.....	1
Part-time (and was working part-time before COVID-19)	2
Reduced to part-time hours as a result of COVID-19	3
Consultant/contractor/freelance	4
Sole proprietor (no employees).....	5
Business owner (with employees).....	6
Home duties (parental leave; caring for children etc.)	7
Student	8
Unemployed before COVID-19	9
Recently unemployed due to COVID-19	10
Retired	11
Other (please specify)	12

ASK ALL - SC**Q40.** Which of the following best describes you?

Single	1
Married.....	2
Living together with partner	3
Divorced/separated	4
Widowed.....	5
Other.....	6

ASK ALL - SC**Q41.** Do you have any children?

Yes.....	1
No.....	2

ASK IF Q41=1 (HAVE CHILD) - SC**Q42.** How old is your oldest child?

Preschool age	1
Primary school age.....	2
Secondary school age	3
Older than secondary school age	4

ASK IF Q42=3 OR 4 (SECONDARY SCHOOL AGE OR OLDER THAN SECONDARY SCHOOL AGE) AND Q1=AGED AT LEAST 30 - SC

Q43. Do you have any grandchildren?

- Yes..... 1
- No..... 2

ASK ALL - SC

Q44. What is your total household income before tax?

- Less than Up to \$30,000..... 1
- \$30,001 - \$50,000 2
- \$50,001 - \$70,000 3
- \$70,001 - \$100,000 4
- \$100,001 - \$130,000 5
- \$130,000 - \$200,000 6
- Over \$200,000 7
- Prefer not to say..... 8

ASK ALL - SC

Q45. Do you identify as...?

- Aboriginal 1
- Torres Strait Islander 2
- Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 3
- None of these 4

ASK ALL - SC, RANDOMISE

Q46. And finally, what is the main language spoken in your home?

English	1	ANCHOR
Italian	2	
Greek	3	
Cantonese	4	
Mandarin	5	
Arabic	6	
Vietnamese	7	
Hindi	8	
Punjabi	9	
Spanish	10	
Urdu	11	
Other [SPECIFY]	12	ANCHOR
Don't know	13	ANCHOR
Prefer not to say	14	ANCHOR

SHOW ALL

Thank you very much for taking the time to answer our questions today. If you have anything else to add about any of the topics we've covered, please do so below. Otherwise, please press the 'done' button to submit your answers.

OPTIONAL TEXT BOX

If you would like further information about the research or its findings, please email surveys@qmr.com.au

Appendix 2 – Survey charts

These charts contain the data captured by the online survey.

Base size

- For all 'Total' charts base size is $n = 2,440$ (total sample) unless otherwise specified
- For all charts split by age group, base sizes are (unless otherwise specified):
 - » Young adults: 809
 - » Middle-aged people: 902
 - » Older people: 729
- Where base size differs, n will be shown
 - » Please refer to survey text in Appendix 2 for description of audience.

Chart 1 Age

Q1. Please enter your age.

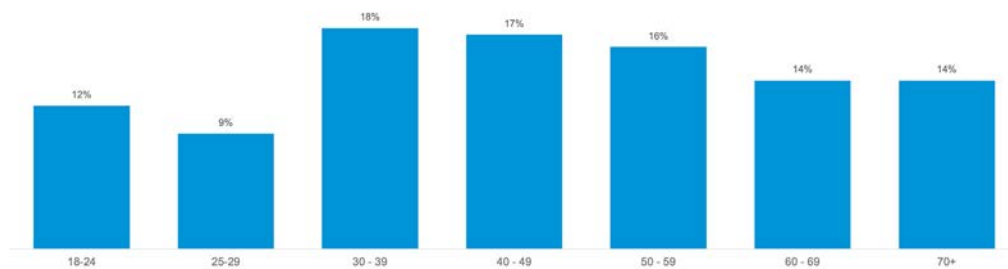


Chart 2 Gender

Q2. Do you identify as...

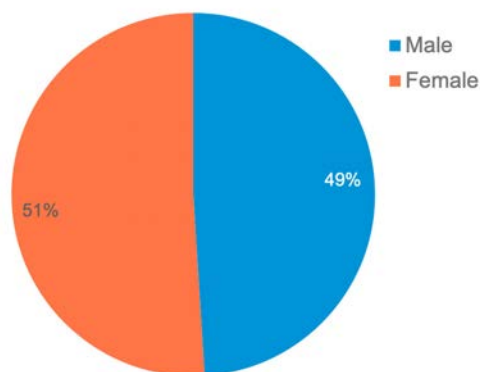


Chart 3 Location

Q3. Where do you live?

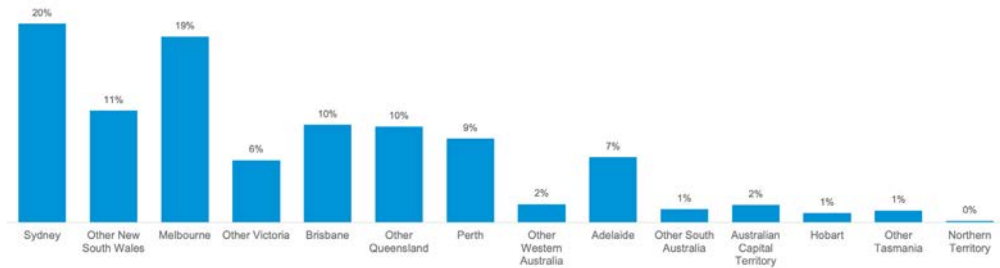


Chart 4 Age become a young adult

Q5. In your opinion, at what age does someone become a young adult?

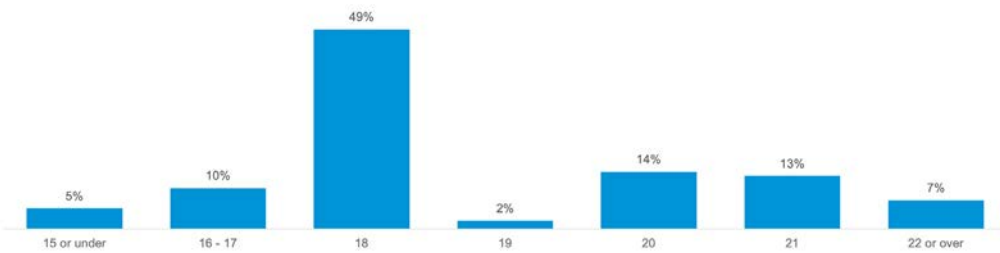


Chart 5 Age become a middle-aged person

Q6. In your opinion, at what age does someone become middle aged?

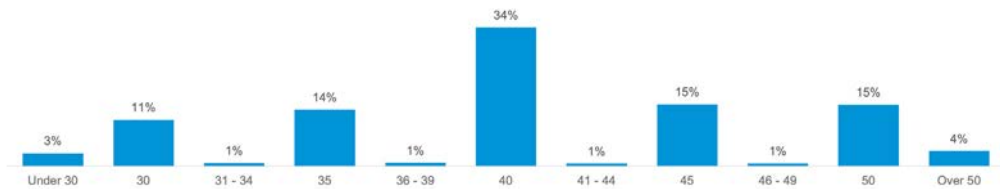


Chart 6 Age become an older person

Q7. In your opinion, at what age does someone become an older person?

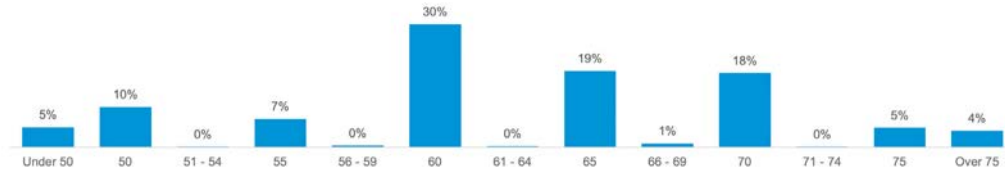


Chart 7 Agreement with positive statements – Total sample view of each age group

Q8/Q15/Q17. Please look at the following statements about young/middle-aged/older adults and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that young/middle-aged/older adults...?

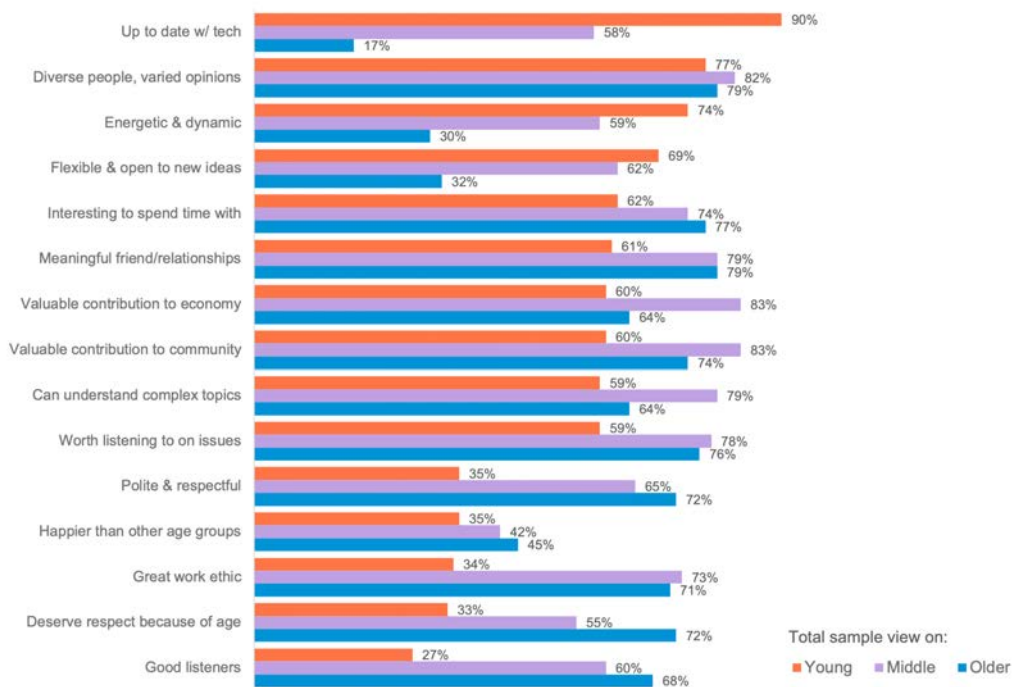


Chart 8 Agreement with negative statements – Total sample view of each age group

Q9/Q16/Q18. Please look at the following statements about young/middle-aged/older adults and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that young/middle-aged/older adults...?

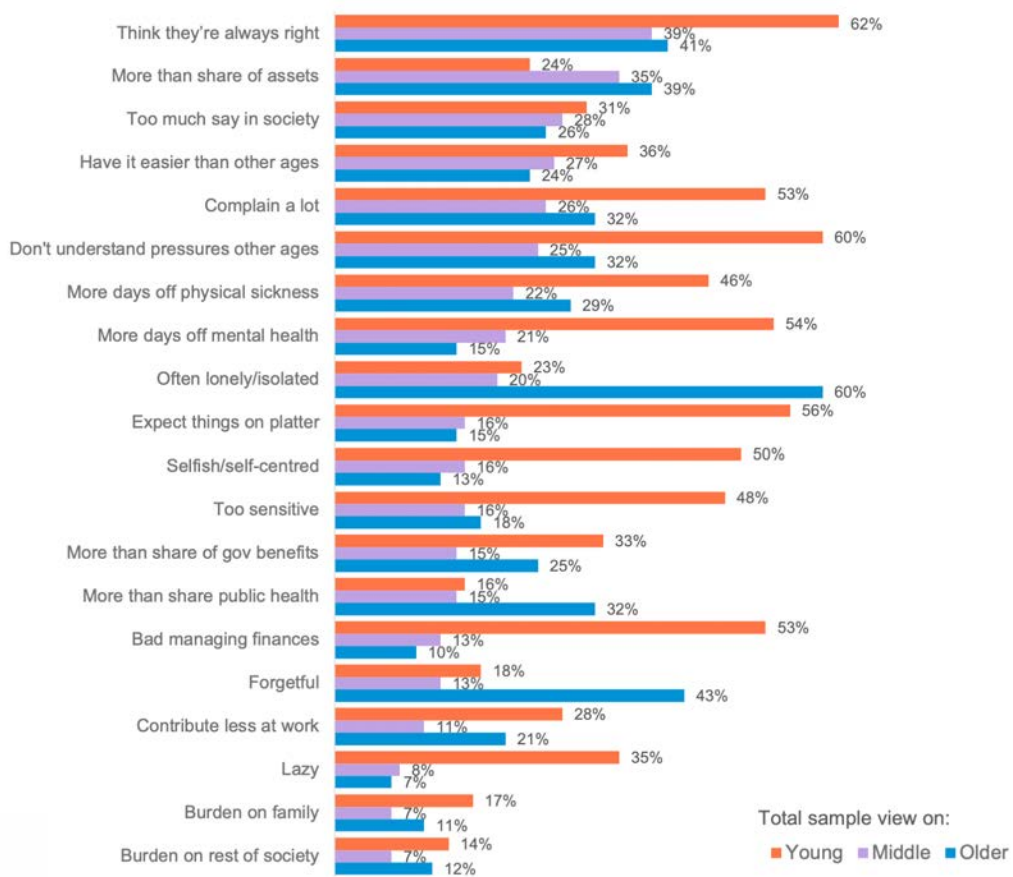


Chart 9 Agreement with positive statements about young adults (by total sample)

Q8. Please look at the following statements about young adults and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that young adults...?

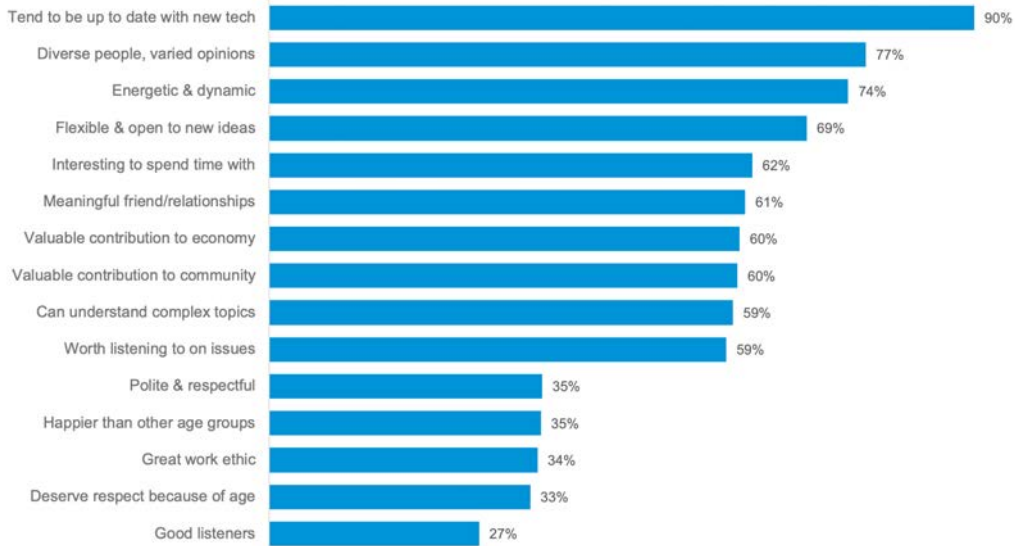


Chart 10 Agreement with positive statements about young adults (by age group and self)

Q8. Please look at the following statements about young adults and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that young adults...?

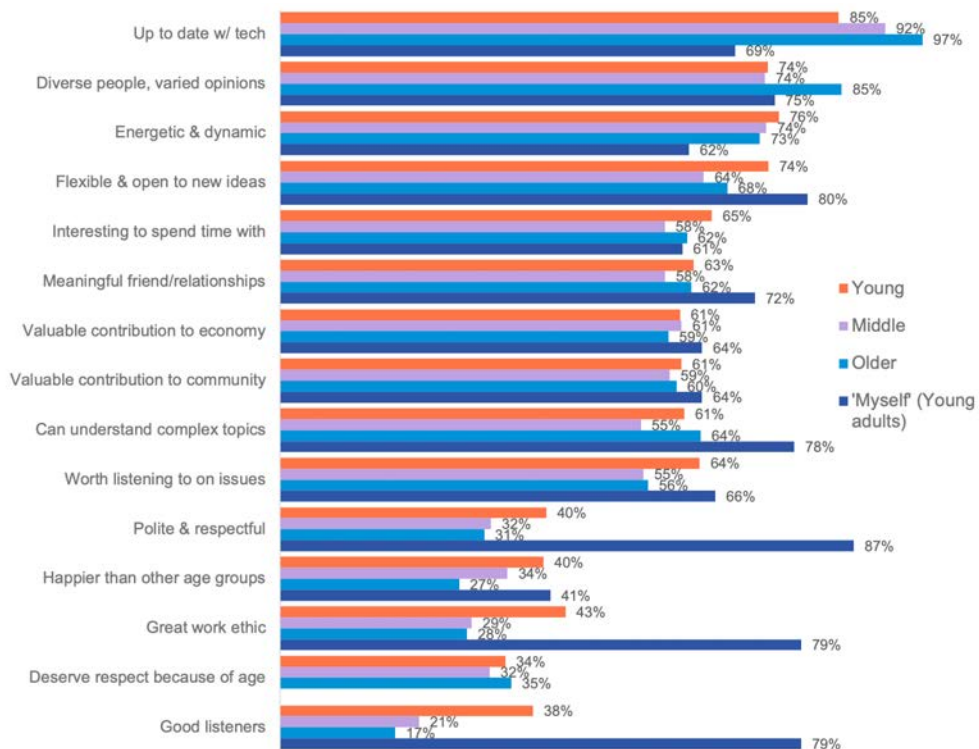


Chart 11 Agreement with positive statements about young adults (Men vs women)

Q8. Please look at the following statements about young adults and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that young adults...? Men = 1,213 Women = 1,226

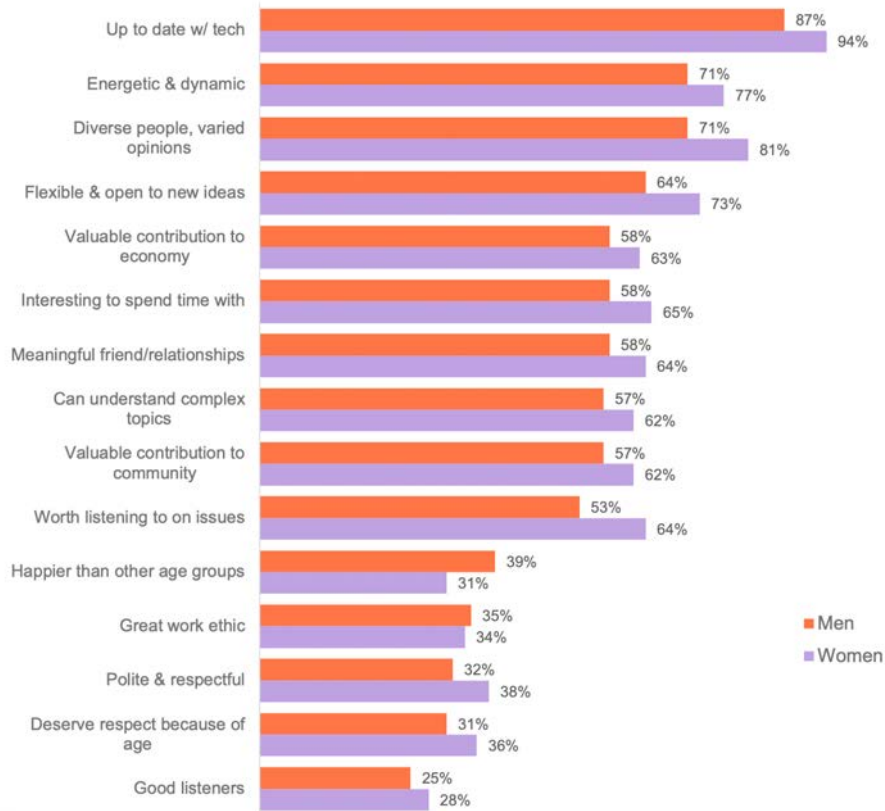


Chart 12 Agreement with negative statements about young adults (by total sample)

Q9. Now please look at this second set of statements about young adults and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that young adults...?

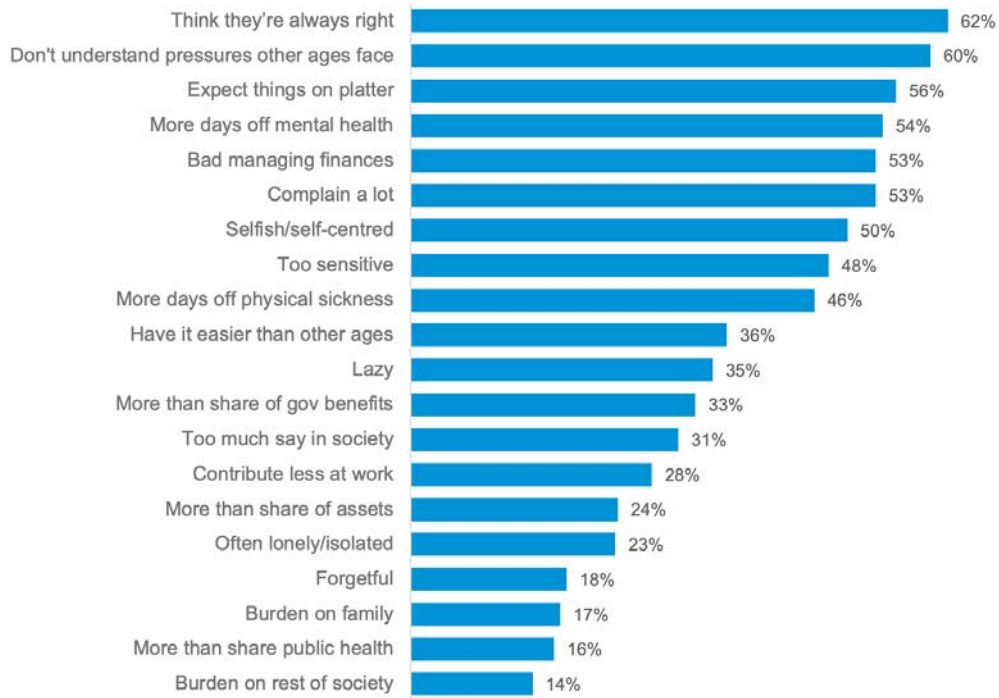


Chart 13 Agreement with negative statements about young adults (by age group and self)

Q9. Now please look at this second set of statements about young adults and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that young adults...?

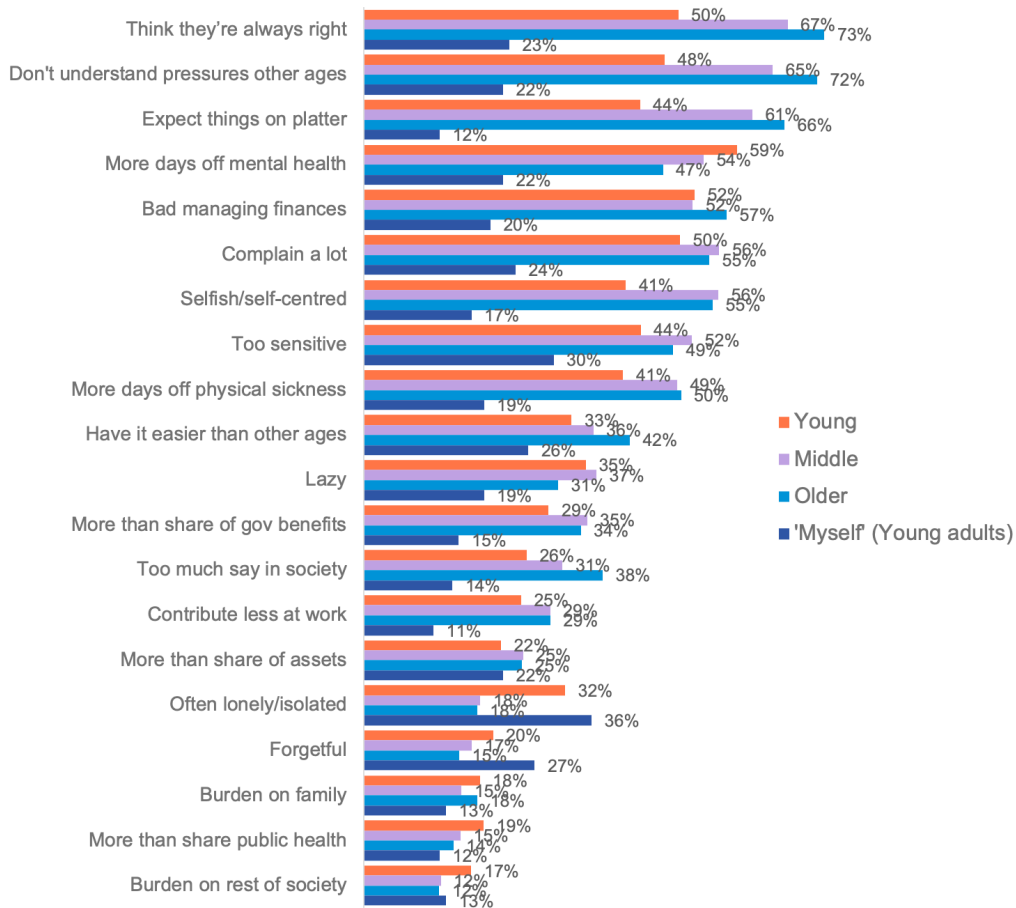


Chart 14 Positivity towards young adults

Q10. How positively or negatively do you feel overall towards young adults?

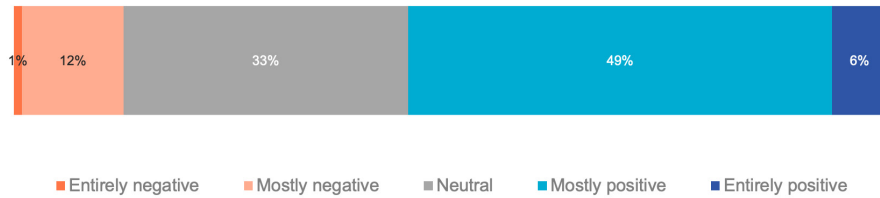


Chart 15 Time spent with young adults

Q11. Over the past few months, life has looked different for many of us due to COVID-19 (coronavirus). For this question, please think about 'regular' life, before any restrictions were implemented.

How often do you usually spend time with young adults in each of the following settings, in 'normal' life?

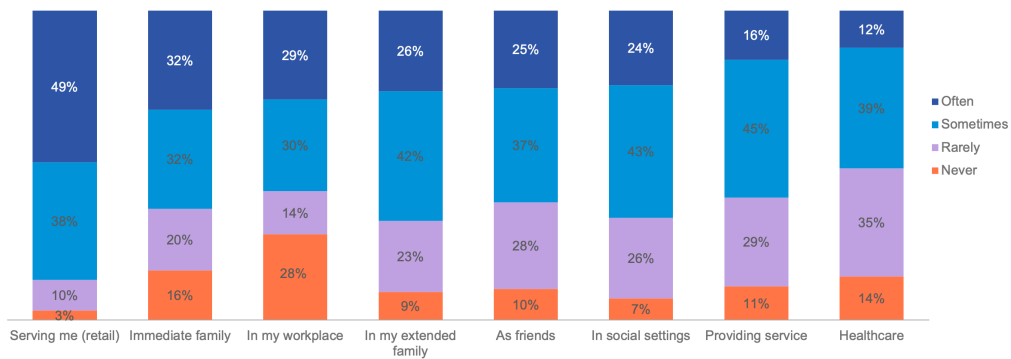


Chart 16 Impact of time spent with young adults on agreement with positive statements

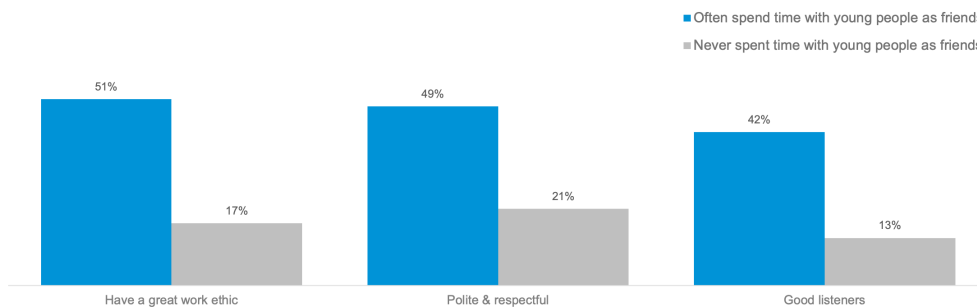


Chart 17 Frequency of media representation of young adults

Q12. Now let's think about the media representation of young adults. By media, we mean any kind of TV, film, music, news, social media or similar that you read, listen to or watch. Do you feel young adults feature in the media ...?

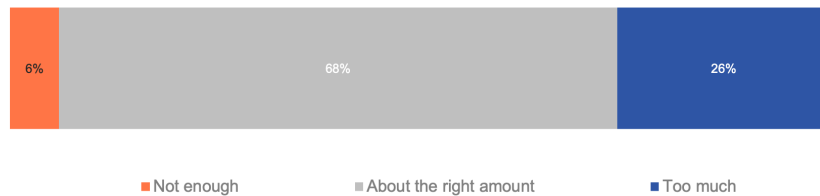


Chart 18 Positivity of media representation of young adults

Q13. Now let's think about how young adults are portrayed in the media. Do you feel they are portrayed...?

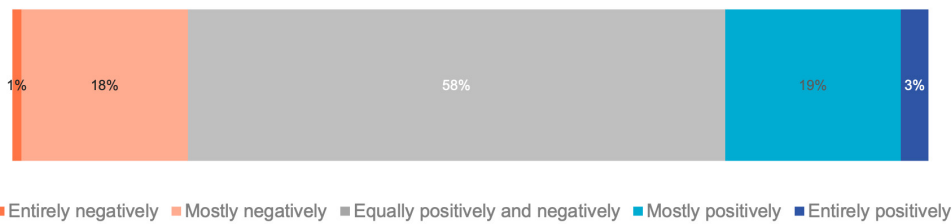


Chart 19 Words often used to describe young adults in the media

Q14a). Thinking across the types of media you engage with, which words from the following list would you say are often used to describe young adults in the media?

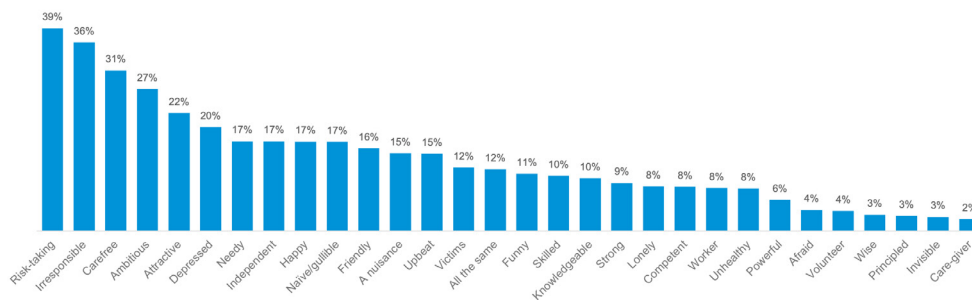


Chart 20 Words seldom or never used to describe young adults in the media

Q14b). Thinking across the types of media you engage with, which words from the following list would you say are seldom or never used to describe young adults in the media?

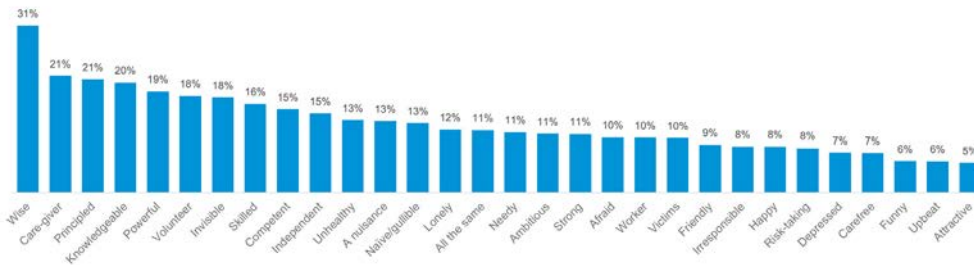


Chart 21 Agreement with positive statements about middle-aged people (by total sample)

Q15. Please look at the following statements about middle-aged people and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that middle-aged people...?

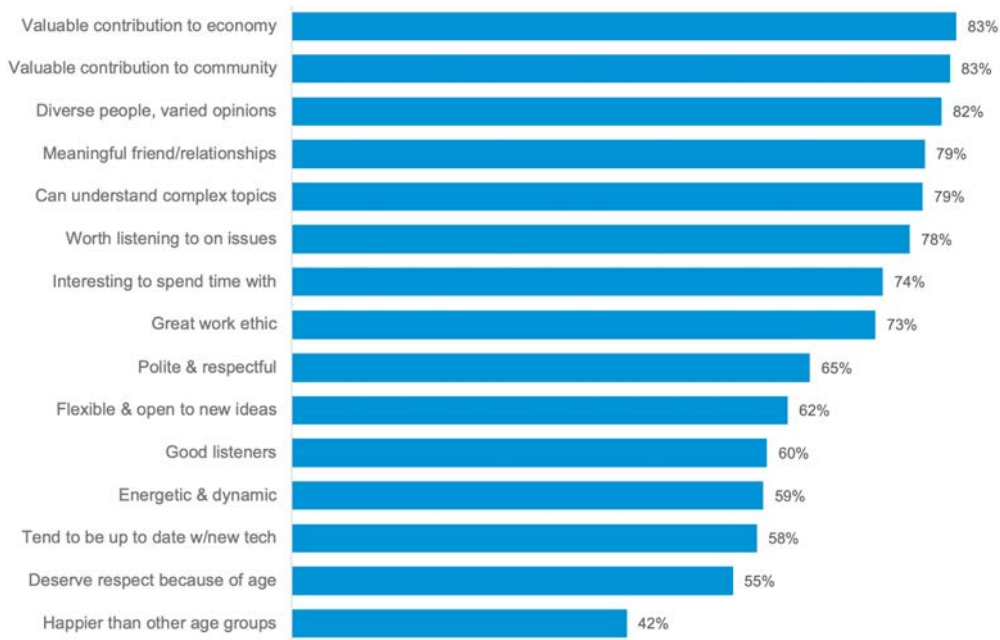


Chart 22 Agreement with positive statements about middle-aged people (by age group and self)

Q15. Please look at the following statements about middle-aged people and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that middle-aged people...?

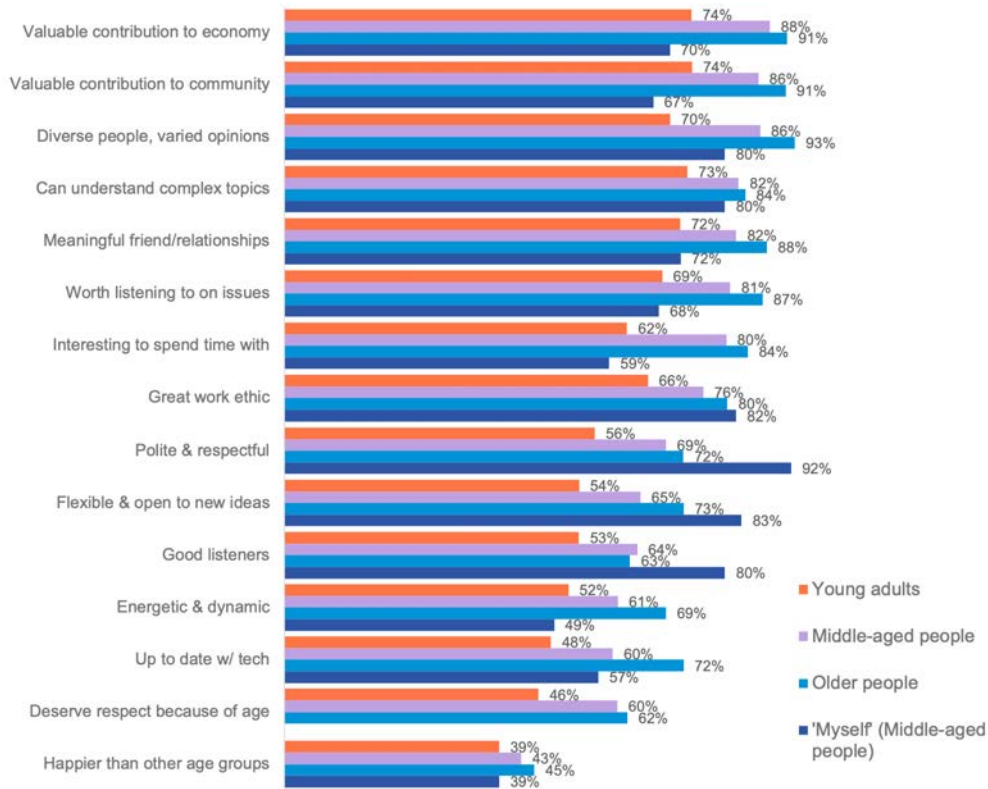


Chart 23 Agreement with negative statements about middle-aged people (by total sample)

Q16. Now please look at this set of statements about middle-aged people and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that middle-aged people...?

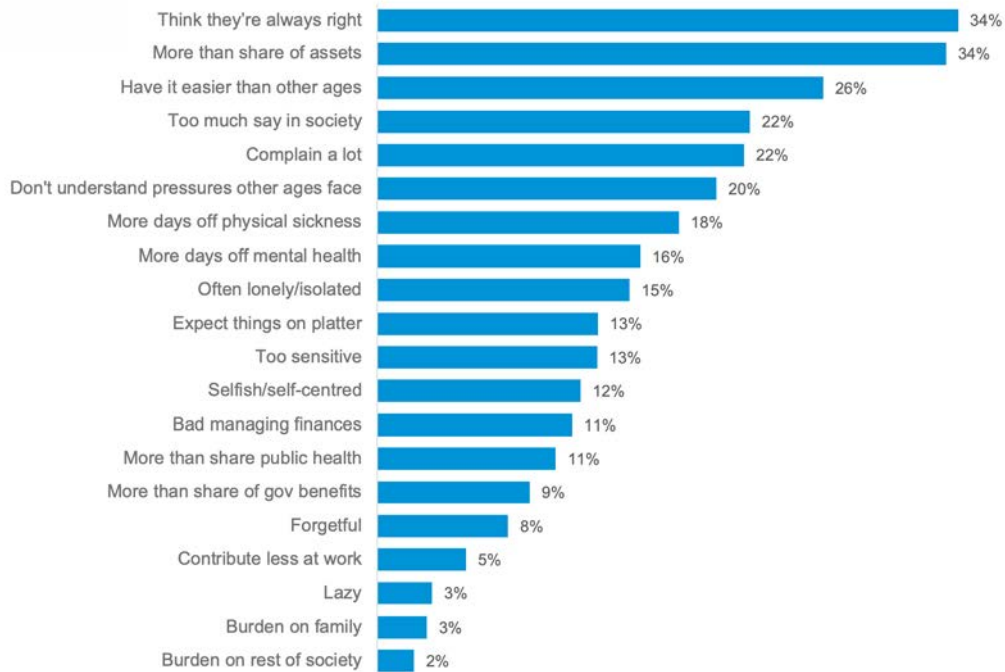


Chart 24 Agreement with negative statements about middle-aged people (by age group and self)

Q16. Now please look at this set of statements about middle-aged people and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that middle-aged people...?

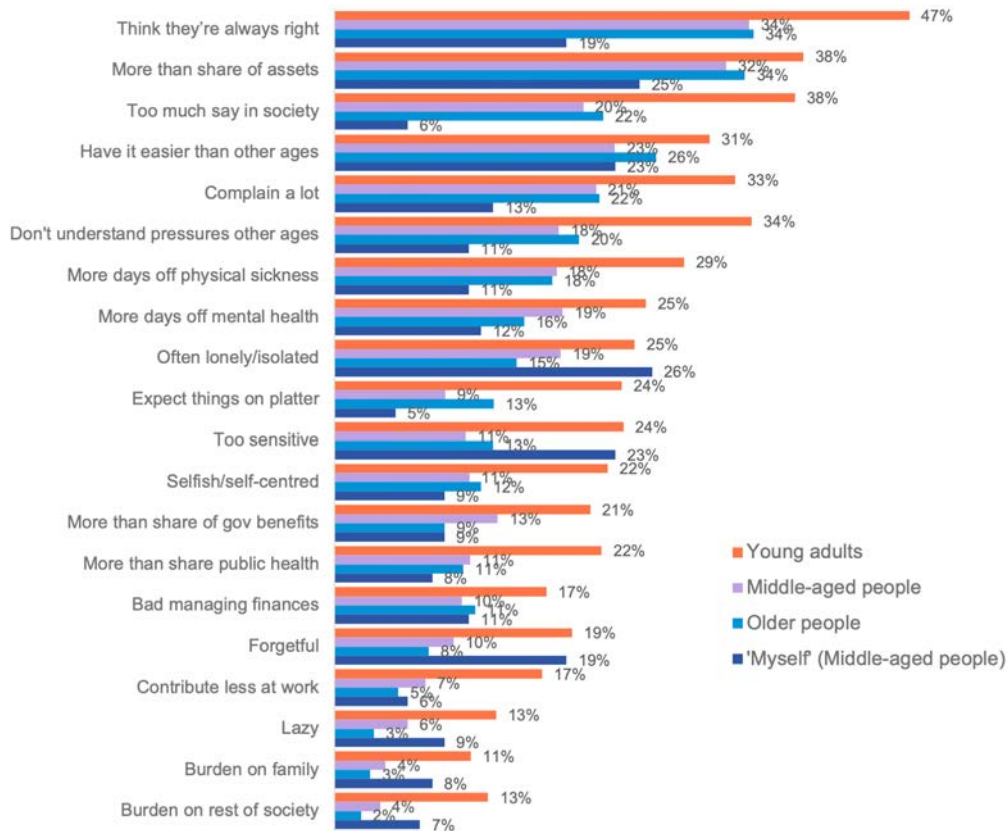


Chart 25 Agreement with positive statements about older people (by total sample)

Q17. Please look at the following statements about older people and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that older people...?

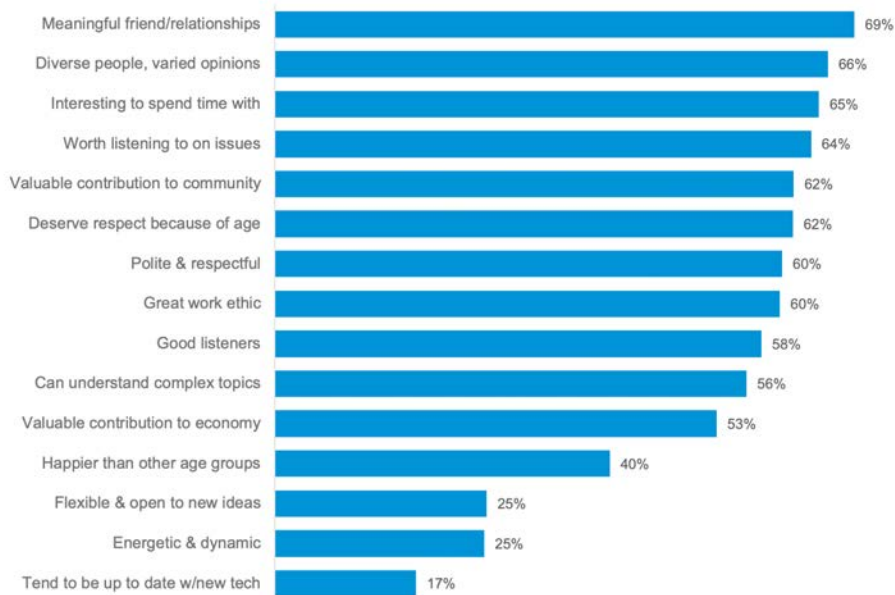


Chart 26 Agreement with positive statements about older people (by age group)

Q17. Please look at the following statements about older people and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that older people...?

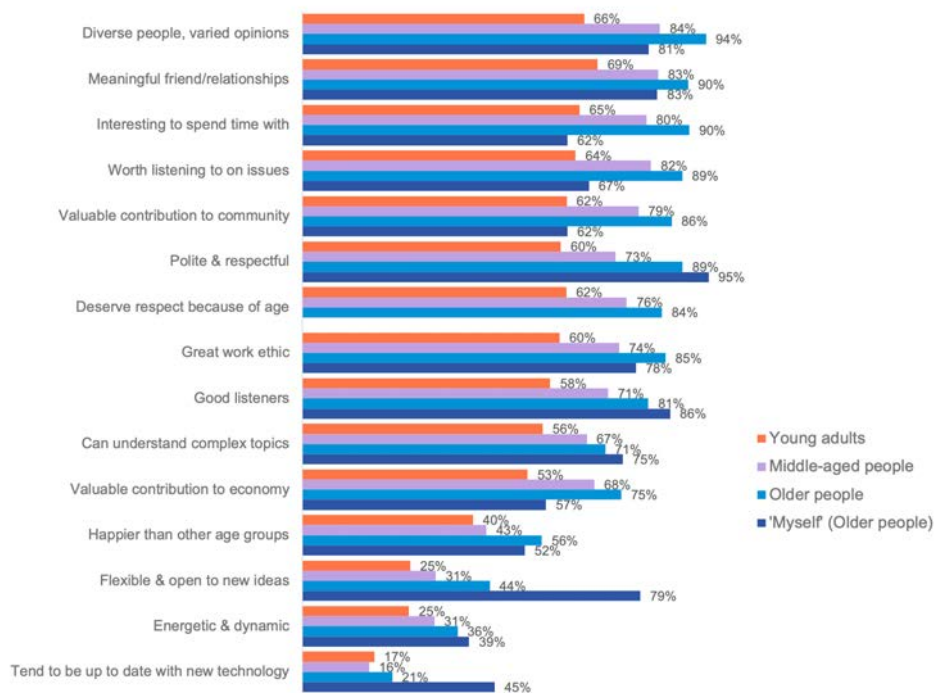


Chart 27 Agreement with negative statements about older people (total sample)

Q18. Now please look at this set of statements about older people and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that older people...?

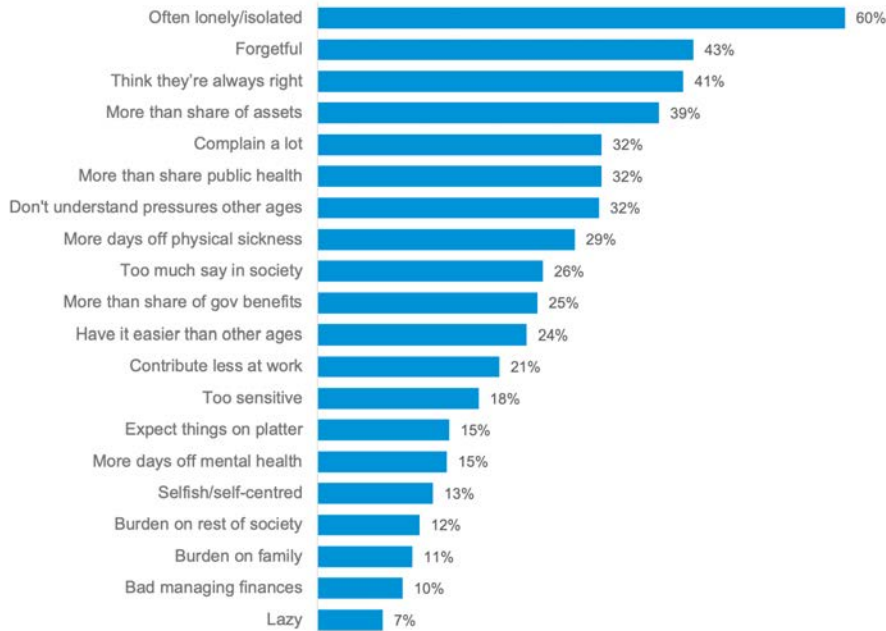


Chart 28 Agreement with negative statements about older people (by age group and self)

Q18. Now please look at this set of statements about older people and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree. Please read each statement carefully before you answer. Do you agree that older people...?

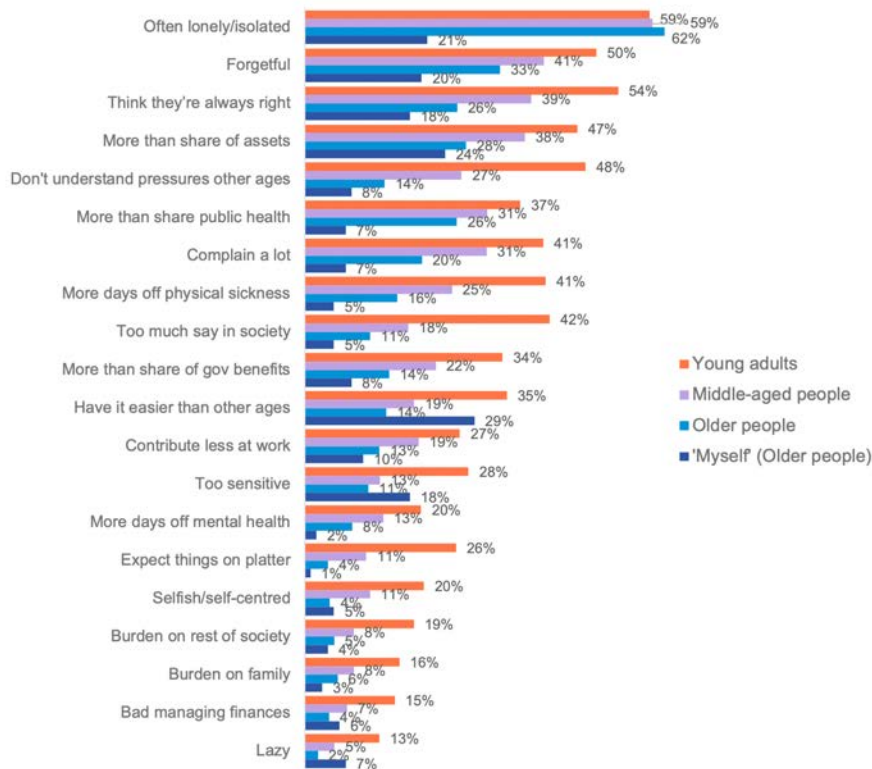


Chart 29 Positivity towards older people

Q19. How positively or negatively do you feel overall towards older people?

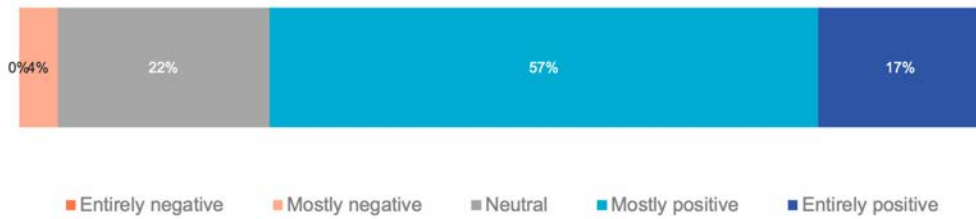


Chart 30 Time spent with older people

Q20. Over the past few months, life has looked different for many of us due to COVID-19 (coronavirus). For this question, please think about 'regular' life, before any restrictions were implemented. How often do you usually spend time with older people in each of the following settings, in 'normal' life?

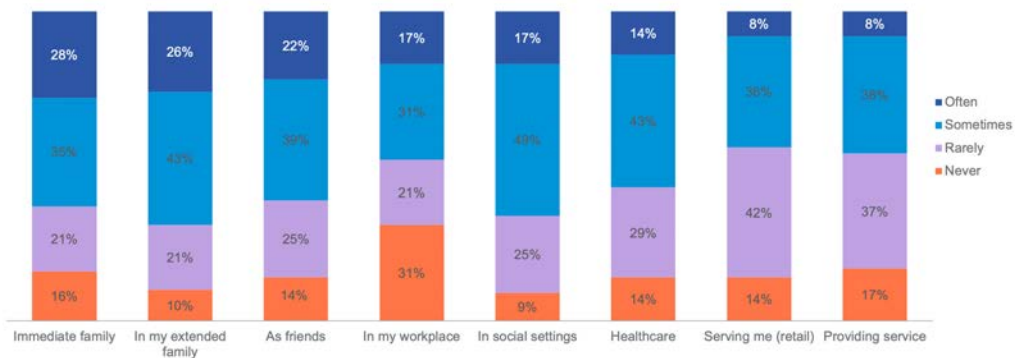


Chart 31 Frequency of media representation of older people

Q21. Now let's think about the media representation of older people. By media, we mean any kind of TV, film, music, news, social media or similar that you read, listen to or watch. Do you feel older people feature in the media...?



Chart 32 Positivity of media representation of older people

Q22. Now let's think about how older people are portrayed in the media. Do you feel they are portrayed ...?

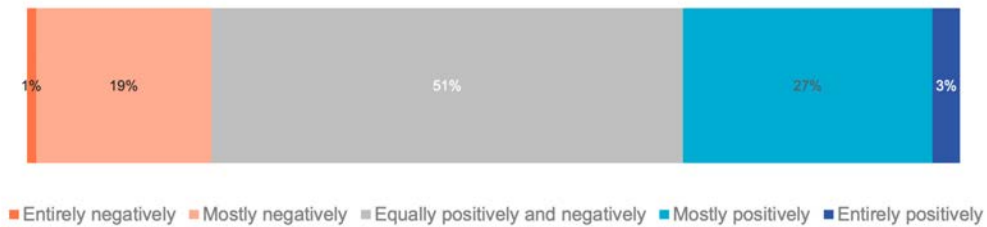


Chart 33 Words often used to describe older people in the media

Q23a). Thinking across the types of media you engage with, which words from the following list would you say are often used to describe older people in the media?

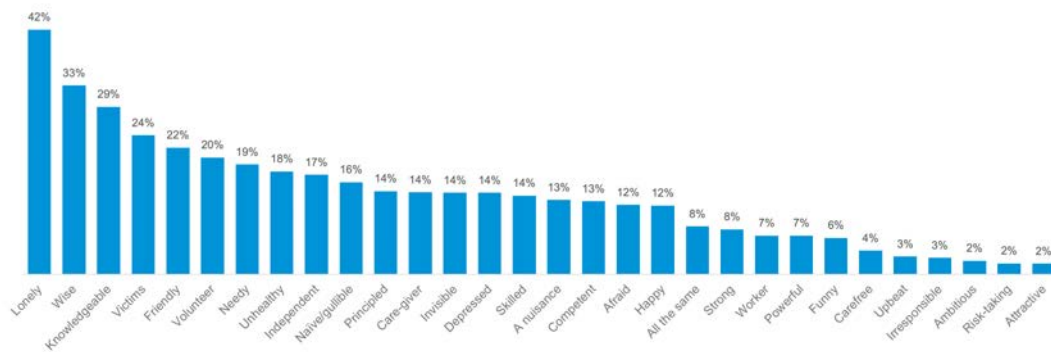


Chart 34 Words seldom or never used to describe older people in the media

Q23b). Thinking across the types of media you engage with, which words from the following list would you say are seldom or never used to describe older people in the media?

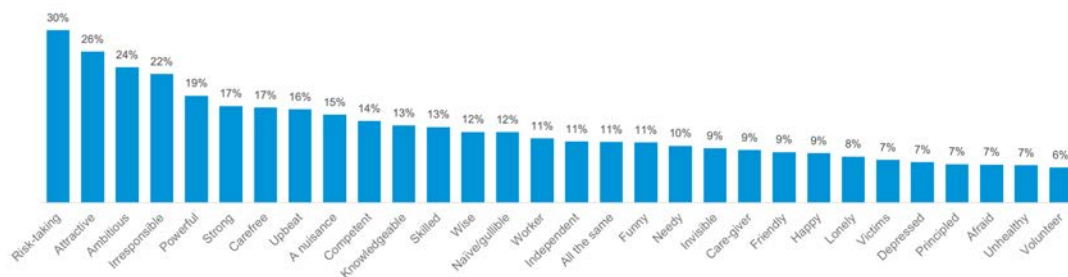


Chart 35a Agreement with positive statements about self (total sample)

Q24. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about yourself...?

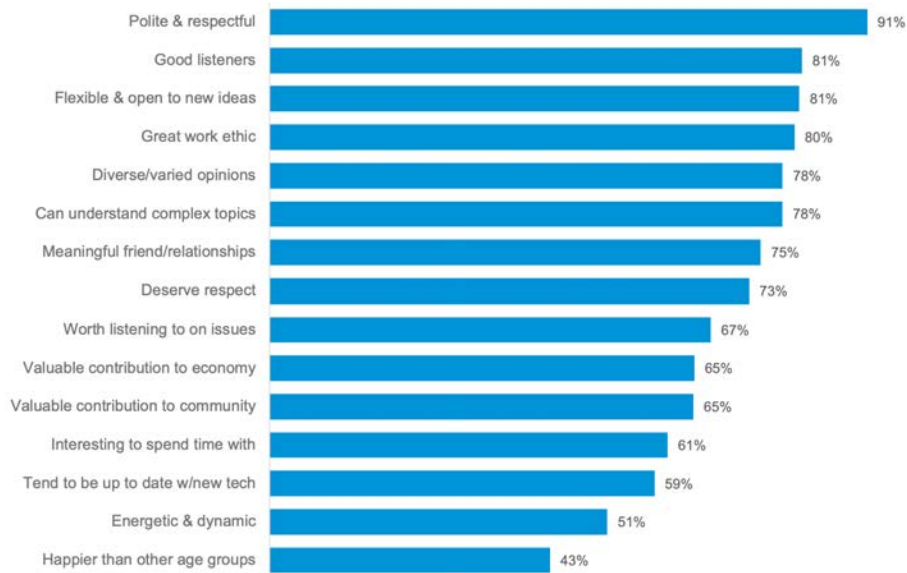


Chart 35 Agreement with positive statements about self (by age group)

Q24. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about yourself...?

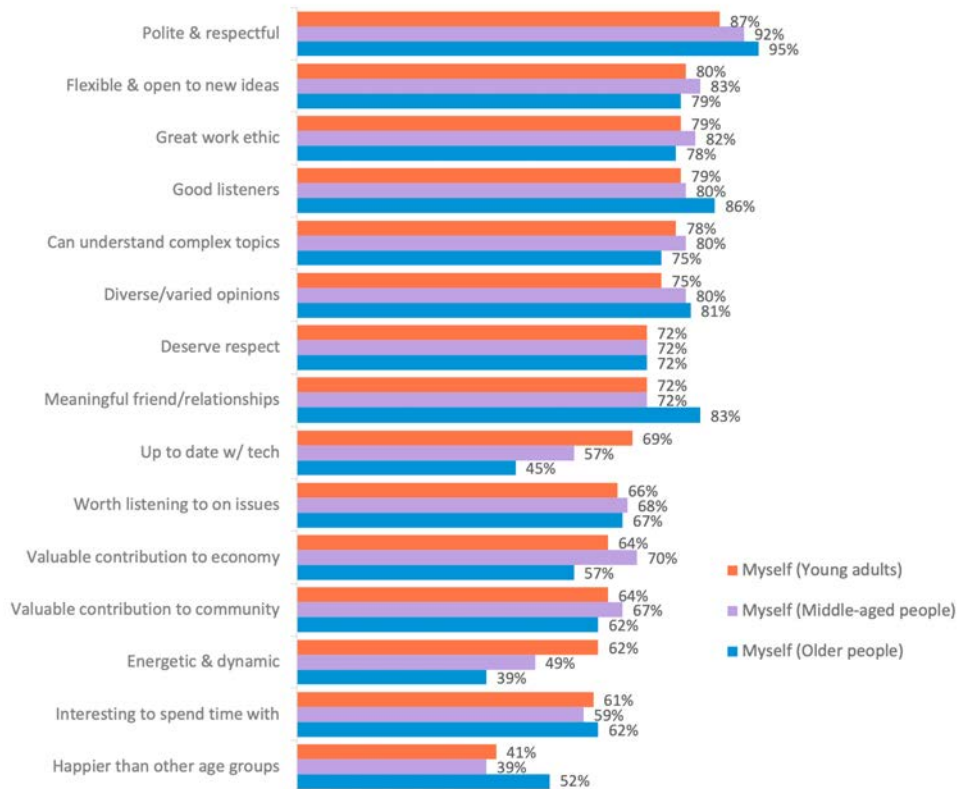


Chart 36 Agreement with negative statements about self (total)

Q25. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements...

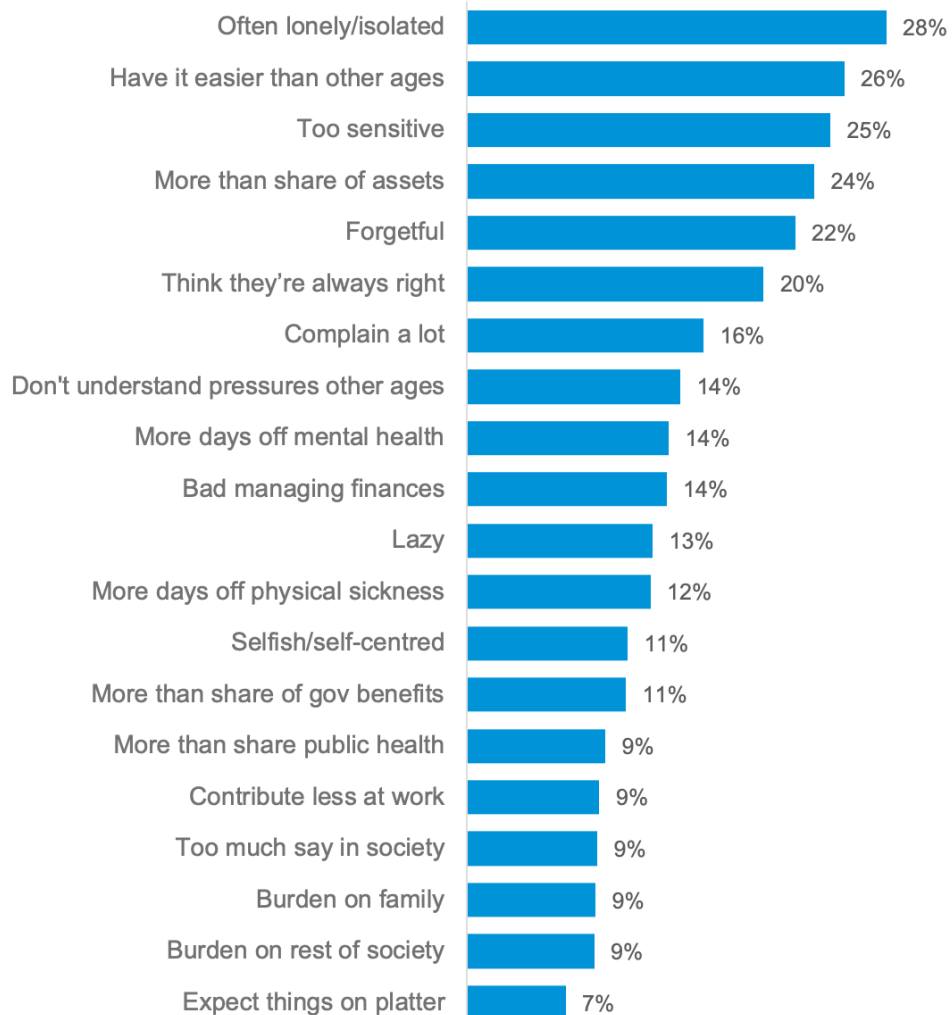


Chart 37 Agreement with negative statements about self (by age group)

Q25. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements...

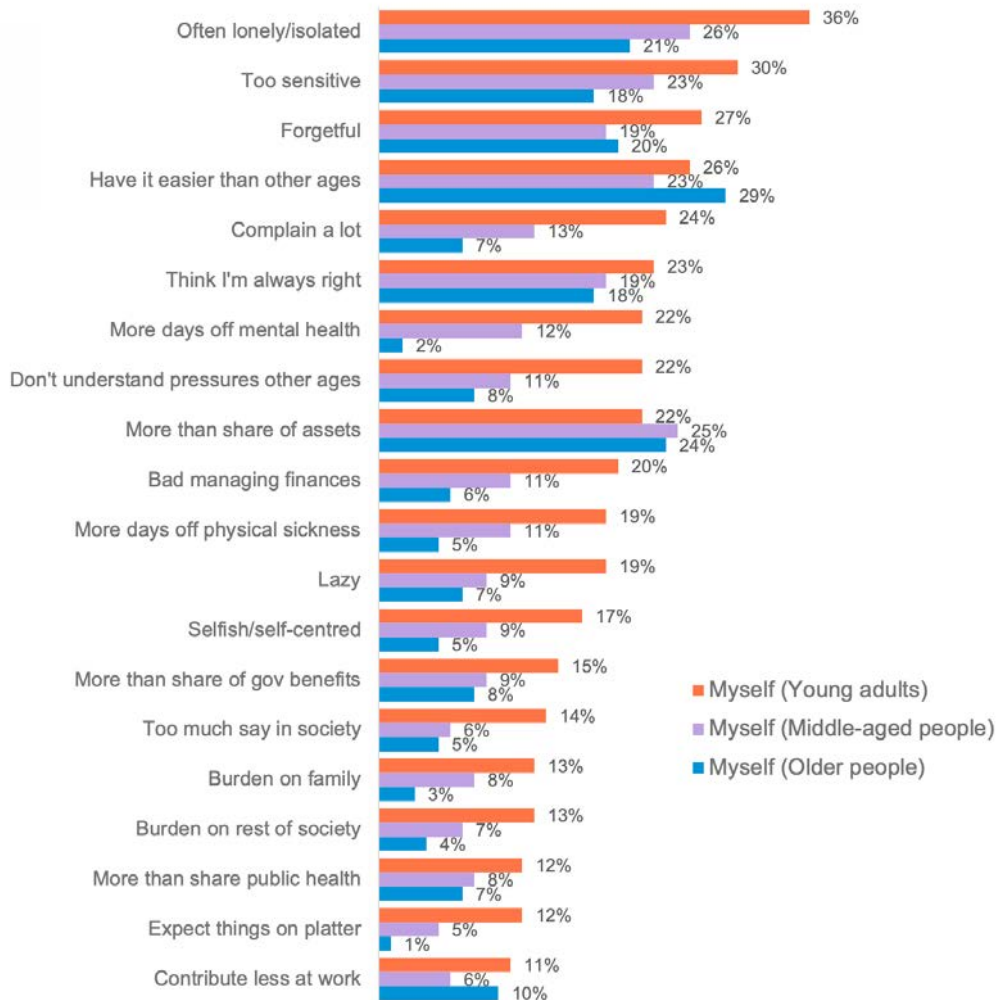


Chart 38 Age 'felt'

Q26. Which of these statements applies to you?



- I feel a lot older than my actual age
- I feel a little older than my actual age
- I feel my age
- I feel a little younger than my actual age
- I feel a lot younger than my actual age
- Age isn't something I think about/I don't 'feel' any age

Chart 39 Roles associated with age group

Q27. Which age group of people do you associate most closely with being the following...?

Please choose as many age groups as apply for each option, or choose the 'age is irrelevant' option if you feel that applies

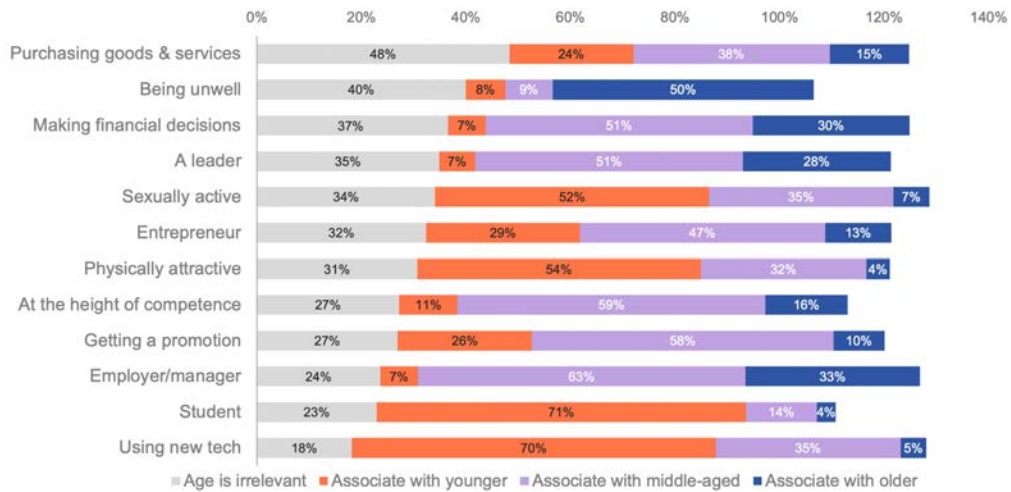


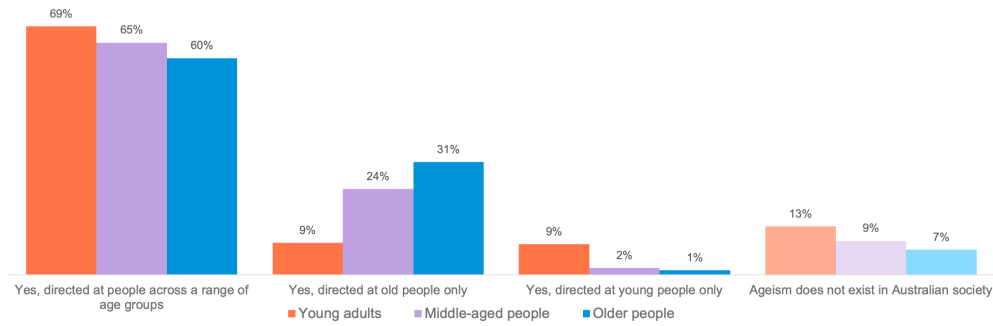
Chart 40 Existence of ageism in Australian society (total sample)

Q28. Ageism is defined as stereotyping, prejudice, or discrimination against people on the basis of their age. Ageism can affect people at any age. Do you feel ageism exists in Australian society?



Chart 41 Existence of ageism in Australian society (by age group)

Q28. Ageism is defined as stereotyping, prejudice, or discrimination against people on the basis of their age. Ageism can affect people at any age. Do you feel ageism exists in Australian society?



Q28 - Do you feel ageism exists in Australian society? Young = 809, Middle = 902, Older = 729

Chart 42 Belief that ageism is a problem (total sample)

Q29. Do you feel ageism is currently a problem in Australian society?



Chart 43 Belief that ageism is a problem (by age group)

Q29. Do you feel ageism is currently a problem in Australian society?

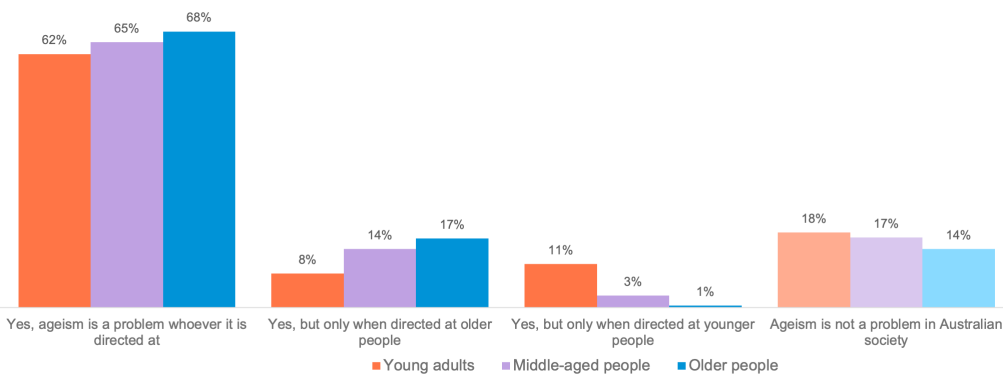


Chart 44 Agreement with statements about age and age groups

Q30. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

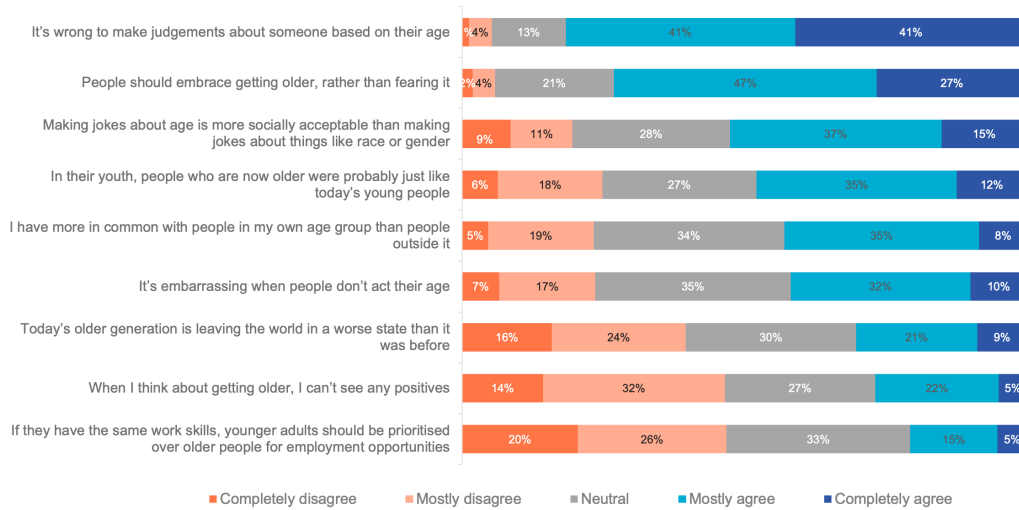


Chart 45 Agreement with statements about age and age groups (by age group, Completely and Mostly Agree)

Q30. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

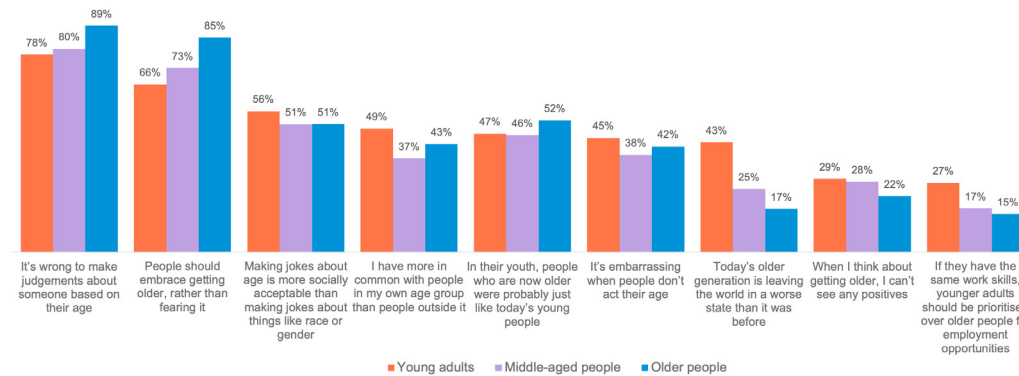


Chart 46 Frequency affected by ageism (total sample)

Q31. Do you feel ageism has affected you within the last five years? E.g., do you feel you have been treated differently because of your age?

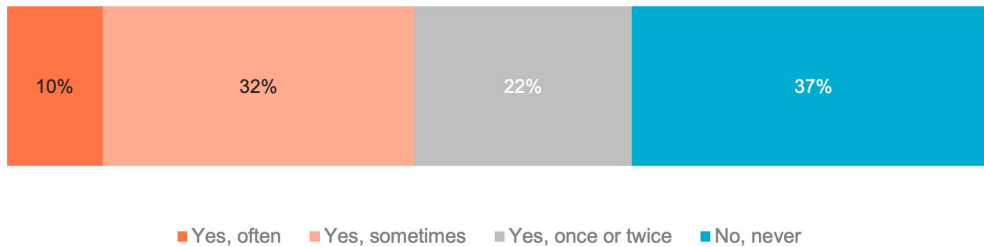


Chart 47 Frequency affected by ageism (by age group)

Q31. Do you feel ageism has affected you within the last five years? E.g., do you feel you have been treated differently because of your age?

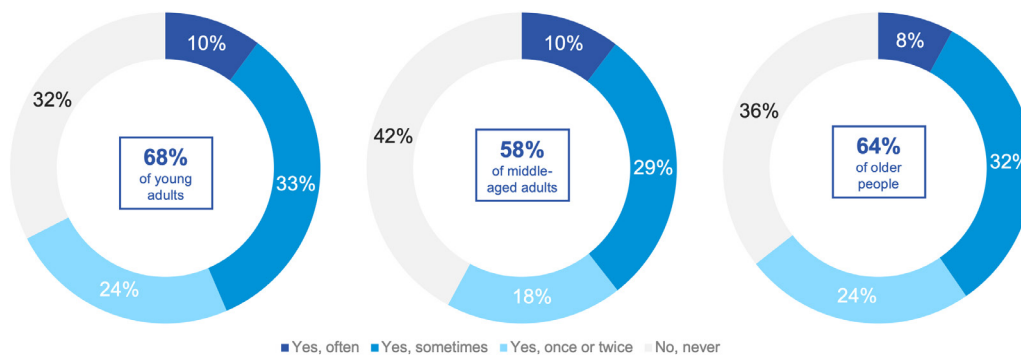


Chart 48 Ways affected by ageism (total)

Q32. In what way(s) do you feel you have been affected by ageism in the last five years? Please choose all that apply. (Those who have been affected, n = 1,527)

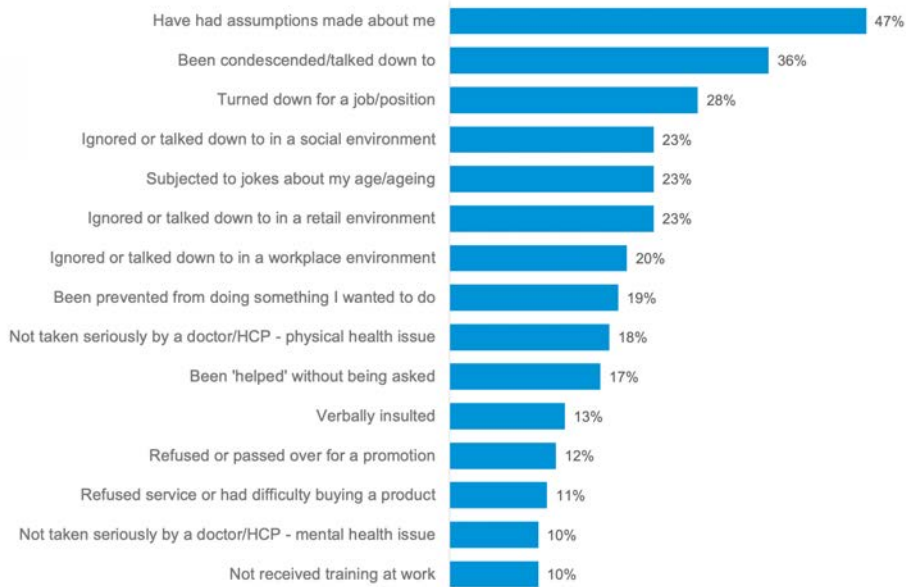


Chart 49 Ways affected by ageism (by age group)

Q32. In what way(s) do you feel you have been affected by ageism in the last five years? Please choose all that apply. (Those who have been affected: Young adults = 533, Middle aged = 526, Older adults = 468.)

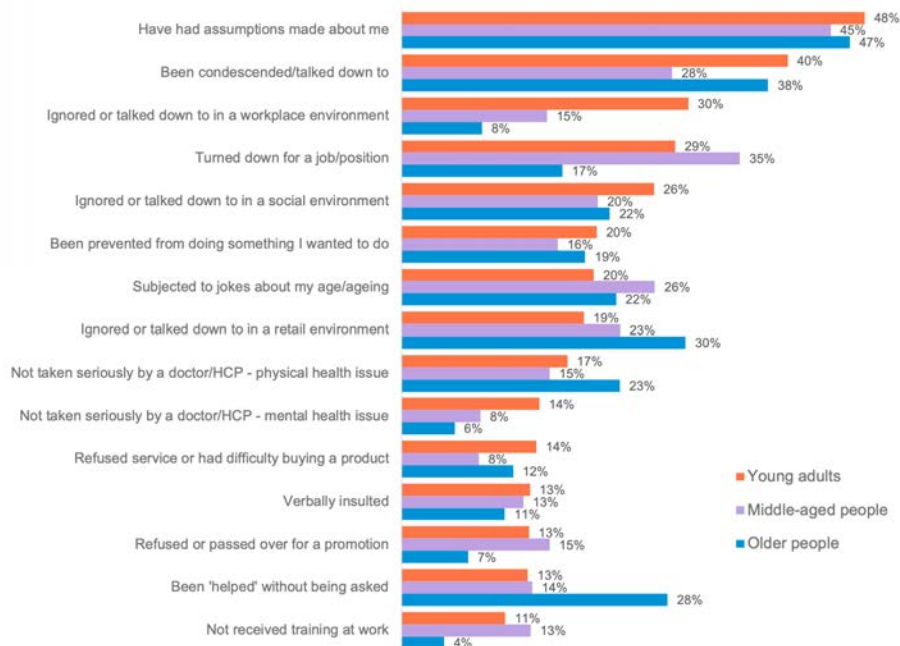


Chart 50 Personal ageism against other age groups

Q33. For the following questions, please remember this survey is anonymous and none of your answers will be linked to any personal details. Do you feel you may have ever stereotyped or made assumptions about any of the following age groups of people because of their age?

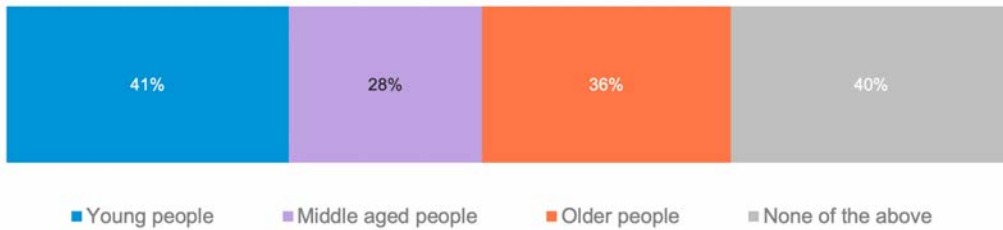


Chart 51 Frequency of personal ageism against other age groups (total)

Q34. You said you feel you may have stereotyped or made assumptions about some people because of their age. How often would you say you do this for each age group you mentioned? (See chart for base sizes for each column, n = those who have stereotyped each age group).

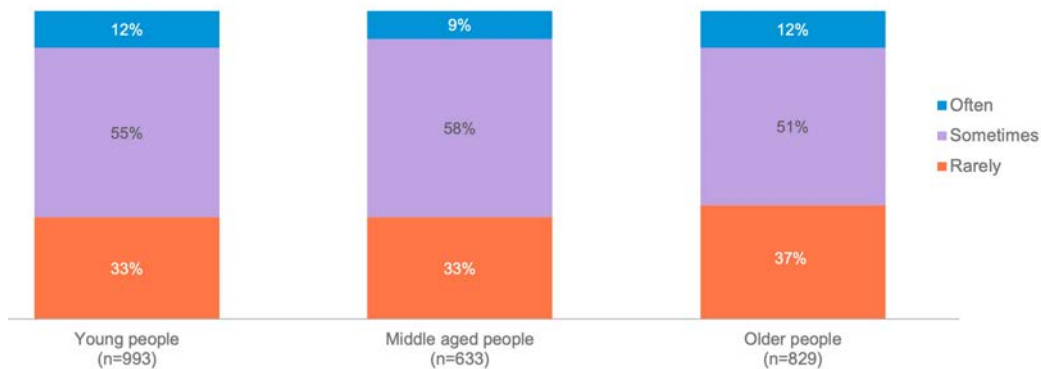


Chart 52 Frequency of personal ageism against other age groups (by age group)

Q34. You said you feel you may have stereotyped or made assumptions about some people because of their age. How often would you say you do this for each age group you mentioned? (See chart for base sizes for each column, n = those who have stereotyped each age group).

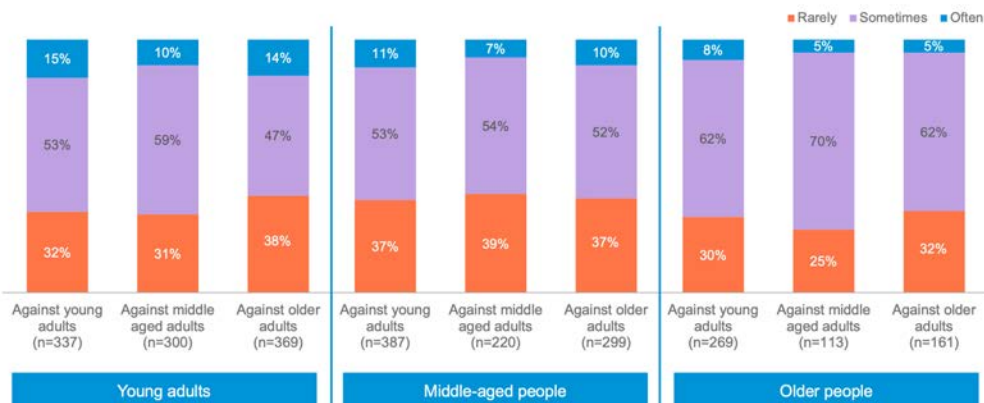


Chart 53 Effectiveness of potential actions to combat ageism (by total sample)

Q35. Which of the following do you think would be most effective to combat ageism in Australia? Please choose up to three options:

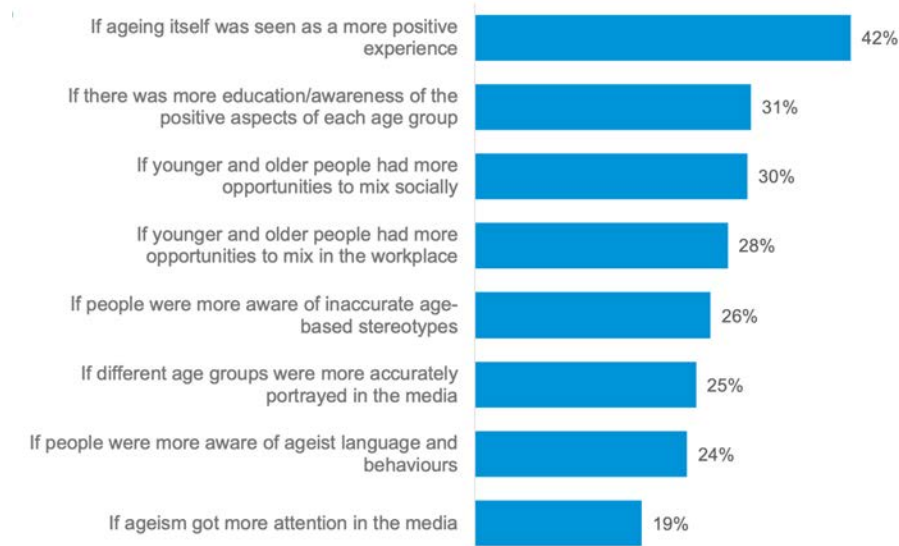


Chart 54 Effectiveness of potential actions to combat ageism (by age group)

Q35. Which of the following do you think would be most effective to combat ageism in Australia? Please choose up to three options:

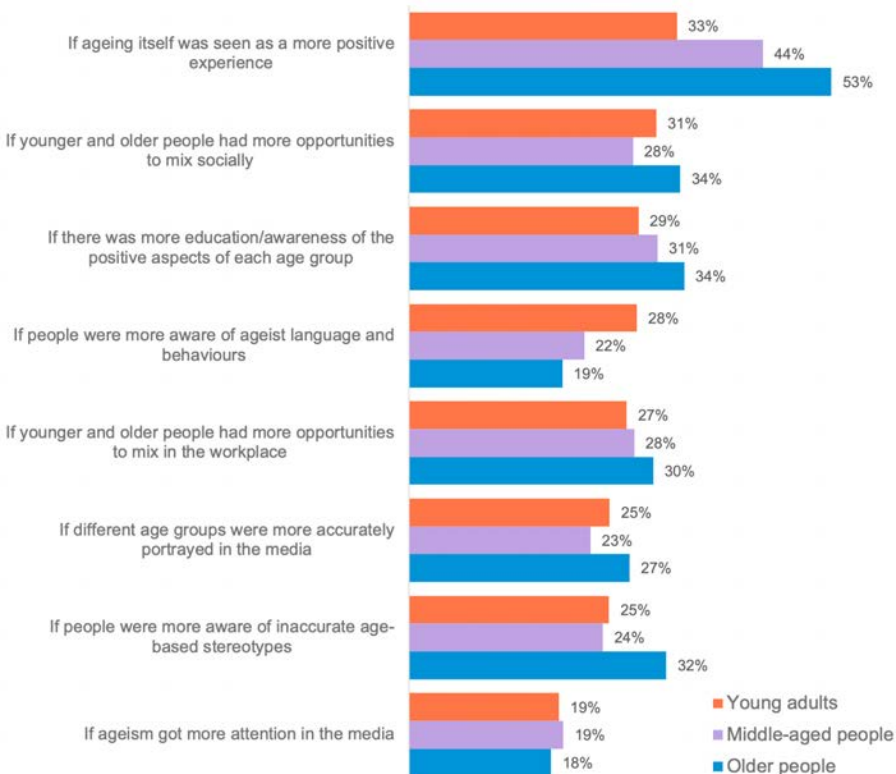


Chart 55 Impact of COVID-19 on feelings about other age groups (total sample)

Q36. Has COVID-19 (coronavirus) affected the way you feel about people of ages other than your own?



Chart 56 Impact of COVID-19 on feelings about other age groups (by age group)

Q36. Has COVID-19 (coronavirus) affected the way you feel about people of ages other than your own?

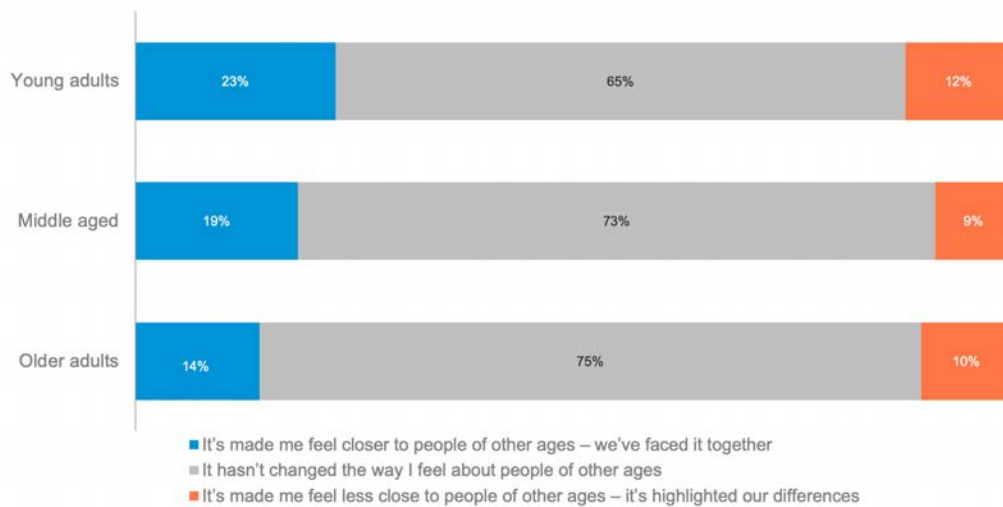


Chart 57 Media consumption in typical week

Q37. During a typical week, how often do you watch, read or otherwise consume the following types of media?

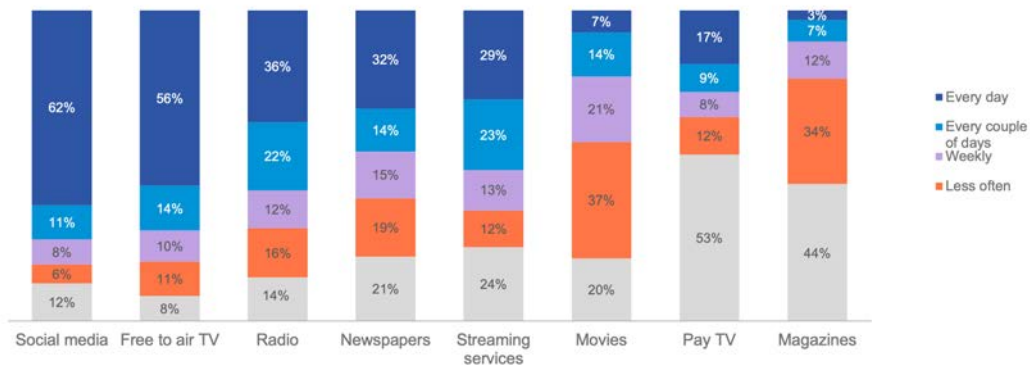


Chart 58 Education level

Q38. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

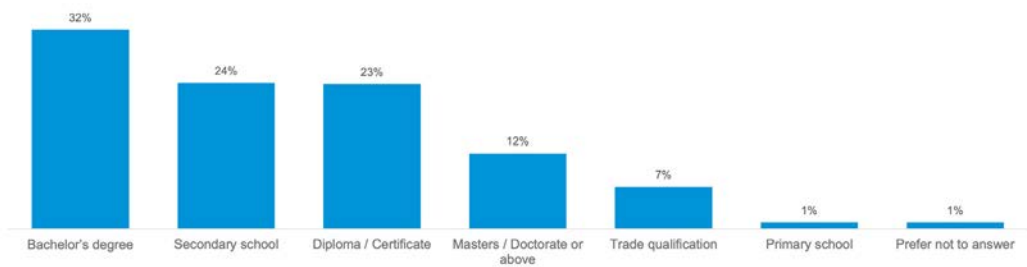


Chart 59 Employment

Q39. Which best describes your current employment type?

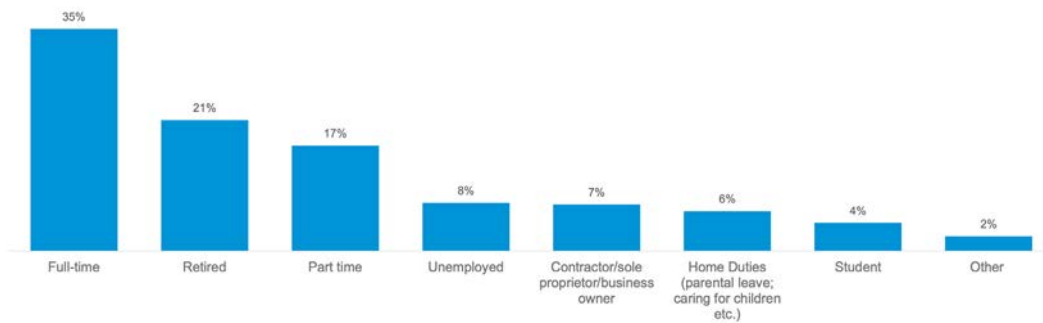


Chart 60 Marital status

Q40. Which of the following best describes you?

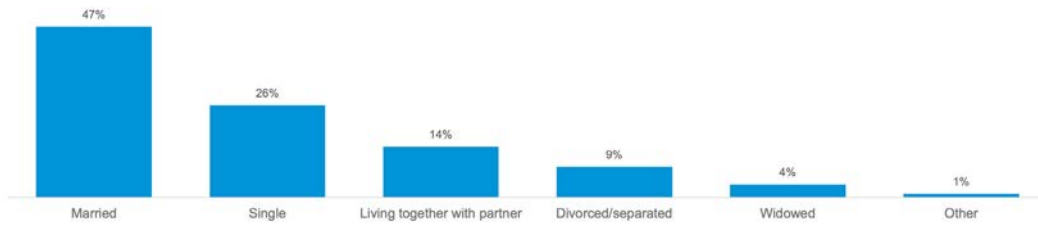


Chart 61 Children

Q41. Do you have any children?

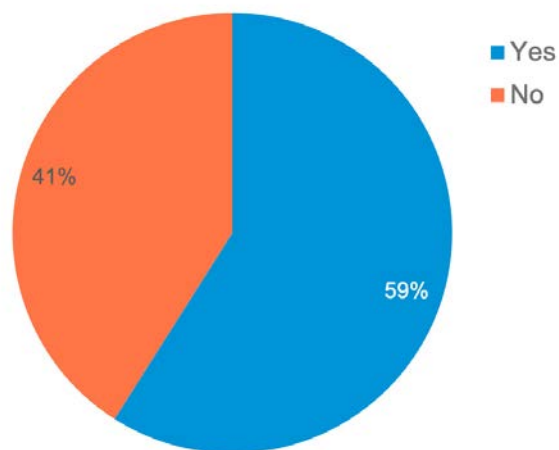


Chart 62 Age of children

Q42. How old is your oldest child? (Those with children, n = 1,538.)

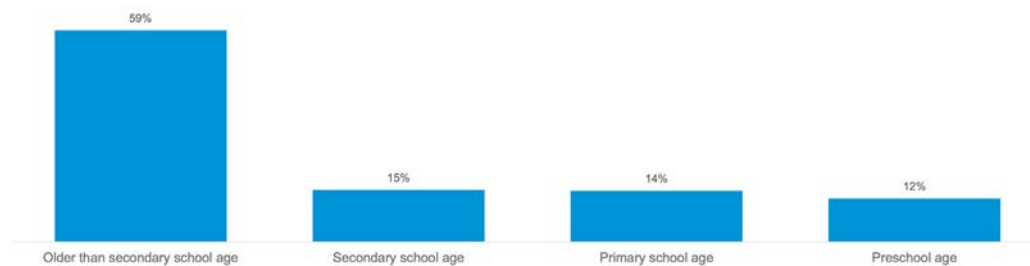


Chart 63 Grandchildren

Q43. Do you have any grandchildren? (Those with older children, n = 1,178.)

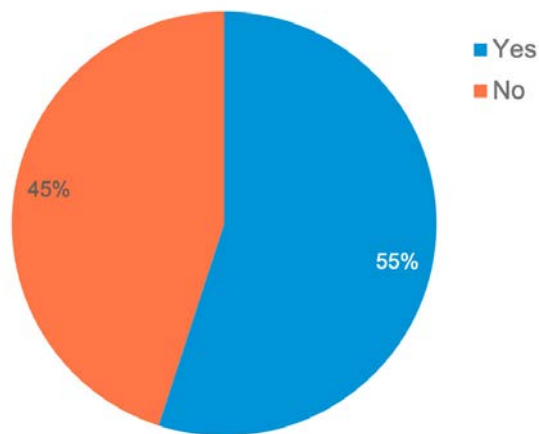


Chart 64 Household income

Q44. What is your total household income before tax?

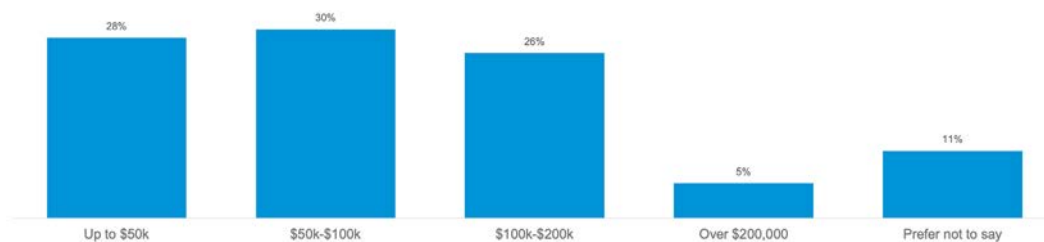


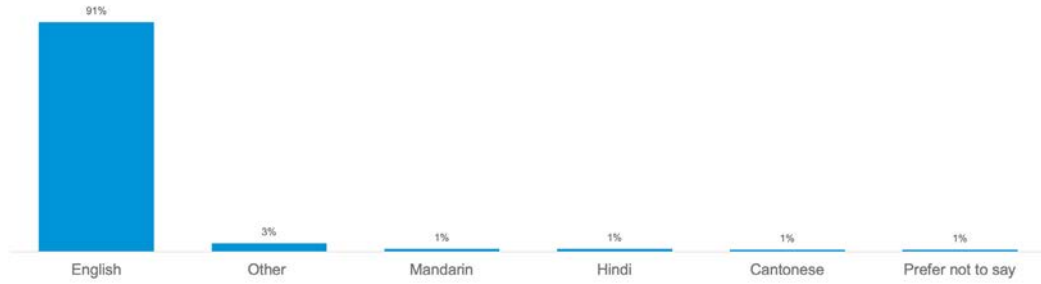
Chart 65 Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander status

Q45. Do you identify as...?



Chart 66 Main language spoken at home

Q46. And finally, what is the main language spoken in your home?



Further Information

Australian Human Rights Commission

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SYDNEY NSW 2001
Telephone: (02) 9284 9600

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