

COTA

NEW SOUTH WALES
For older Australians



What older
people think...



Executive Summary

Very often when the opinions or attitudes of older people are referred to in the public domain, there are a range of assumptions made about what they think and feel.

There is a dominant narrative of the selfish and wealthy 'baby boomer' for example, that is based on generalities and simplification - instead of the diverse range of ages, background and beliefs that characterise people in the over 50s age group.

This research sought to explore the attitudes and values of people aged 50 and older in New South Wales, on a range of topic areas that are of concern to the Australian people both now and into the future. More than 6390 older people responded to the 2021 COTA NSW survey with a further 8 online focus groups conducted to explore the themes of the research in greater depth.

The results reiterate what COTA NSW already knew - that older people are not a homogenous group. Like the general population, older people hold different views on a range of issues that may confirm or challenge assumptions that are often based on gender, age-cohort, income or geographic location.

The main findings of the survey include:

- Top 3 issues of concern were: Climate change, Housing affordability & homelessness, COVID-19.
- 91.2% of respondents agreed with the statement that it is getting harder to access information and services without using the internet.
- A decisive 81.7% of respondents believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be recognised in the constitution.
- $\frac{3}{4}$ of older people agree with the statement that cultural diversity has had a positive impact on Australia.
- Climate change was the most significant environmental challenge, followed by loss of plant and animal species and drought and drying.
- A significant majority (78.6%) felt that they understood climate change either a lot or a moderate amount.
- Survey respondents thought that the most important government policy to combat climate change was to introduce policies to encourage the use of new low carbon technologies e.g. electric cars, solar panels.
- 1/3 of older people cited online news websites as their main news source compared to traditional print newspapers of 12%.
- For their news our participants read Sydney Morning Herald, listened to ABC radio and visited ABC News online.
- Half of respondents believe that they had more social and economic opportunities than young people today.
- Less than an $\frac{1}{4}$ believe that advertisers show older people in a fair light.
- 64% thought that older people either had a lot or moderate amounts of influence in politics or public policy.

Methodology

A survey of people aged 50 and over in NSW was conducted by COTA NSW in August and September 2021 and received 6390 valid responses.

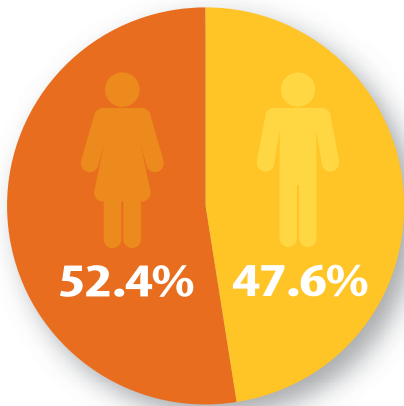
The survey was self-administered and available online and in hardcopy to COTA NSW members without e-mail or internet access. The survey was promoted through COTA NSW e-newsletter subscribers, COTA NSW members and COTA NSW Facebook and Twitter accounts. A link to the survey was inserted in the Seniors Card e-newsletter and posted on various community organisation and local council websites in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas.

Data was weighted using Q Research Software by age and gender according to 2016 Census data for NSW population aged 50 and over. This was to ensure the data was representative of the target population. The resulting data set was analysed within the software package SPSS.

COTA NSW would like to acknowledge the assistance of SEC Newgate Research in the weighting of the data and Daniel Dinale, The University of Sydney for analysis of the resultant weighted data.

Survey sample

Gender



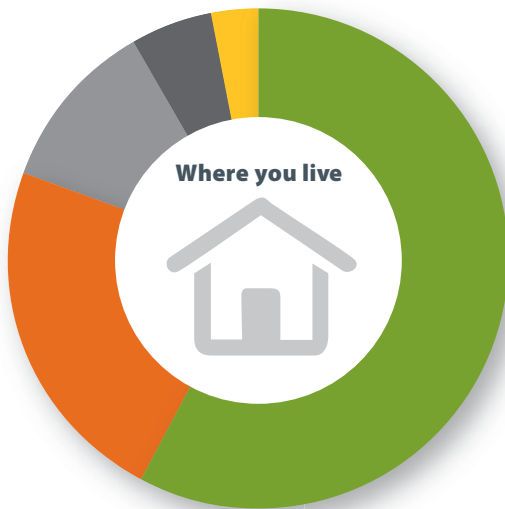
Age Group

55 - 59 years	6.1%
60 - 69 years	49.4%
70 - 79 years	34.6%
80 years or >	6.0%
Missing data	3.9%

Diversity

82	Respondents identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
5%	Respondents identified as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse.
4.8%	Respondents identified as LGBT.
6.4%	Respondents identified as a Person with Disability.
8.4%	Respondents identified as a carer.

Where you live



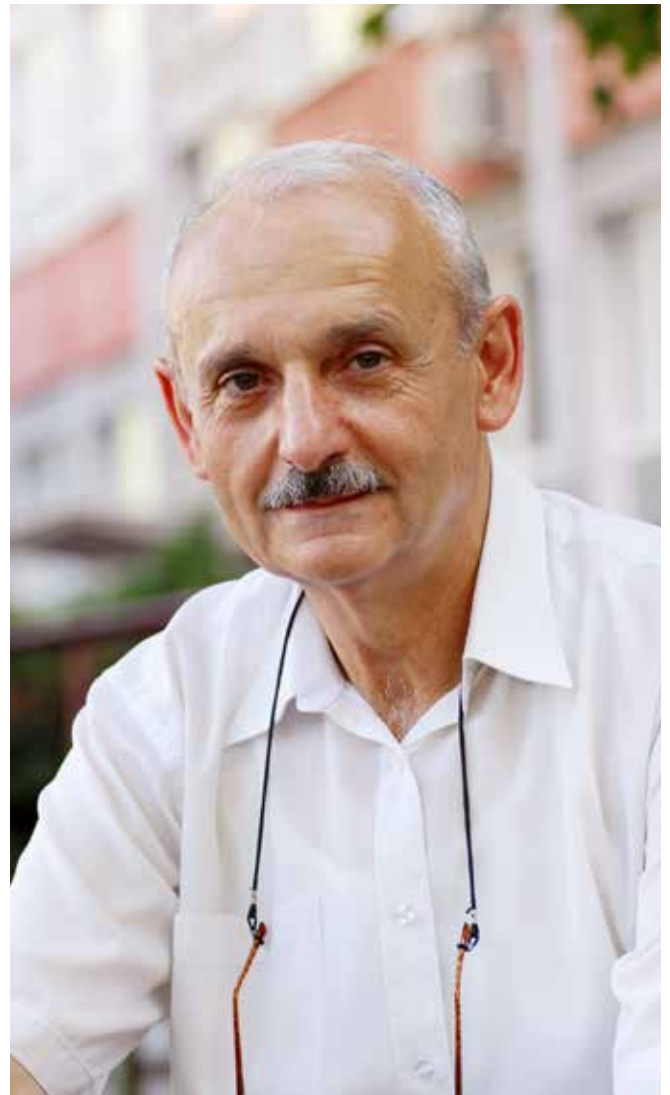
57.8% Metropolitan area
(e.g. Sydney or surrounds)

23% Regional city/centre

11% Rural town

5.2% Rural area out of town
or remote area

3% Prefer not to answer



Current Work Status

I am retired from paid work	44.5%
I am self-employed	5.6%
I work part-time	9.5%
I work full-time	22.8%
I am unemployed	5.2%
I work as a casual	2.7%
I am a volunteer	5%
Prefer not to answer	4.6%

Household income

\$480 per week or less	11.6%
\$480 - \$961 per week	18.8%
\$962 - \$1442 per week	13.4%
\$1443 - \$1923 per week	10.5%
\$1924 - \$2884 per week	11.4%
\$2885 per week and over	12%
Prefer not to answer	22.4%

Limitations

As the survey was conducted predominately online, to complete it all participants needed internet access and to be competent in its use. It is acknowledged that this requirement may skew responses across a range of variables. A small sample of respondents completed the survey on paper. The survey has been weighted by age and gender.

Respondents to this survey were overwhelmingly Australian born and English speaking. The response rate to this survey of people from cultural and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds was 5% and not indicative of the cultural diversity in NSW. Additionally, the survey continues to receive limited responses from younger cohorts i.e. 50 – 60. For these reasons, while the survey provides many insights into the attitudes and behaviour of the people who participated in the research project, the findings cannot be generalised to all older people living in New South Wales.

Consumer Reference Groups

To complement the quantitative research, 8 focus groups were conducted online in October and November of 2021.

These groups consisted of a maximum of 8 participants and included older people from across the state, from different age groups and gender. The groups provided an opportunity to discuss in greater details many of the themes contained within the survey, such as diversity, the environment and media usage and representation.

It is from these in-depth conversations that much of this report is informed, providing nuanced insights and personal stories on older people's values and attitudes to a range of issues impacting Australia now and into the future.

Issues facing Australia today

The societal, economic and environmental challenges that are of concern to older people in New South Wales are not limited to within the confines of the state border but are broader and significant issues impacting Australia - and for two selected priorities – the world and humanity.

Within the survey, respondents were asked to select their top 3 most pressing issues that they felt needed to be addressed in Australia today. They were provided with a list of policy areas that are commonly cited as of importance in Australia. Respondents could also provide additional topics of concern if not listed amongst the 14.

The results were unequivocal, climate change was the predominate issue of concern, with over half of respondents indicating that this was of primary concern to them. The second most selected issue was 'housing affordability & homelessness' with 47.9% of respondents selecting this, followed by Covid-19 at 43.8%.

The nomination of climate change and housing affordability & homelessness as the two key issues facing Australia today challenges many of the stereotypes that often exist and portrays older generations as self-interested and socially conservative.



N=5843

The issue of housing affordability and homelessness was of greater importance to women and all respondents in the 50 – 59 age group. Those living in a rural area out of town (31%) were least likely to have selected this issue. However, 1 in 2 residents of regional cities nominated this as a priority issue.

A further analysis of individuals that selected climate change as a top 3 issue in Australia, found negligible differences between gender. Younger cohorts were more likely to be concerned about climate change, with a 9% difference between those aged 50 – 59 and the 80+ group. When analysed further by income and location, those with a household income above \$1443 (\$75 k p.a.) (61%) and living in metropolitan areas (54%) were more likely to have selected this issue. It is interesting to note that older people living in rural areas out of town also felt this was an important issue with 48% of these respondents selecting climate change. COTA NSW contends that this may be due to living with many of the effects of climate change, such as reduced rainfall, bushfires or floods.


The importance of these issues were reinforced in subsequent focus groups. Participants were asked unprompted to articulate about what areas as a nation needed to be addressed. Climate change predominated. There was a general frustration with what many attendees saw as a lack of concrete action on climate change – particularly at a federal government level.

“I’m very concerned about climate change. But I believe that older people have a role in convincing people that things have to be done, we don’t have an option. I’m already seeing it.”

Focus group, 2/11/21.

“I think my number one at the moment is climate, and particularly thinking about my grandchildren, and what it’s likely to mean in their lifetime, and where I live is probably going to be an island within the next 60 years, and the whole place will not be habitable.”

Focus group, 2/11/21.



The need for effective public policy and investment in affordable housing was also raised frequently. Discussion on this topic was wide ranging, including the difficulty of younger generations able to enter the housing market, but also concerns about the levels of homelessness and housing diversity within their local areas.

“I agree that housing affordability is a major issue. Our young people are not able to afford to buy into the housing market. And I think that's a subject of great concern. Because as they get older, they will become increasingly unable to afford to rent somewhere. Rent affordability is also an issue.”

Focus group, 3/11/21.

Other areas of concern raised during the focus groups included: growing inequality, lack of trust in government, inadequacy of JobSeeker rate and the aged care sector.

Technology

The COVID-19 pandemic and the physical and social restrictions that were subsequently imposed has resulted in a dramatic increase in the use of technology.

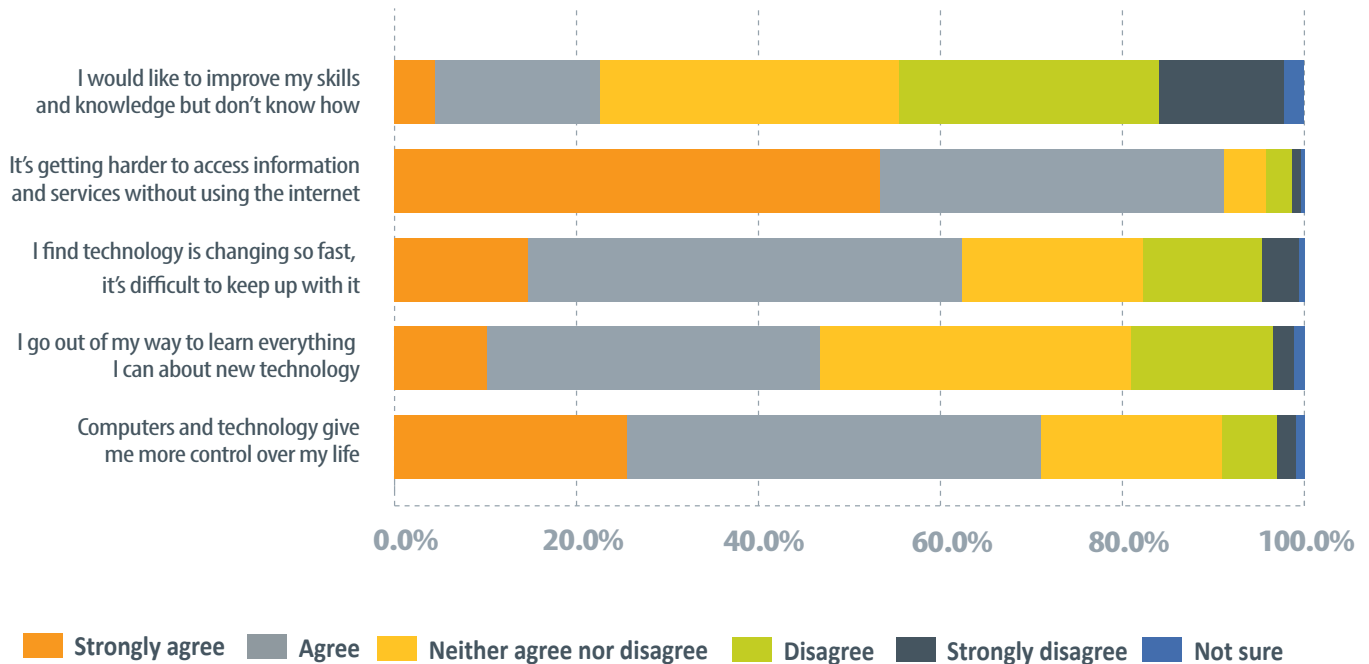
The introduction of QR codes for check-in to businesses and services exposed the challenges that many older people faced, especially those without smartphones or who were not proficient in the use of technology.

This produced a level of frustration amongst many and a feeling of being left behind with government and businesses moving information provision and access to services to online platforms.

The survey asked respondents to select to what extent they agreed or disagreed with five statements to provide insight into older people's attitudes to technological change. A decisive 91.2% of respondents agreed with the statement that it is getting harder to access information and services without using the internet. This is problematic, with many groups in the community impacted by an inability to gain access to information or services if they are relying on more traditional modes of information dissemination such as print media.

These findings align with those published in the annual *Digital Inclusion Index*, that highlighted the digital disadvantage that many older people endure compared to those with higher digital ability scores – particularly with accessing medical, social and financial products and services online.¹

Attitudes to changing technology



N=4096

The level of knowledge and skill required to use technology is also a concern to a majority of older people, with 62.4% agreeing that they find it difficult to keep up with the changes in technology. However, this concern of being left behind does not translate to similar levels of interest in improving skills and knowledge with approximately 1 in 5 of the respondents expressing a wish to undertake further training.

“I'm personally uncomfortable with the pace of change in technology. My concern is the number of organisations that have assumptions or expectations about people and their access to or their ability use apps and the internet. This is inappropriate, especially for people who may not be so familiar with the technology.”

Focus group, 21/10/21.

¹ Thomas, J., Barraket, J., Parkinson, S., Wilson, C., Holcombe-James, I., Kennedy, J., Mannell, K., Brydon, A. (2021). Australian Digital Inclusion Index: 2021. Melbourne: RMIT, Swinburne University of Technology, and Telstra. Retrieved from: https://h3e6r2c4.rocketcdn.me/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ADII_2021_Summary-report_V1.pdf

Despite these concerns, 71% believed that technology and the use of computers provided them with greater control over their lives. Almost half (47%) of respondents expressed an interest in the use of technology and a willingness to stay informed.

“I like to adapt to technology because if you don’t, somewhere down the track, you're going to need it and you won't have the skills to go with it. I think you just need to keep up and I'm fortunate I've got a lot of younger people in my life who introduced me to apps and I've had a lot of fun with it. So, technology can be both useful and entertaining, and can keep you up to date.”

Focus group, 2/11/21.



Indigenous recognition

Australia's recognition of First Nations peoples and the importance of addressing both current and historical injustices - continues to be an area where little momentum in public policy has occurred.

***This is despite the release of 'The Uluru statement from the heart' in 2017 – a collaborative statement of over 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates that was 'addressed to the Australian people, invited the nation to create a better future via the proposal of key reforms.'*²**

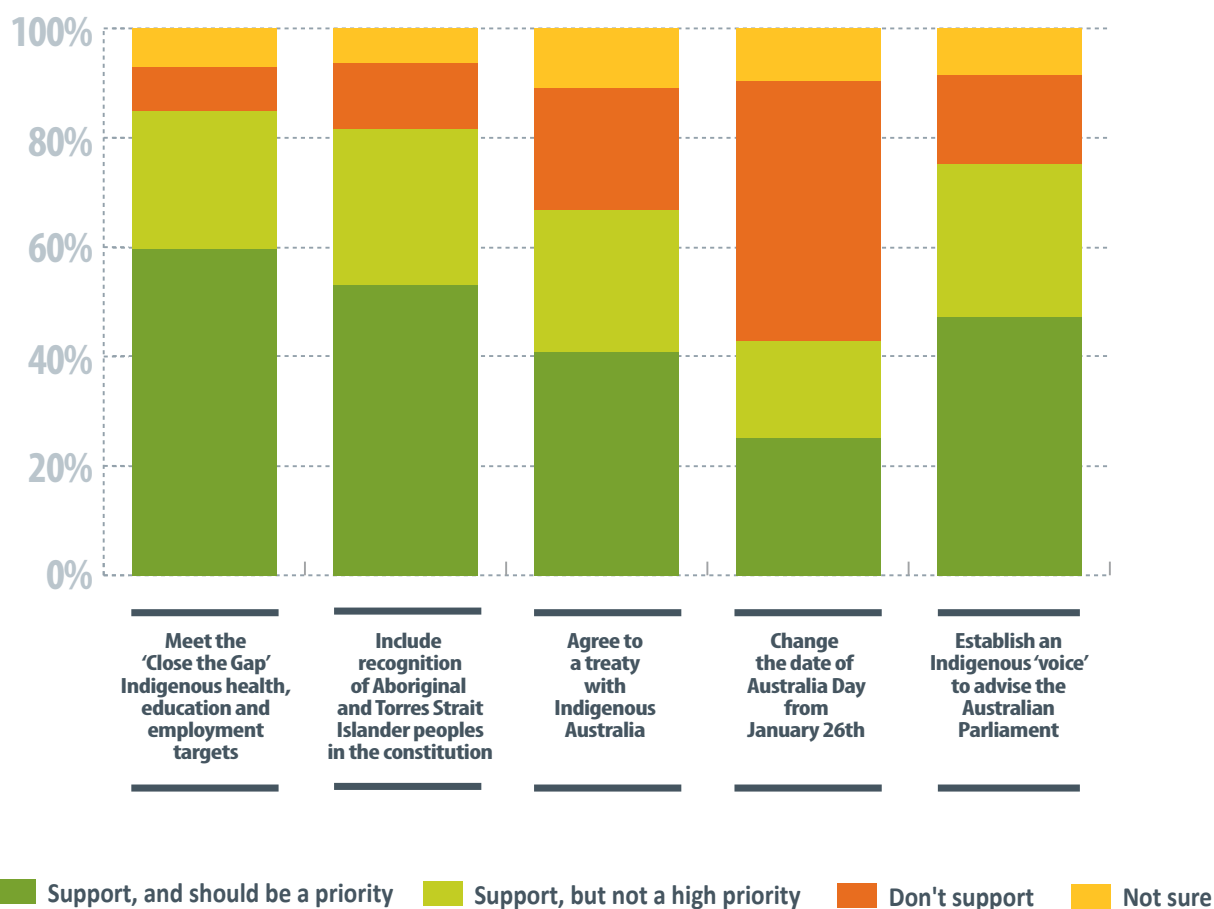
The lack of political commitment to tackle the need for Indigenous recognition in Australia does not align with the support for these reforms that exist within the older Australian populace. The COTA NSW survey, referencing statements included in a previous *Essential Research* report, asked respondents to indicate whether they supported the actions listed, whether they didn't support them and if they weren't sure.³

The results of the survey were unequivocal in support on all statements relating to the recognition and inclusion of Indigenous Australians in the constitution and the establishment of a voice to the Australian parliament. On the question of recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the constitution, 81.7% supported this, with 53.1% believing it should be of high national importance. Only 11.9% of respondents did not support this constitutional recognition.

² The Uluru Statement. Retrieved from: <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement/>

³ Essential Research. (2021). *Support and priority of Indigenous Issues*. Retrieved from: <https://essentialvision.com.au/support-and-priority-of-indigenous-issues>

Indigenous recognition in Australia



N=4810

This decisive support continued in response to the two statements relating to the development of a treaty (66.8%) and the establishment of an Indigenous 'voice' to the Australian parliament (75.2%). The importance of implementing policies and concrete actions to 'close the gap' to improve Indigenous health, education and employment targets attracted resounding support (84.9%) from the survey respondents, including 59.7% of respondents rating this as a high priority.

The often contentious debate on whether the marking of Australia Day should be moved from January 26th continued to produce polarising results in the COTA NSW survey. Those opposed to changing the date (47.7%) exceeded those supporting a move (42.7%).

Women were more likely than men to agree with the statements and at a higher priority. On average there was a difference of 17% between women and men in selecting that they supported the actions and believed that they should be a priority. Of those respondents that didn't support the listed statements, there was opposition from men of approximately 2 to 1 compared to female respondents. There was no significant difference in support based on age cohort or by geographic location.

“I think it's vital that there is recognition of Indigenous people in our constitution. You know, I grew up in an era where the only thing you were taught about now First Nations people was that they were hunters and gatherers. And I'm actually ashamed of the fact that that was all I knew for a very long time, until you start learning more. And I think it's really nice when you see people acknowledge country, I think we should also start to include Aboriginal place names in our communities. And I think that until we start acknowledging where we came from, we're not really going to grow. I think that our diversity should be celebrated and tapped into, and we haven't. I don't know why politicians and I don't want to get political, but I don't know why politicians are afraid of it. Because what happened with the Uluru statement was not controversial. I don't think First Nations people should have to work so hard to try and get recognition.”

Focus group, 2/11/21.

Cultural Diversity

Australia is a multicultural country, nearly half (49%) of all Australians were either born overseas or had at least one parent who was born overseas.⁴

In NSW, 33% of people aged 50 and over were born overseas according to the 2016 census. Whilst it can be argued that Australia is fundamentally a harmonious society, unfortunately there continues to be elements of social exclusion and racism.⁵

The survey questions aimed to gauge older people's attitudes to five statements that explored the level of support for a culturally diverse community and recognition of the contributions that migrants have made and continue to make in Australia today. The statements were informed by the Scanlon Foundation annual social cohesion survey.⁶

The support for a multicultural society elicited strong support from respondents with 76.3% of people agreeing with the statement that '*cultural diversity is a positive influence*' in Australia. This assertion was consistent across all age groups. Those living in metropolitan areas were more likely to agree with this statement (78.9%) compared to older people living in rural towns (69.5%); however, support was still very high in these locations.

⁴ 2071.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Reflecting Australia - Stories from the Census, 2016

⁵ Scanlon Foundation (2021). *Mapping social cohesion*, 2021.

Retrieved from: https://scanloninstitute.org.au/sites/default/files/2021-11/Mapping_Social_Cohesion_2021_Report_0.pdf

⁶ Scanlon Foundation (2020). *Mapping social cohesion*, 2020.

Retrieved from: <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/sites/default/files/2021-02/SC2020%20Report%20Final.pdf>

“We've been fortunate to have friends from lots of different cultural backgrounds. But unfortunately, my family have also experienced racism in my local area. And sadly, I find that it's probably more our generation that I've heard it from, and my daughter in law has experienced it first hand and it really hurts. Fortunately, they live in an area which is so culturally diverse. It's an absolutely wonderful place for their son to be going to school and growing up.”

Focus group, 28/10/21.

A recognition of the contribution that migrants have made to the Australian economy through their skills and knowledge produced the highest level of support, with a definitive 85.3% of survey participants agreeing with the statement ‘migrants have contributed to a greater range of skills and knowledge’. A similar level of support was present, with a significant majority (79.5%) of participants supporting the belief that ‘culturally diverse communities should be able to enjoy and celebrate their own culture and share it with others’.

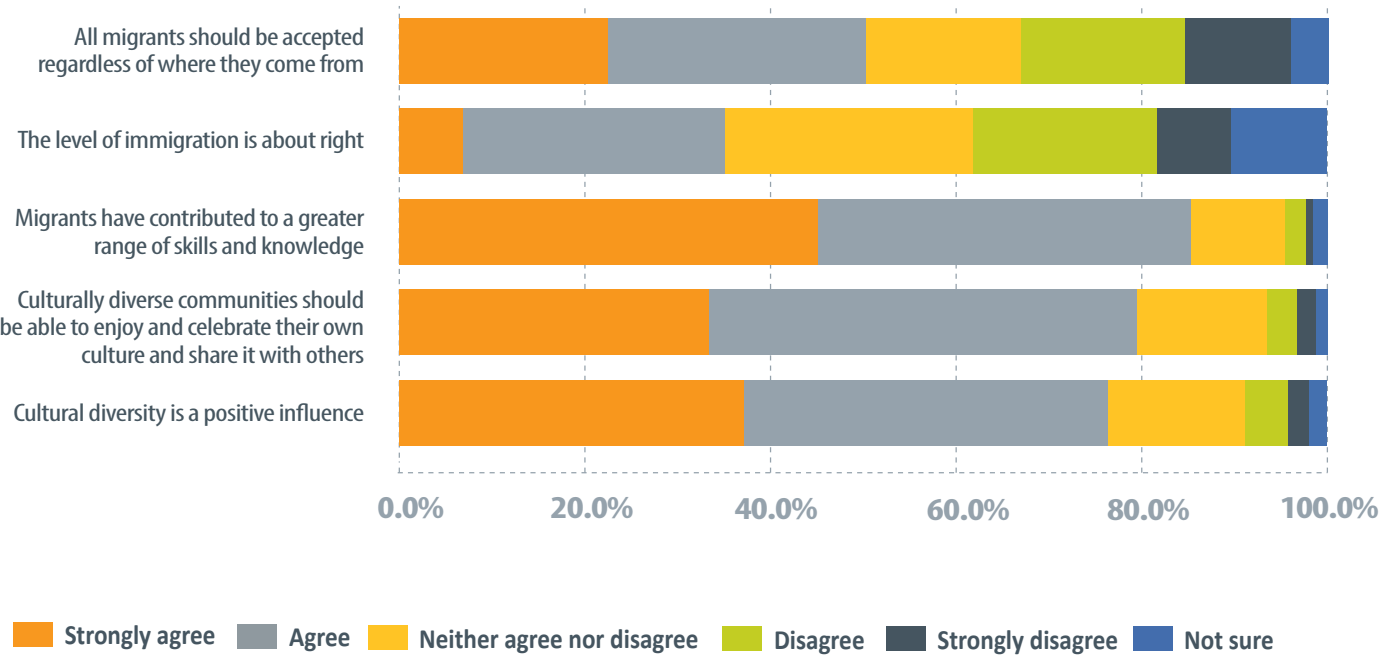


“So, I think in terms of multiculturalism, a lot of people think of it very narrowly. And I think that we need to really think of it much more broadly. It's not just about food, or it's not really about religion, it's about a whole lot of other things. And the sooner we start acknowledging that not everybody lives their lives the same way, and that's okay, then I think we'll do a lot better.”

Focus group, 2/11/21.

There was greater polarisation however, on the question of acceptance of migrants regardless of where they come from, with 50.2% agreeing with this statement and only 22.5% strongly supporting this value. There was greater acceptance of all new migrants amongst the 50 – 59 age group (60.5%) compared to an average of 49.8% for all other age groups.

A multicultural Australia



N=4810

Due to the ambiguity of the statement ‘the level of immigration is about right’ it is not possible to draw any conclusions. Those that disagreed with statement 27.8% may have responded that way with a belief that we have too much immigration or not enough. There is also a higher-than-average response of respondents that selected neither agree nor agreed, indicating possible confusion with the statements meaning.

The environment

When the environment is listed as an issue of importance, there are often widely divergent ideas about what this phrase may encompass.

For some people it may be specific and refer to the ecology of a local area they love, for others the concept is broader and may be global such as a concern about climate change.

The survey asked respondents to rank 8 environmental issues that are currently impacting Australia.

They included:



Floods



Extreme Heat



Bushfires



Waste Disposal and recycling



Drought and drying



Climate change or global warming



Loss of plant and animal species



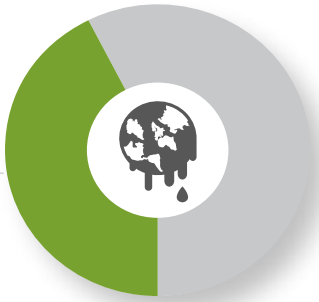
Soil salinity and erosion

It must be noted that when the survey was conducted in August and September 2021, New South Wales was experiencing the La Nina weather event and temperatures were mild and there was higher than average rainfall.

A recognition of the impact that climate change is having on Australia was ranked as the number 1 environmental issue by a significant margin. The second most important concern was the loss of plant and animal species followed by drought and drying ranking third.

Climate change

42.6%



Loss of plant and animal species

16.2%



Drought and drying

21.3%



An examination of ranking of climate by location found almost 60% of older people living in regional cities in NSW ranked climate change number 1 compared to approximately a 1/3 of respondents in out of town or remote areas. There was not a significant difference of prioritisation of climate change due to respondents’ main source of news or the newspaper masthead they read, with the exception of Australian Financial Reviews readers, with 32% selecting climate change as their most important concern compared to an average of 50% to readers of other main newspapers.

N=5731

Further analysis of climate change as the primary concern was undertaken by gender, age, location and news source. This exploration found minimal difference between women and men in the ranking priority, however the results indicated that those aged 50 – 79 more likely to rank climate number 1 compared to people aged 80+ years.



Extremes of temperature

The recently released IPCC Sixth Assessment Report: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerabilities asserts with a high level of confidence that Australia will face greater numbers of heatwaves and days of extreme heat.

This in turn will lead to increased deaths and rates of illnesses amongst older people who are highly vulnerable to extreme events, such as heat stress. ⁷

As recently as January 2020, Penrith in Western Sydney hit 48.9°C a foreshadowing of the years to come without a global commitment to a reduction in carbon emissions. The survey endeavoured to explore older people's experiences of heat and the impacts on their health and wellbeing.

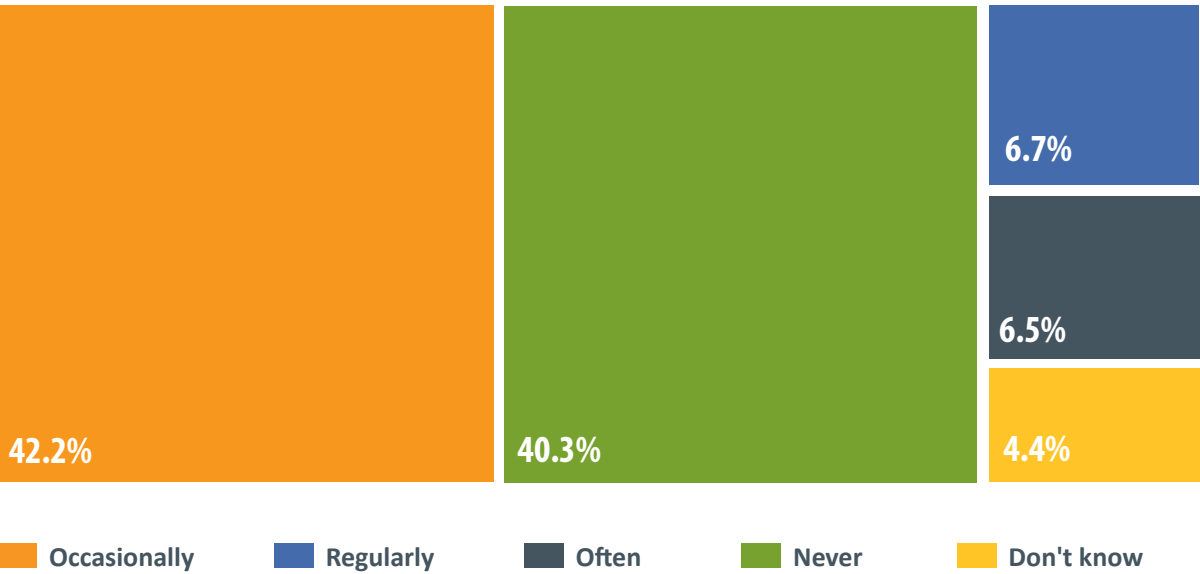
Have you ever felt unwell due to hot weather?



⁷ IPCC WGII Sixth Assessment Report, Chapter 11: Australasia.

Retrieved from: https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6wg2/pdf/IPCC_AR6_WGII_FinalDraft_Chapter11.pdf

Heat and health



N=4680



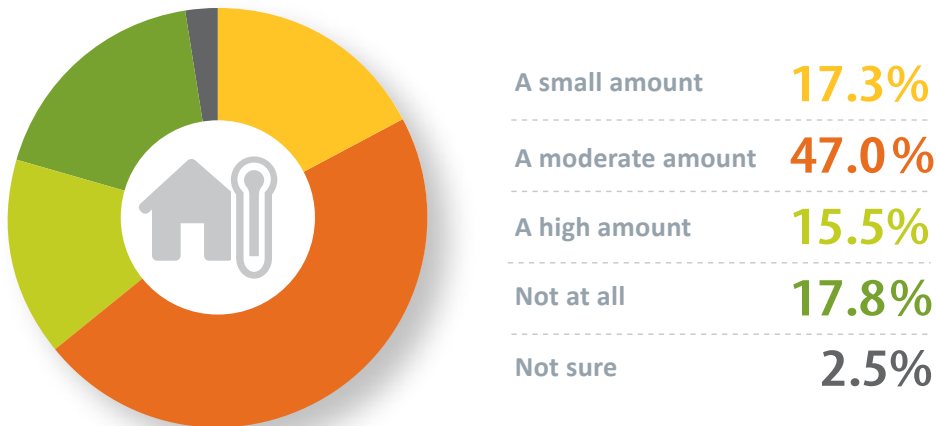
Although, the results broadly indicate that many of the respondents to the survey did not believe that heat impacted their health, when analysed by other variables such as gender, age, housing type and income source these results provided notable differences.

Of those who reported feeling regularly unwell due to the heat, 83.6% of those answering in the affirmative were female. This was also repeated with respondents who reported that they often felt unwell in hot weather, with 76.6% of females within this group. When explored by age group, those in the 80+ age group were twice as likely to feel unwell in higher temperatures compared to the 50 – 59 cohort.

The data suggests that there is a correlation between income source, housing tenure and the level of discomfort that they experience during heat waves. Older people receiving disability payments (31.1%) were more likely to report feeling regularly unwell during extremes of heat compared with all other income sources (Avg. of 5.92%). This disparity is mirrored in housing tenure with those living in social housing more likely to report feeling unwell both regularly (16.9%) and often (10.1%), compared to older people living in other housing types, such as own home (5.8% and 6.1% respectively).

Respondents were asked to consider whether their home was built to withstand extremes of cold or heat. Housing tenure and income support were again features of respondents who stated that their homes were not at all built to provide comfort to the occupants during extremes of temperature. Those living in social housing (57.8%) or rented (40.2%) were significantly more likely to feel that their home did not provide protection from these extremes compare to all other house tenure types.

Housing for temperature extremes



N=4680

Those receiving a disability pension (50%) were three times more likely to state that their housing was inadequate during cold and heat extremes compared to older people earning a salary or wage or receiving income from investments.

Perhaps counterintuitively, older people living in metropolitan areas were more likely to say that their housing was able to withstand temperature extremes by either a small amount (18.3%) or not all (19.4%) compared to other areas in the state, such as rural out of town or remote where the results were 10.7% and 14.3% respectively.

Attitudes to climate change

A discussion about the science of climate change, its impacts on the natural world and humanity and the importance of implementing both mitigation and adaptation measures, has unfortunately in Australia been politicised over many years.

This survey was in the field during the lead up to the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Glasgow.

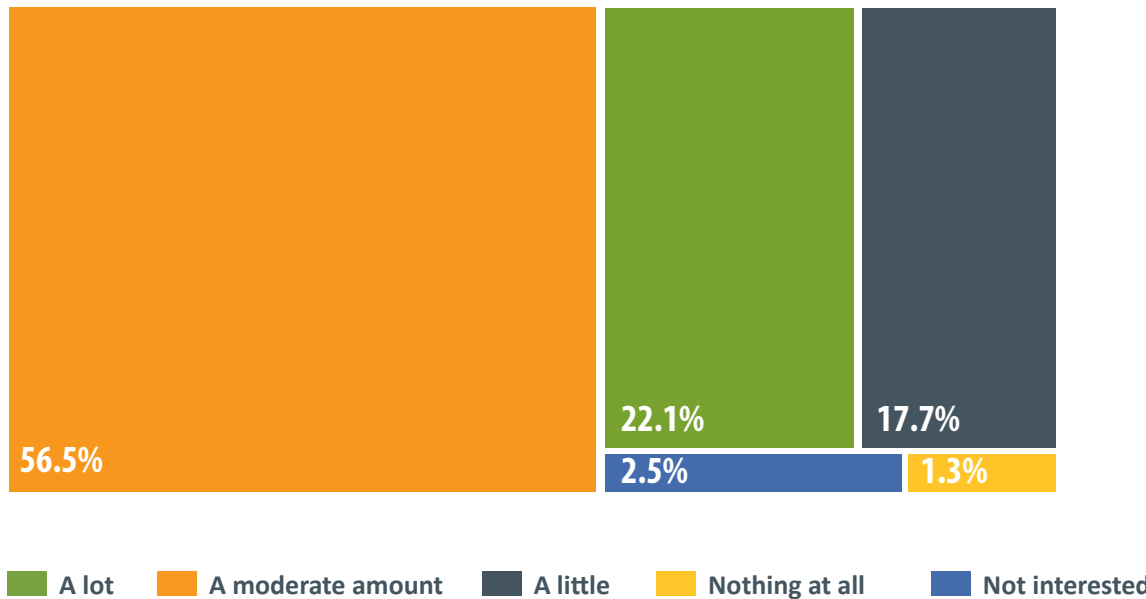
Consequently, there was a proliferation of media coverage and political discourse during this time and may have influenced the level of interest or commitment to policies relating to the mitigation of climate change and its affects.

Understanding climate change

The survey asked respondents to self-rate their understanding of climate change, with further analysis undertaken based on gender and their main source of print news.

A significant majority (78.6%) felt that they understood climate change either a lot or a moderate amount. Encouragingly, only 1.3% rated themselves as having no knowledge and 2.5% of respondents were not interested in understanding climate change at all.

Understand climate change



N=4645

When this level of confidence was examined by gender, men were more likely to express their belief that they knew a lot (27.9%) compared to women (18.4%). Approximately 1 in 5 women felt that they only knew a little, compared to 1 in 10 males.

Further analysis was conducted on the newspaper readership of the respondents and the level of confidence that they felt in their knowledge of climate change. This exploration found that consumers of the Sydney Morning Herald and Australian Financial Review rated themselves the highest in level of knowledge (28.6%), whilst the highest percentage of respondents who felt that they had little or no knowledge came from readers of The Daily Telegraph (22%).

Climate Statements

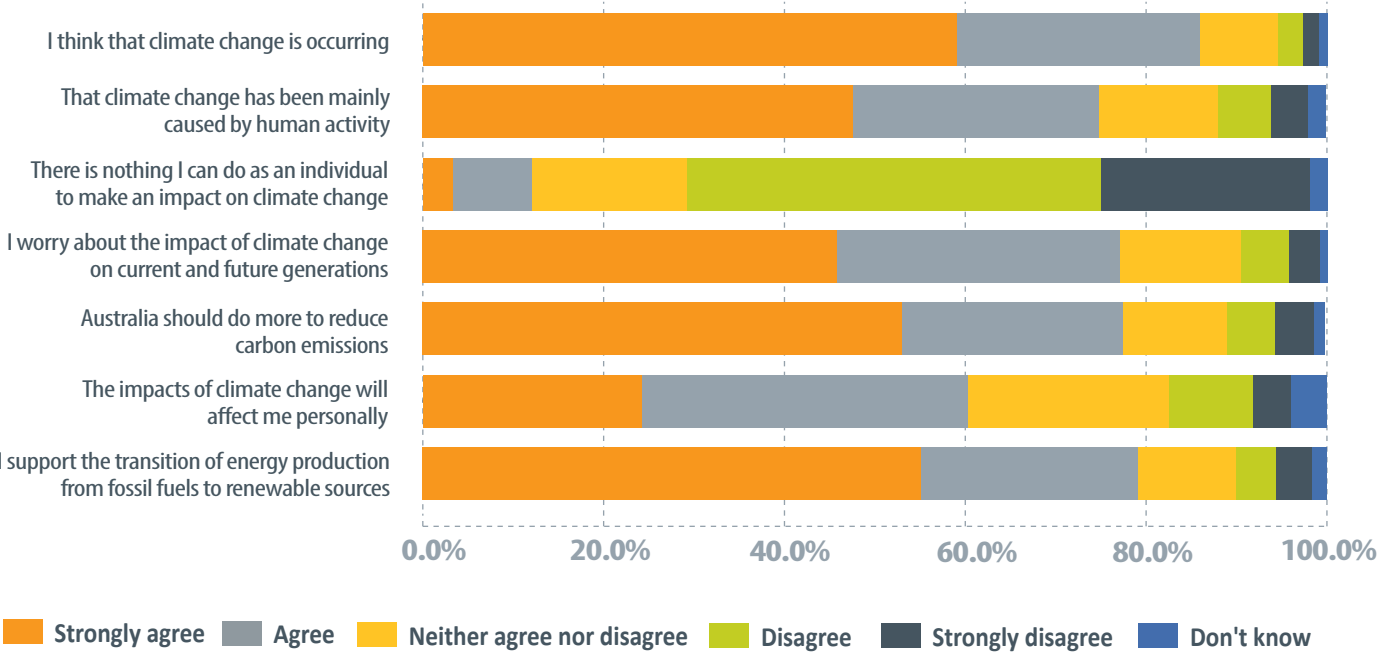
The inclusion of a range of climate statements within the survey aimed to capture the nuance of older people's attitudes and beliefs on an issue where the middle ground is often lost in the polarising discourse that has occurred in Australia.

A significant majority of respondents answered in the affirmative to statements that acknowledged that climate change is occurring (85.9%), that climate change has mainly been caused by human activity (74.8%) and that Australia should do more to reduce carbon emissions (77.4%).

Older people are also concerned about the impacts of climate change on current and future generations (77.1%). However, they were less likely to believe that the effects of climate change will affect them personally, with only 24.2% strongly agreeing, or 36.1% agreeing with this statement.

There was strong support (79%) for the transition of energy production from fossil fuels to renewable sources and broad disagreement with the statement that as an individual they have no impact on climate change.

Attitudes to climate change



N=4645

When analysed by gender, minimal difference was evident on their support or disagreement with the statements listed. This negligible variance was not maintained when age cohorts and location were examined. A willingness to strongly agree with the statement *'I think that climate change is occurring'* for example showed a decrease of 20 percentage points from the 50-59 age group (71.5%) compared to the 80+ (50.2%). The age group 80+ was also the least likely to support Australia doing more to reduce carbon emissions (47.6%) compared to 70.7% of the 50-59 age group.

An investigation of the results by location indicates that those living in metropolitan centres and rural out of town or remote areas were similarly supportive of the climate change statements and government action. This contrasts with those respondents living in rural towns, who were less likely to believe that climate change is predominantly caused by human activity or support the transition from fossil fuels to renewables.

Climate policy

In recent years there has been an array of climate policies and actions that have been debated within the public realm. Participants were asked to select which policies government should implement in order to address climate change:

- Adopt a net-zero emissions target by 2050
- Supporting the community to prepare and adapt to extreme weather events
- No new coal, oil and gas projects
- Introduce policies to encourage the use of new low carbon technologies e.g. electric cars, solar panels
- Fund the transition & job creation for all fossil-fuel workers & communities
- Not sure
- Nothing
- Other (please sepcify)

Top 3 selected government actions



The most commonly selected option was the introduction of policies that encourage use of low carbon technologies. This would indicate that the older Australian populace is supportive of introducing measures that maintains their way of life. Support for the community to prepare and adapt to extreme weather events was also rated highly, and the recent experience of the Black Summer fires may have added to the urgency of this action. A significant majority support the adoption of net-zero emissions targets by 2050, which was closely followed by the need to fund the transition and job creation initiatives for workers in communities reliant on the mining of fossil fuels. Only 3.5% of respondents believed that no action should be undertaken to combat climate change and its impacts.

“I think most of the hard work will be done by large corporations in terms of producing electric vehicles, changing mining, manufacturing processes, producing more solar and wind power and so on. But for that to work successfully, the federal government needs to set up frameworks to encourage it rather than do the opposite.”

Focus group, 3/11/21.



The support of various initiatives was further analysed by gender, age group, income, location, main source of news and main newspaper. On all suggested policies the results found that women were on average 7 percentage points more likely to support these actions. When examined by age, the 50 – 59 age group was approximately 10 percentage points more likely to support specific government actions compared to other age groups. The only exception to this related to the policy of encouraging the use of technology to reduce carbon emissions, with the 80+ group strongly supporting this initiative.

All climate policies were most strongly supported by the highest income group, those earning over \$2885 per week, with the exception of the suggested policy to support communities to prepare for extreme weather events which was most supported by middle income earners. Respondents from metropolitan areas continued to back further action in climate policy. The exception to this was the policy of ceasing approval for new fossil fuel projects, with those living in rural out of town or remote areas more likely to support this.

Lastly, respondents' main source of news and readership of newspaper print was explored alongside their supporters of climate policies. Survey participants who stated that their main source of news was online news sites were the greatest supporters of the enactment of climate policies. The highest level of doubt about any of the policy suggestions was found in those that sourced their main news from print newspapers (13.4%) compared to an average of 5.8% of all other main news sources. Further analysis was undertaken by readership of print newspapers available in NSW. The largest support for climate policies was found amongst readers of the Sydney Morning Herald and the Sun Herald across all suggested actions. Readers of the Australian Financial Review were strong supporters of policies supporting technological innovation and transitioning workers and towns, but support for other actions dropped by an average of 20 percentage points. Consumers of the Daily Telegraph and the Sunday Telegraph provided the lowest support for all policies and were more likely to be unsure or not support government action on climate.



Staying informed

The importance of access to factual news and information has never been more essential.

The pandemic and major natural disasters that have occurred in the past 2 years, have highlighted the value of being able to source accurate facts and information to assist older people to protect themselves from COVID-19 and during emergency situations.

Within this survey and the focus groups, a number of important social, economic and scientific issues that are impacting Australians both now and into the future were explored. COTA NSW sought to investigate how older people consume news and what, if any influence did this consumption have on their attitudes and values on the issues raised.

Source of news

Survey participants were asked to nominate their main source of news over the past week. The predominant source perhaps unsurprisingly was television (45.2%) followed by online news websites (30.9%). The perception that greater numbers of older people are sourcing their news from social media was challenged with only 3.5% of respondents citing this as their main source.

A further question was posed that asked people to select all sources of news. These results found that almost all survey participants sourced some of their news from television (91.2%) and at least two-thirds accessed online news sites. Radio continues to be a popular news source (60.5%); however, readership of print newspaper continues to show a decline (38.5%).

Main source of news



N=4537

There is minimal difference of main sources of news when compared by age cohorts, with people aged 80+ the highest consumers of television news (53.9%) and the 50 – 59 age group twice as likely to mainly source their news from social media (7.5%) than other age groups. Television was the primary source of news for regional viewers (56.3%) compared to metropolitan residents (36.4%) and older people in metropolitan (40.9%) and rural out of town or remote (48.6%) were more likely than other locations to utilise online news websites as their main news source.

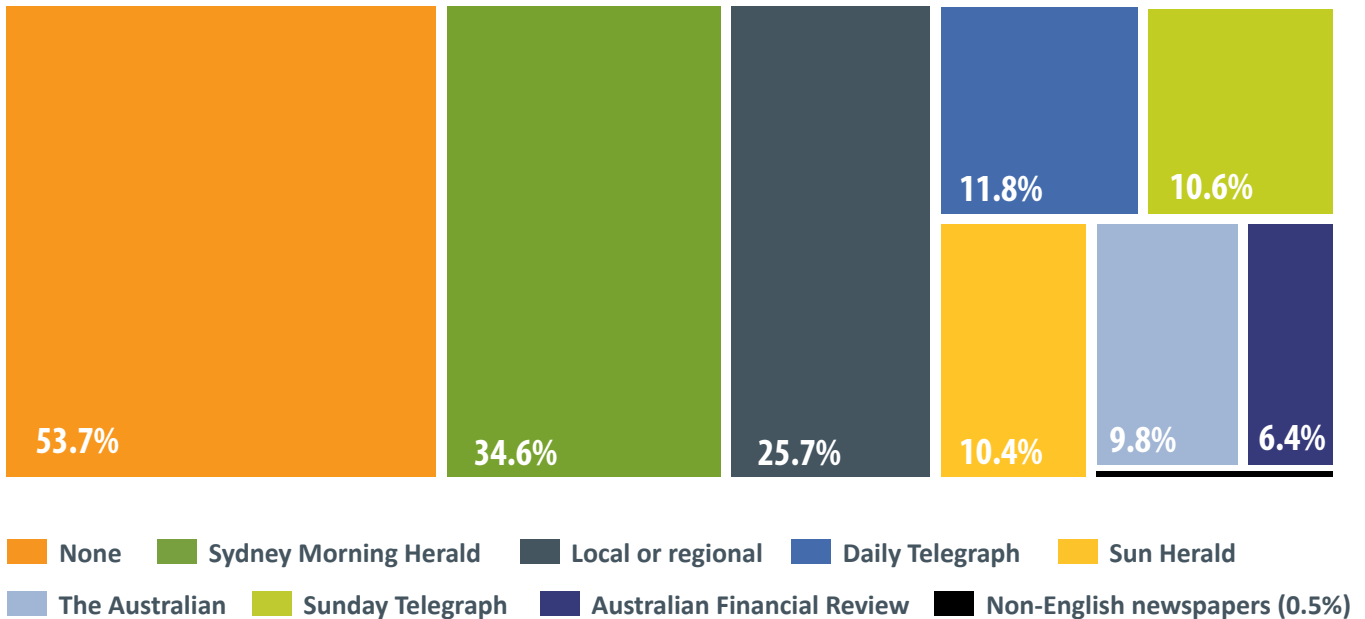
Print news

Although readership of traditional print media continues to decline, it remains an important source of news and information for many older people. This is particularly true in relation to local or regional community newspapers, that for many older people remains a vital source of information and connection to their local communities. Unfortunately, local and regional newspapers continue to be shutdown. In 2020 for example, NewsCorp ceased printing 112 community and regional newspapers. Some of these became digital only, and others closed completely. For many older people who may not be digitally literate or don't have access to the internet this reduces their ability to stay informed and connected.

“There are some excellent local Central Coast papers, which really give you almost 100% of what's going on at a local government level. If you want to keep in touch with the local news, such as what's being developed, current road works or community events - it's essential reading.”

Focus group, 26/10/21.

Print Newspaper readership

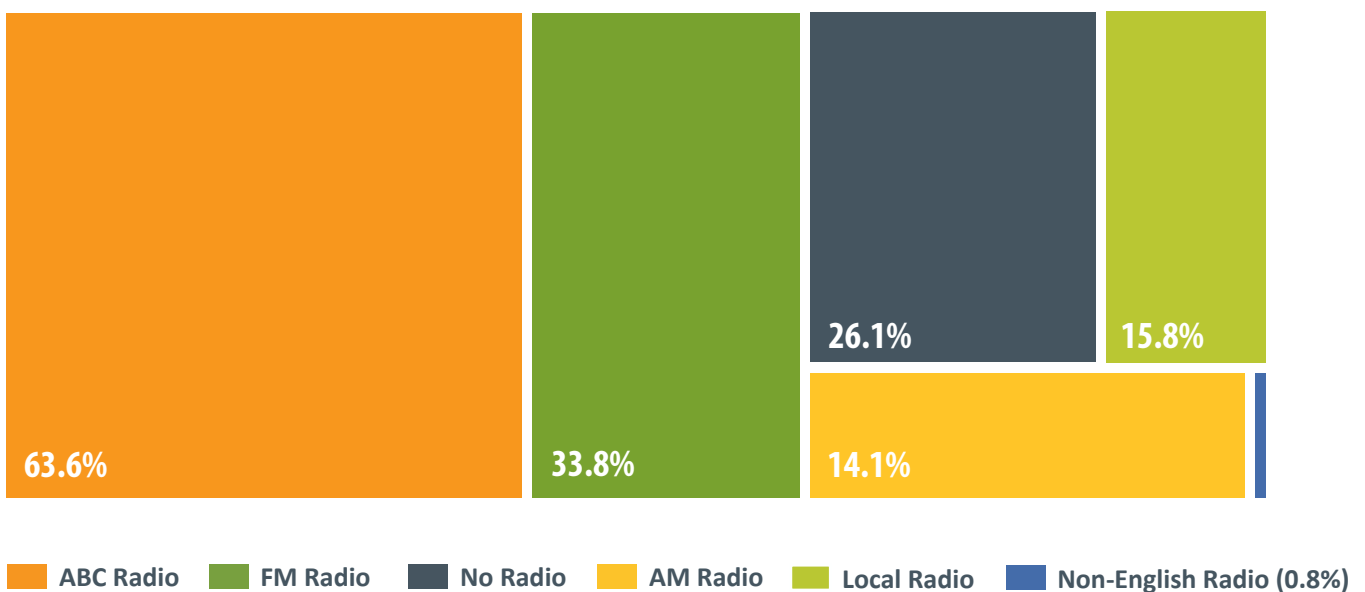


N=4537

Radio

Radio as a source of news remains popular amongst older people. Survey participants were asked to select what type of radio they listened to in the past week. ABC radio dominated as the most listened to platform. Radio was most popular amongst older people living in rural out of town and remote areas, with 83.4% of these respondents regularly listening to the radio compared to an average of 77.4% of all other locations.

Radio listeners



N=4537

Online News sites

Survey respondents selected all online news websites that they visited in the last week. In line with TV and radio usage, ABC online dominated. Variations to website readership were found based on geographic location, income, age cohort and gender.

Website	% of cases
ABC	68.3%
SMH	43.2%
Guardian	37.0%
Facebook	29.5%
International	24.4%
News.com	23.8%
None	17.0%
You Tube	16.5%
Nine	11.7%
Regional	11.2%
New Daily	10.2%
Twitter	9.9%
Saturday Paper	8.8%
AFR	8.5%
The Australia	8.3%
Daily Telegraph	7.1%
Sky	7.0%
Daily Mail	4.7%
Non-English	2.8%

N=4537

Intergenerational opportunity

There is an persistent narrative that there is intergenerational conflict, with older generations critical of younger people and young people resentful of the perceived attitudes and wealth of older people.

Of course, this headline commentary does not take account of the different experiences, attitudes and economic circumstances of both older and younger generations. The questions within the survey and the focus groups aimed to explore and challenge the prevailing assumptions about intergenerational opportunities and discord.

Economic opportunities

Half of those surveyed indicated that they thought that they had better social and economic opportunities during their life compared to younger people today (<49). When examined in more detail during the focus groups a predominate argument for this belief related to the unaffordability of housing for young people and participants' concern for their children and grandchildren being able to break into the property market. Other reasons for this stance included the cost of higher education and ongoing HECs debt and the omnipresent issue of climate change.

Better for my generation

52%

About the same

19%

Better for younger people

21%

Not sure

9%

N=4592

“What they all talk about more than more than anything other than climate change, and their frustrations with the government leadership is unaffordability of buying a place or of renting something decent. I think that's one of the worst problems that we're leaving behind for our young people. I just think it must be so disheartening.”

Focus group, 20/10/21.

For those stating that they thought that it was better for younger people today, the prevailing argument related to educational and career variety and opportunities. Many older women in the focus groups explained that there had been limited jobs available to them. One participant said that she could be a secretary, work in a bank or become a teacher. Many female participants felt that the restrictions that they experienced as young women had significant impact on their life choices and this has improved greatly for younger generations.

“I think things are better now mainly because of technology and the job choices that are available to people these days. I am amazed at the new jobs that exist. So, I think there's some really good things for young people. Whereas in my generation, there were much more narrow choices.”

Focus group, 2/11/21.

Intergenerational conflict

A majority (52.8%) of survey participants thought that there was little if any intergenerational tension between older and younger people. Women were more likely to think that no tension exists (11.2%) compared to men (17.7%). When analysed by age cohort, those in the 50 – 59 and 80+ were twice as likely to believe that there was a lot of tension between generations compared to people aged 60 to 79.

A lot	5.9%
A moderate amount	26.3%
A little	38.2%
None at all	14.6%
Not sure	15%

N=4592

Older people in the Media

A report by the Australian Human Rights Commission argued that the way in which older people are portrayed or omitted in the media is a key influence on the perceptions and attitudes of the broader community.⁸

Importantly, the way in which your generation is represented can have impacts on an individual's own internalised ageism and sway their personal attitudes and behaviours around ageing and their place in society. Respondents in the survey were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on five statements concerning older people and their portrayal in the media.

The results as displayed in the graph show mixed results on how survey respondents felt that were portrayed in the media, including relatively high percentages of those that did not hold strong opinions either way. A majority felt that older people were portrayed in varied ways, but that there weren't enough older role models and twice as many respondents felt that there were more negative stories in the media than positive about older people. Less than one quarter of participants felt that the way in which older people are shown in advertising was fair.

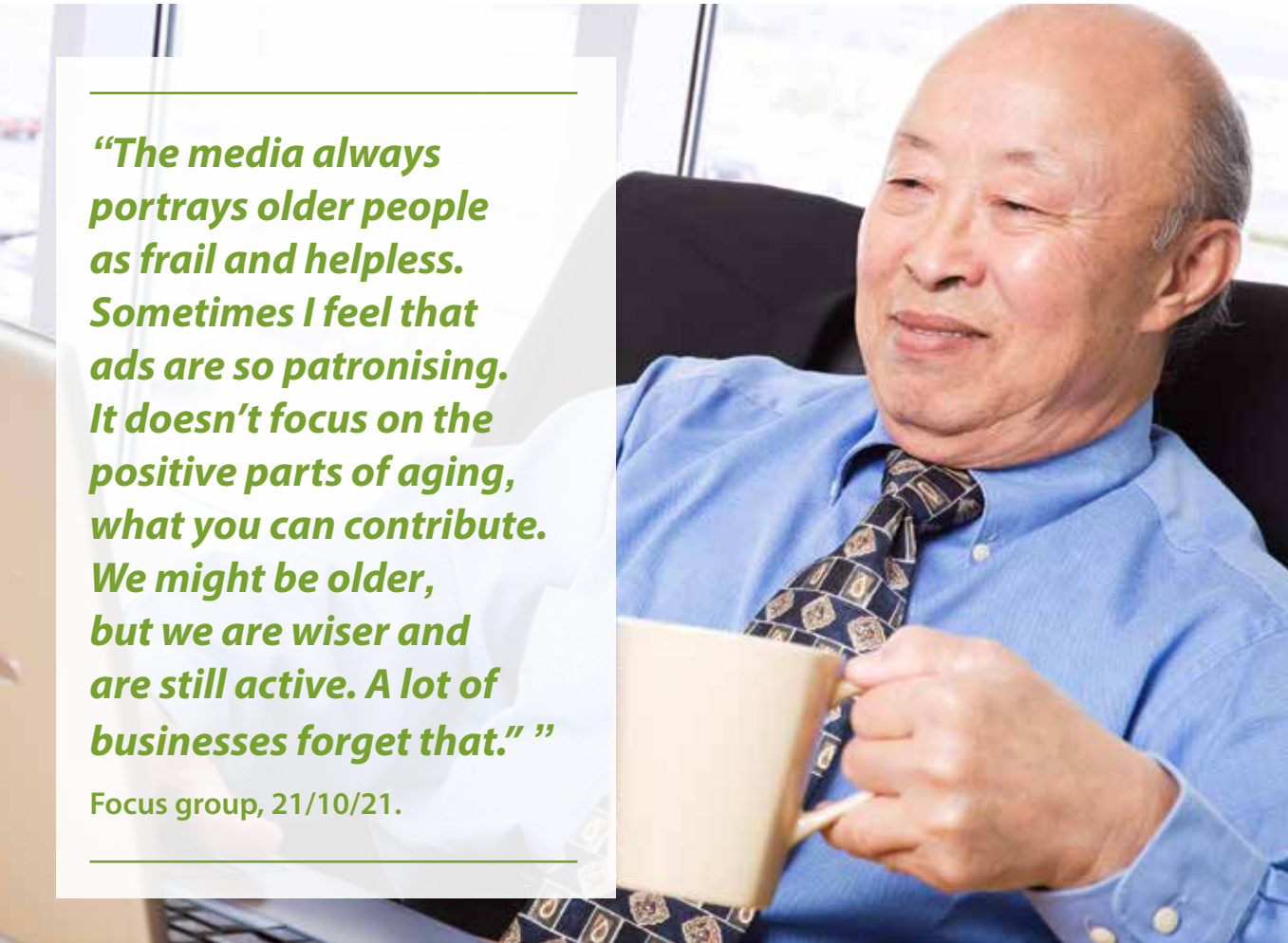
⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission (2013). *Fact or fiction? Stereotypes of older Australians*.

Retrieved from: https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/Fact%20or%20Fiction_2013_WebVersion_FINAL_0.pdf

	Net Agree	Net Disagree
The media portrays older people in different ways	60.9%	5.5%
There are generally as many positive stories in the media about ageing as there are negative stories	22.4%	39.5%
There are enough older role models portrayed in the media	21.8%	41.8%
In the media, older people are treated in the same way as younger people	9.6%	59.9%
The way older people are shown in advertising is fair	23.5%	35.9%

N=4592

Women (40.9%) were more likely to disagree with the statement that they were shown fairly in advertising compared to men (27.7%). Upon further discussion within the focus groups, women were much more likely to have expressed dissatisfaction with media portrayal, ageism and sexism. These feelings were more pronounced as people aged, with the level of dissatisfaction increasing with each age cohort from 50 – 59 (29.3%) to 80+ (38.2%).



“The media always portrays older people as frail and helpless. Sometimes I feel that ads are so patronising. It doesn’t focus on the positive parts of aging, what you can contribute. We might be older, but we are wiser and are still active. A lot of businesses forget that.” ”

Focus group, 21/10/21.

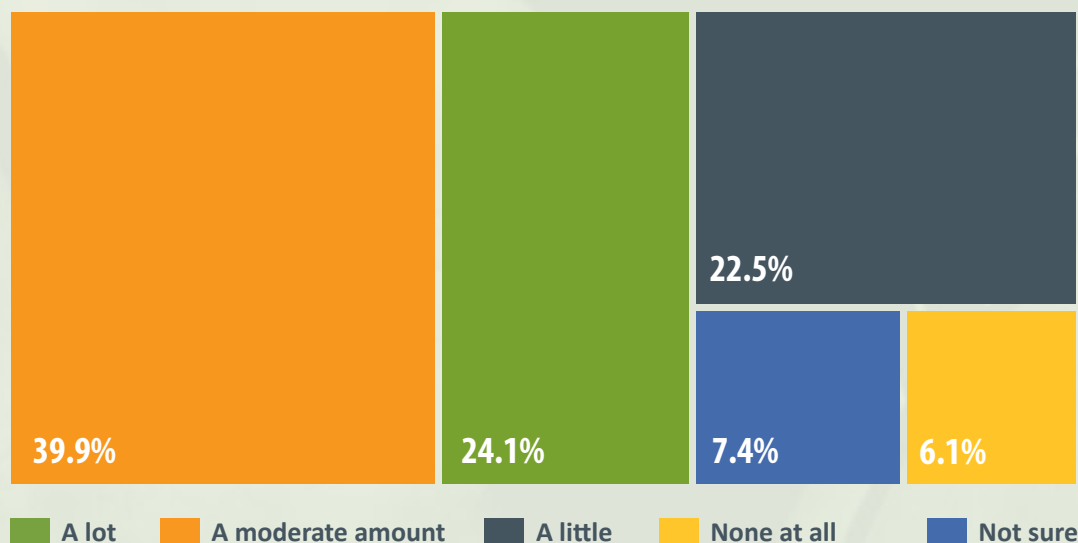
Affecting change

There is a commonly held belief that older people as a group are a key demographic for political parties and subsequently have greater influence on public policy and decision making within government.

Survey and focus group participants were asked how much influence they thought that older people had within politics and to public policy. A solid majority (64%) thought that older people either had a lot or moderate amounts of influence.

Men were more likely to think that they had a lot of influence (28.0%) in public policy compared to women (21.6%). When level of confidence was analysed by geographic location, older people residing in rural towns had the lowest level of confidence in their influence compared to other areas of the state. Perhaps unsurprisingly, older people on the lowest incomes (\$480 per week) were almost four times less likely to believe they had a lot of influence in politics and policy compared to those earning \$2885 a week or more.

Public policy influence



N=4645

There were mixed responses to this question within the focus groups. Many felt that they had little influence, and it depended on whether you lived in a marginal seat rather than your age that determined if your voice was heard. However, the general consensus was that if you wanted to see change in politics or public policy then it was necessary to take individual responsibility.

“I also think that it's the responsibility of older people to come together collectively to create change because it won't change unless the people themselves make a change. I mean, you see young people marching against something they want to change. We need to make a noise.”

Focus group,18/10/21.

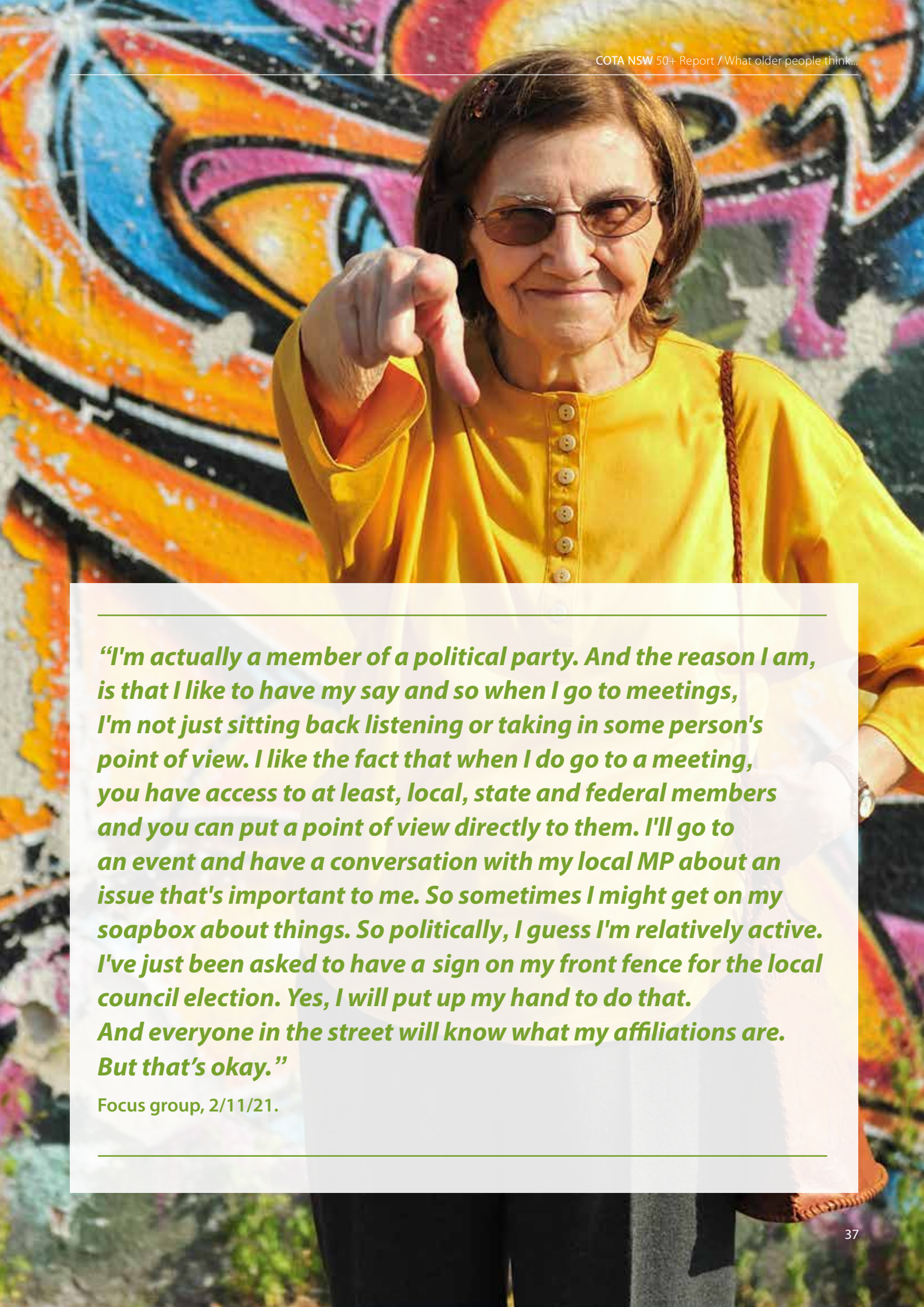


The engagement of older people in advocacy was explored, with survey participants asked to indicate what activities they may have undertaken in the past year to make their voice heard. Approximately 65% of respondents undertook at least one action in the past year, this ranged from the passive – such as signing a petition (51.2%), to the more active such as attending a protest, march or demonstration (8.2%).

Women were more likely to sign petitions and write or email a politician, whereas men were more likely to speak with a state or federal politician about issues important to them. Interestingly, across all activities older people living in rural out of town or remote areas were more politically engaged across all options (with the exception of attendance at a march) compared to people living in other geographic locations.

Signed a petition	51.2%
Written or emailed a state or federal politician	32.4%
Spoken to a state or federal politician	12.9%
Attended a protest, march or demonstration	8.2%
Posted or shared about politics online	24.2%
Attended a community meeting	17.1%
None	35.8%

N=4592



“I'm actually a member of a political party. And the reason I am, is that I like to have my say and so when I go to meetings, I'm not just sitting back listening or taking in some person's point of view. I like the fact that when I do go to a meeting, you have access to at least, local, state and federal members and you can put a point of view directly to them. I'll go to an event and have a conversation with my local MP about an issue that's important to me. So sometimes I might get on my soapbox about things. So politically, I guess I'm relatively active. I've just been asked to have a sign on my front fence for the local council election. Yes, I will put up my hand to do that. And everyone in the street will know what my affiliations are. But that's okay.”

Focus group, 2/11/21.

Conclusion

The results from the research undertaken by COTA NSW challenges the idea that the descriptor of ‘older people’ or ‘seniors’ translates to a homogenous group of people that hold the same attitudes and values on a range of issues that are impacting this country.

If we describe older people as those individuals over the age of 50, this is effectively half of a possible lifespan. As a society, we do not attribute the same attitudes and values to all those under the age of 50 and nor should we for those over this mid-life point.

The findings reveal differences in opinions based on a broad range of factors, including age cohort, gender, geographic location and income. Despite these differences, the research found strong support for issues such as climate change action, Indigenous recognition and cultural diversity.

The results of this research provide important insights for decision makers and the broader populace to be cognisant of the diversity of older people’s experiences, socio-economic background and stage of life to ensure that the many assumptions of what older people think are continually challenged.



