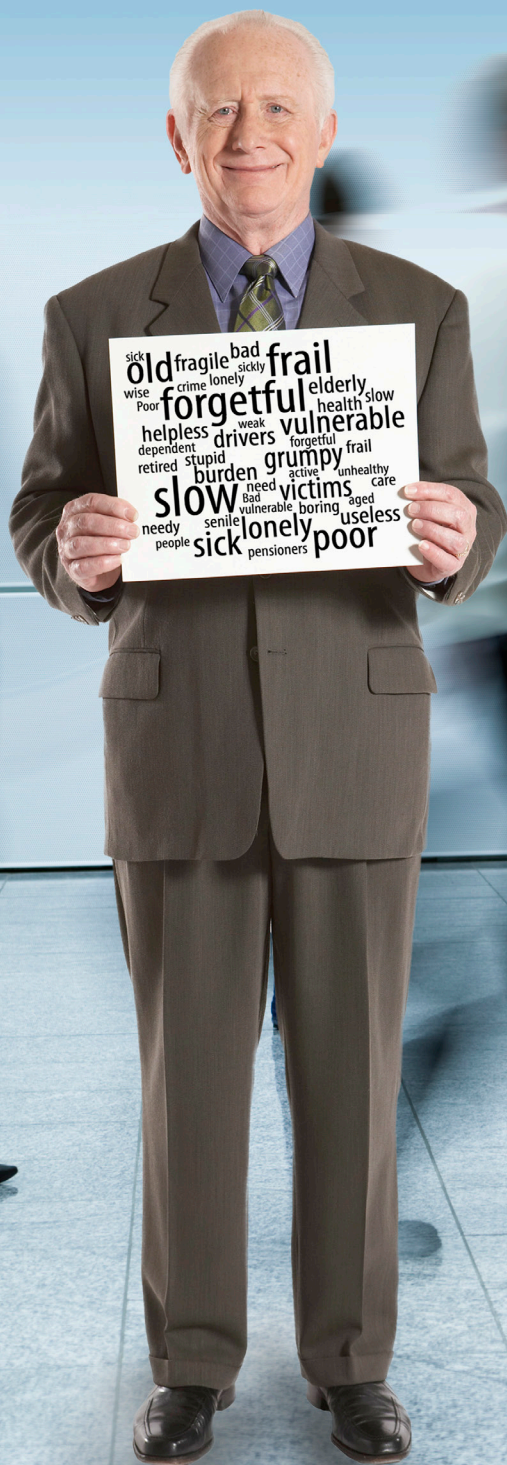




Australian
Human Rights
Commission

Fact or fiction? Stereotypes of older Australians

RESEARCH REPORT • 2013



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ISBN 978-1-921449-42-0

Acknowledgements

The Australian Human Rights Commission acknowledges the contribution of:

- The Australian Government for funding this project
- The research team from Urbis (Alison Wallace, Ashley Moore, Diane Fase and William Briscese)
- The Hon Susan Ryan AO, Age Discrimination Commissioner
- The Age Discrimination Team (Dimity Hodge, Jacqueline Au, Fabienne Baldan and Adriana Siddle)

This publication can be found in electronic format on the Australian Human Rights Commission's website at: <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications-home/all>

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Design and layout: Jo Stocovaz

Printing: Bright Print Group

Cover and internal photography: Thinkstock, iStockphoto, Getty Images

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Foreword



The Hon Susan Ryan AO
Age Discrimination
Commissioner
Australian Human Rights
Commission

The growth in the number of older Australians provides significant benefits and opportunities for Australia. For example, older Australians are a large and growing consumer market for an extensive range of products and services. Research also shows that an increase of 5% in paid employment of Australians over the age of 55 would result in a \$48 billion impact on the national economy, every year.¹

To achieve these benefits we need to remove the barriers that prevent many older Australians from reaching their full potential in workplaces and the community.

One of these barriers is discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, which often stem from negative stereotypes or misconceptions about older people. These stereotypes ignore individual differences and the rich diversity of older Australians. More destructive stereotypes foster a view that older Australians are all the same – that they are unable to learn or change, they complain a lot, are likely to be sick, victims of crime and are an economic burden on society. The reality of course is very different.

At the Australian Human Rights Commission, we are working to combat fundamental attitudes and stereotypes that underpin age discrimination. The project *Age Positive: Promoting Positive and Diverse Portrayals of Older Australians*, has been funded by the Federal Government following recommendations by the Advisory Panel on the Economic Potential of Senior Australians. For the first stage of this project, the Commission engaged Urbis to conduct research on age discrimination, age stereotyping and ageism.

Urbis' research has yielded some challenging results, revealing the prevalence of negative stereotypes within media and advertising portrayals of older Australians. Of equal concern is the underrepresentation of older people in the media. Significantly, the stereotypes and invisibility have influenced perceptions of the younger generations, created negative employer attitudes and impacted negatively the way older people view themselves.

My hope, in publishing this research, is to promote greater awareness of the damaging effects of negative stereotypes on the lives of older people and on the cohesiveness of our society. Following increased awareness, I hope that decision makers will look to change the way they present older Australians. There is much scope for constructive collaboration between media, advertisers and corporate Australia to present older Australians in a more accurate, balanced and diverse manner, to reflect more realistically their value, capability and experience. The benefits for our economy, for corporate Australia and for older Australians themselves, are clear.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Susan Ryan'.

The Hon Susan Ryan AO
Age Discrimination Commissioner
Australian Human Rights Commission

June 2013



Skilled

Key findings

This research report:

- Assesses the prevalence and depth of stereotypes and negative attitudes towards older Australians
- Provides insight into the impact of these attitudes and the resulting behaviours on older Australians and the general community, including business decision makers
- Examines the portrayal, and invisibility, of older Australians in the media by all main media platforms including television, radio, magazines and digital
- Provides insight into the role of the media in creating and reinforcing age stereotyping and discrimination.

This research was commissioned by the Age Discrimination Commissioner and was conducted by Urbis, using three integrated methodologies:

- A media scan and qualitative analysis of the media
- Qualitative research using focus groups
- Quantitative research using an online survey.

These are the Key Findings from the research.

1. The context of ageing and age discrimination

Finding: Ageing is a loaded term and holds predominantly negative connotations – particularly among younger Australians.

- Younger Australians (under 30 years) are generally the most negative about the concept of ageing.
- Younger Australians are more likely to associate ageing with the concept of loss (loss of health, loss of hearing, loss of mental capacity, loss of income).
- Younger Australians find it extremely difficult to identify any benefits associated with ageing and indicate it is simply not something they have given much thought to at this point in their lives.

"I'm afraid of getting older, afraid of some of the things that I can't control and worried about the future."
(55-64 years)

"It's terrible." (18-25 years)

"It's to be avoided." (65+ years)

Finding: Younger Australians and older Australians define ‘old age’ differently and this creates tensions between them.

- Younger Australians feel that age is numeric and defined by an actual age.
- For older Australians, age is not just a number, but is influenced by broader social, emotional and relational elements. Many people over the age of 65 years do not feel that the term ‘old age’ applies to them. They feel that the horizon of ‘old age’ shifts as they age.
- The mean age of ‘old age’ for younger Australians is 55.9 years, compared to 66.9 years for older Australians.
- The mean age of someone who is ‘elderly’ for younger Australians is 66.7 years, compared to 74.4 years for older Australians.
- Older Australians feel that differences in perceptions of ageing and old age create tensions between them and younger people – with misconceptions about age and ageing underpinning many negative stereotypes.

“I can’t think of ageing because the only way I look at ageing is someone around 70-90 years. I don’t think I am [old].” (55-64 years)

“I walk along the street and see my reflection in the shop window and think – who is that old codger?” (65+ years)

“We are boomers most of us. None of our peers seem old.” (55-64 years)

Finding: Most Australians feel that age discrimination in Australia is common.

- 71% of all Australians feel that age discrimination in Australia is common (47% common, 24% very common).
- Findings for business respondents are consistent with the community sample (53% common and 18% very common).
- Most community and business respondents feel that age discrimination is likely to occur in:
 - » the workplace (88% community respondents, 92% business respondents)
 - » retail situations (60% business and 60% community)
 - » social situations (56% business and 57% community).

“Many people don’t disclose their age in the workplace, because they know that others may make presumptions about what that person might be thinking or doing...there are others who modify their age.” (65+ years)

- Almost half of all Australians feel that discrimination is present within the healthcare system (52% community, 49% business), within government policy (44% community, 45% business) or in access to services (46% community, 43% business).

"It was discrimination. I had turned 65, I had an injury and they said they didn't have suitable duties for me anymore and gave my job to a young girl who was only 33. They knew there was a loophole because I had turned 65 and I could get the pension but they didn't realise that my husband works so I get nothing."
(65+ years)

"It doesn't matter what you have learned, you are no longer employable unless you own the agency."
(55-64 years)

Finding: More than a third of Australians aged 55+ years have experienced age-related discrimination.

- 35% of Australians aged 55-64 years and 43% of Australians aged 65+ years have experienced discrimination because of their age.
- The most common types of age-related discrimination, experienced by over 50% of older Australians, are:
 - » being turned down from a position (67% of Australians aged 54-65; 50% aged 65+)
 - » being ignored (59% of Australians aged 54-65; 66% aged 65+)
 - » being treated with disrespect (51% of Australians aged 54-65; 64% aged 65+)
 - » being subjected to jokes about ageing (53% of Australians aged 54-65; 53% aged 65+).
- Many older Australians also report:
 - » service invisibility: being ignored because service people do not see value in spending time with an older person
 - » product invisibility: being overlooked by corporate Australia despite the financial capacity of older Australians
 - » relationship invisibility: feeling like they are a burden on friends and family because of the issues associated with ageing
 - » cultural invisibility: a lack of representation in popular culture leading to a feeling of being overlooked, devalued or ignored.

"I walk into a nice dress store, I don't get served – they see me and they think that I can't possibly be interested in something fashionable and that I am probably killing time waiting for my grandkids."
(55-64 years)

"I had a friend who was looking to buy a new car...with cash. She walked into the dealer and was basically told that she 'probably wouldn't be interested in these types of cars' and that she should look at some of the other businesses down the road." (65+ years)

Finding: Age discrimination and invisibility result in a strong and negative emotional response.

- A result of age discrimination and invisibility is that older Australians feel a sense of shame, anger or sadness.
- There is also a direct impact on personal perceptions of self-worth and an impact on how older Australians define their experience of ageing.

Figure 1: Feelings associated with discrimination

The size of each word is directly proportionate to the number of mentions of that theme.



Question: How did this (discrimination) make you feel?

Base: All respondents who experienced discrimination (n=199).

“Made me feel angry and sad – my response to that person was one day you will get older too and somebody will say that to you.”

“Invisible, angry, my contribution to society, education etc. was not recognised or appreciated.”

“I call it being invisible...nobody sees you and your opinion does not matter. I feel very vulnerable.”

“Made me feel not a member of society, in fact very inadequate and I felt very distressed about it.”

“Of course it has an impact on you – I wanted to continue working – I was told ‘we don’t have suitable roles and duties for you anymore’ and that took me 12 months to get over. I had to have counselling because I thought that I still had a lot to offer and I still want to work therefore it affected my self-esteem.”
(65+ years)

Finding: Those aged 18-34 years are the least concerned about age discrimination.

- Younger Australians feel that age discrimination is not as negative as other forms of discrimination, such as race or gender.
- Younger Australians are less likely to feel that age discrimination is common in Australia. The percentage of Australians by age group who feel it is common is:
 - » 68% of those aged 18-24 years
 - » 62% of those aged 25-34 years
 - » 76% of those aged 45-54 years
 - » 81% of those aged 55-64 years.

“If you look at discrimination based on sex or sexual preference or religion it’s [age discrimination] sort of more socially acceptable to joke about and for banter.” (26-34 years)

“It just doesn’t seem to have that sting to it. If you look at other things like religion and sexual preference and sex and so forth, it’s so careful and there are such stringent HR policies and other things – whereas people seem to be able to have a laugh about the old bastard or something like that.” (26-34 years)

2. Australians’ attitudes and behaviours

Finding: Many Australians agree with a number of stereotypes about older Australians.

- 59% of Australians feel that older people are more likely to be lonely or isolated.
- 52% feel that older people are more likely to be victims of crime.
- 51% feel older people are more likely to be forgetful.
- 43% feel older people don’t like being told what to do by someone younger.
- Those holding predominantly negative attitudes about older Australians include:
 - » young people
 - » university graduates
 - » those on higher incomes (earning more than \$100k per household)
 - » full time employees
 - » Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community members
 - » those in a capital city
 - » males.

Finding: Those aged 18-24 years are the most negative about older people.

- Younger people aged 18-24 are more likely than any other age cohort to agree that older people:
 - » are more likely to be sick (51%)
 - » have difficulty learning complex tasks (33%)
 - » have difficulty learning new things (30%)
 - » do not have sexual relationships (24%)
 - » do not care about their appearance (17%).
- Younger business decision makers are more likely to agree with all negative statements about the capabilities of older workers.
- Social media tends to show older people in a more negative light – younger people are more likely to engage with social media.

“Made me feel angry and sad – my response to that person was one day you will get older too and somebody will say that to you.”

Finding: Negative stereotypes about older Australians lead to negative behaviours.

- 44% of Australians feel sorry for older people as they are perceived often to have complex health problems.
- 35% of Australians feel they often have to take extra time to explain complex topics to older people.
- 20% of Australians avoid conversations about technology with older people as they feel explanations will take a long time and a lot of effort.
- 13% of Australians tend to speak louder to older people as they assume they cannot hear that well.
- 11% of Australians sometimes tell jokes about older people. These jokes can have a negative impact, particularly when the joke-teller is younger than the recipient.
- Younger people are more likely to display negative behaviours toward older Australians.

Finding: One in ten business respondents have an age above which they will not recruit – the average age is 50 years.

- 50% of business decision makers agree that older employees are at higher risk of being made redundant. This belief is significantly more likely to be held by smaller businesses (63% of those with less than five staff agreed this was the case).
- 36% of business decision makers believe that older employees are less likely to be promoted.
- 29% of business decision makers believe that older employees have difficulty adapting to change.
- 23% of business decision makers agree that older employees will not be in the role as long as younger employees and that it is difficult to teach older workers new things.
- 22% of business decision makers agree that they do not expect older employees to have the same technical skills as younger employees.

“Getting older means you are more likely to lose your job.” (35-54 years)

“Many people don’t disclose their age in the workplace, because they know that others may make presumptions about what that person might be thinking or doing...there are others who modify their age.” (65+ years)

“Of course it has an impact on you – I wanted to continue working – I was told ‘we don’t have suitable roles and duties for you anymore’ and that took me 12 months to get over. I had to have counselling because I thought that I still had a lot to offer and I still want to work therefore it affected my self-esteem.” (65+ years)

3. The role and influence of the media

Finding: Older Australians are underrepresented and often poorly portrayed in the media.

- 14.2% of the population are aged 65 years. However,
 - » people aged 65+ featured in only 4.7% of the advertising content
 - » people aged 65+ were mentioned in only 6.6% of the editorial media content
 - » people aged 55+ were referred to in only 11.5% of the editorial media content.
- Many older Australians feel that the media plays a significant role in contributing to a sense of invisibility of older people through limited, homogenous portrayals of older people.
- 61% of the Australian community feel that the portrayal of older people in the media is 'unfair'.
- Only 19% of Australians feel that the media portrays older people in diverse ways.
- Only 16% of Australians feel that there are enough older role models portrayed in the media.
- Only 21% believe that there are generally as many positive stories in the media about ageing as there are negative stories.

"If you look at the percentage of people, the age bracket in a particular show, I think Australian-made television has a very low average age of perform[ers] compared to something coming out of Europe." (65+ years)

"Even like presenters and stuff on TV have an expiry date where they are no longer useful." (18-25 years)

Finding: The media influences negative perceptions of older Australians.

- Older Australians feel that the media has a significant role to play in how older people are portrayed. For example, as:
 - » lonely
 - » victims
 - » unhealthy
 - » as sources of amusement.
- Older people in the media are most often portrayed as frail, weak, victims or in poor health.
- The most common words Australians use to describe the portrayal of older people in the media are *forgetful, slow, frail, vulnerable, burden, grump* and *sick*.
- The media influences specific stereotypes:
 - » Over 70% of Australians feel that stories they have seen or read in the media influence their perception that older people are *victims*.
 - » Around 60% feel that stories they have seen or read reinforce their perception that older people are *lonely or isolated*.
 - » 62% feel that stories they have seen or read influence their perception that older people are *bad drivers*.
 - » Around 60% feel that stories they have seen or read in the media influence their perception that older people are *more likely to be sick*.

Base: All respondents (n=2,020).

"The influence is subliminal, for those who are not constructive enough in their lives to form their own views." (65+ years)

- Peaks in social media discussion are focused around reports of older people as victims of crime, or as otherwise physically vulnerable or at risk of illness.
- The vast majority of high membership age-related Facebook sites relate to aged care and issues associated with caring for the elderly. While they are generally positive in tone, they are homogenous in content and show little diversity.

- Despite having relatively high membership, Facebook pages generate relatively little flow-on discussion. For example, the Just Better Care Fanpage had 2,909 members, yet only 6 people were ‘talking’ about the page.
- For each of the leading age-related Facebook pages and blog sites, the most active voices are the page administrators.

Finding: 47% of Australians feel that the portrayal of older people in advertising is ‘unfair’.

Australians feel that the portrayal of older people needs to:

- Show older people as normal people living normal lives.

“The same as any other social group – many great things to offer, and some not so great! Realistically so to speak”.

“Just as they are – a diverse group with interests other than superannuation, insurance and funeral plans”.

“As a true cross-section of what is the reality. Interviews of ‘famous’ elderly and victims is not a true cross-section”.

“As diverse. You do have frail, dodderly old people – there’s no escaping that fact. There are also some that are active and alert until they die suddenly at the age of 103”.

“To be portrayed for who they are, not how old they are. They cannot be painted with the same brush so to speak”.

“Like everyone else. Age doesn’t need to be factored into it”.
- Show older people in roles that contribute to Australian society.

“Intelligent people who can still contribute – either in business or with the family. More recognition of the skills they can contribute”.

“More focus on the different roles that older people are engaged in. How many older people, though retirees, are called on to support their families”.

“As people that know a lot about a lot of things and could teach young people and help them by passing on what they know”.

“As being capable of contributing, being active, interested and willing to participate”.

“As people who contribute to society, from still being in the workforce, to charity or community work, not just lazy, retired people”.
- Reduce the fear associated with the portrayal of older people as victims.

“While some older people are fearful, a lot are not. I believe that older Australians are often influenced by the media, which means that they are often ‘made’ to be fearful by inaccurate reports, which then becomes a cycle of fear”.

“In a positive way. We do see from time to time, but I love to see elderly people that study or still play sport rather than those that can’t pay their electricity bill. I do feel for those people but they also need to be seen as a positive influence on the community too”.

“More happy and loving towards their families. Also, my grandparents have an iPad each and a DS each, so they need to be shown on ads using technology”.

A middle-aged man with grey hair, wearing a dark pinstripe suit, white shirt, and blue striped tie, stands outdoors holding a white rectangular sign. The background is a blurred cityscape with tall buildings. A solid blue curved shape is on the left side of the frame. The man is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression.

Enthusiastic

Chapter 1:

Introduction

1.1 Background

The Australian population is expected to change significantly in the next 50 years. By 2056 it is estimated that around 25% of the Australian population will be 65 and over, while the proportion of younger Australians is expected to decline.²

With this radical shift, challenges and opportunities will arise. These will require new ways of thinking to ensure all Australians have the ability to participate and contribute to their choice of paid work and community activities.

Currently, older Australians are underrepresented in paid work. Underemployment is often symptomatic of other forms of exclusion including participation in the community. Social exclusion and isolation, in turn, have significant impacts on physical and emotional wellbeing.

In many cases, it is negative attitudes about older people, and the resulting behaviours, which drive this exclusion. These attitudes and behaviours are a result of stereotypes which ignore the individual difference, the breadth of contribution and the rich diversity of older Australians.

This project, *Age Positive: Promoting Positive and Diverse Portrayals of Older Australians*, is funded by the Federal Government in response to recommendations made by the Advisory Panel on the Economic Potential of Senior Australians (the Panel). The main objectives of the Panel were to identify and respond to the economic and social opportunities presented by an older population.

In April 2012, the Federal Government committed funding³ over four years to the Age Discrimination Commissioner to:

1. conduct research on age discrimination, age stereotyping and ageism
2. convene media roundtables and partner with the media to present more accurate, balanced and empowering portrayals of older Australians
3. develop a community education and awareness campaign that identifies ageism and age discrimination and promotes positive images of ageing.

“I call it being invisible...nobody sees you and your opinion does not matter. I feel very vulnerable.”

The aims of the *Age Positive: Promoting Positive and Diverse Portrayals of Older Australians* project are to:

- expose prevailing stereotypes of older Australians and replace them with:
 - » accurate, balanced, diverse and empowering portrayals of older people
 - » portrayals that reflect the value, capability and experience of older people
- raise awareness of age stereotyping and age discrimination in the Australian community
- contribute to reshaping attitudes in the community to support older Australians to realise their potential and maximize their contribution to workplaces and the community.

This report presents the results of the first stage – research on age discrimination, age stereotyping and ageism.

1.2 Aims and objectives of this research

The specific aims of this research are to:

- assess the prevalence and depth of stereotypes and negative attitudes towards older Australians
- provide insight into the impact of these attitudes and the resulting behaviours on older Australians and the general community, including business decision makers
- examine the portrayal, and invisibility, of older Australians in the media by all main media platforms including television, radio, magazines and digital
- provide insight into the relative role of the media in creating and reinforcing age stereotyping and discrimination compared to other factors (such as broader community discrimination, family, friends, religion and education).

1.3 Methodology

The research was conducted using three integrated methodologies:

- a media scan and qualitative analysis of the media
- qualitative research – focus groups
- quantitative research – online survey.

“The only thing I actually see from real advertising on TV is about funerals – and incontinence. There is nothing out there to say to just a normal run of the mill [older] person – ‘let’s have a bit of life’.” (55-64 years)

(a) Media scan and qualitative research

Broadcast media

A sample of coverage was drawn from the following highest rating and highest circulating programs and outlets:

Table 1: Broadcast media

Source type	Programs and outlets
Newspapers (all press includes weekend editions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Herald Sun• The Daily Telegraph• The Courier-Mail
Magazines	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Woman's Day• Australian Women's Weekly• Better Homes & Gardens
Radio	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2GB Breakfast• 3AW Breakfast
Television	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Today Tonight (Channel 7)• Seven News• Today (Channel 9)
Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• News.com.au• Yahoo!7 News

Press, radio and television reports were sourced from even days throughout the calendar month of November 2012. Internet articles were gathered from 15 days spanning 18 December 2012 to 11 January 2013. For the purpose of this analysis, 'older people' included any individual or group aged 55 or more. Researchers manually audited the sample of programs and publications to identify whether or not an article included a reference to an older person.

Advertising scan

Outlets and programs sampled for the analysis of advertising were consistent with those sampled for the analysis of editorial content. Advertising content was collected from the target outlets for the periods of 5-11 November 2012 and 19-25 November 2012. For the purpose of this analysis, 'older person' included anyone aged 65 or over. Throughout the research, analysts identified a small number of advertisements that either targeted or included talent that could be from the 50-70 year old age range. These advertisements were included in the research.

Quantitative media scan

A quantitative editorial media scan was undertaken of Australian news and current affairs coverage mentioning older people and related themes in Australian media for the period 1 January-31 December 2012. Reports about older people were identified through keyword matching. Results are therefore indicative of actual results. This approach does not account for every single report, but is a method to examine the macro trends in Australian media coverage on older people in general. Within this coverage, more specific themes have been identified through searches for keywords and phrases.

Social Media Audit

A scan of Australian social media channels was conducted for discussion about older people. This analysis combines two approaches:

- channel discovery to identify social media channels that focused on issues relating to older people
- keyword searching to provide an indication of the frequency of keywords relating to older people in broader social media conversations.

(b) Qualitative research (focus groups)

Five focus groups were conducted in NSW and Victoria. Groups were conducted in professional viewing facilities in Sydney and Melbourne and in a conference facility in Albury. All groups were conducted in January 2013 and each group lasted up to two hours. Across all groups, a total of 42 participants took part in the research.

Questions were designed to understand behaviours and attitudes and guides were tailored to be reflective of the different experiences and attitudes that different age cohorts may possess or have experienced.

All participants for the focus groups were recruited using a professional recruitment firm. In consultation with the Commission, Urbis drafted a series of screening questions to ensure that appropriate participants were included in specific groups. All participants had either watched television, read newspapers/magazines or listened to the radio in the last month. Groups were comprised of close to 50/50 male and female participants.

To ensure that attitudes and behaviours could be understood from a variety of perspectives, four age cohorts were included in this study:

- 18-25 years: 1 group in Sydney
- 26-34 years: 1 group in Melbourne
- 35-54 years: 1 group in Albury
- 65+ years: 1 group in Sydney and 1 group in Albury.

(c) Quantitative research (online survey)

An online survey with community members and business representatives was conducted in February 2013. The online questionnaire approach was deemed the most appropriate given the broad focus of this study and the need for a nationally-representative sample. The sample also needed to be sufficiently large to understand sub-group differences in terms of gender, age, location, Indigenous status, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) status, income and household composition.

Respondents were drawn from a nationally-representative research-only online panel. Respondents are recruited to the panel using a variety of online and offline methods to reduce attitudinal bias. Hard quotas and post-weighting of the data was undertaken to ensure that the consumer results can be generalised to the Australian population as a whole. Respondents on the online panel are limited to participating in two studies in a year.

A total of 2,020 community respondents took part in the questionnaire. Hard quotas were set on gender and state to ensure that the sample was proportionate to the population on these key demographics. To ensure that the sample was representative of the population by age, data was post-weighted to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011 census data for those aged 18-80 years in line with panel sample and representation. Table 2 provides the final raw sample proportions for key ages included in this study.

Table 2: Quantitative research sample

	Sample n	Sample proportion
18 – 24	175	8.7
25 – 34	436	21.6
35 – 44	452	22.3
45 – 54	448	22.2
55 – 64	234	11.5
65+	275	13.6

A total of 504 business respondents participated in the questionnaire. As with the consumer sample, business consumers were drawn from an online panel. All respondents were responsible for making decisions in the business, including recruitment, training, purchasing, financial management, contracting or policy decisions.

It is important to note that the business decision maker sample is senior in nature. Almost half (44%) of business respondents earn more than \$100,000 per annum, and two-thirds (65%) of business decision makers have a university qualification. A majority of respondents are in managerial/administrator roles or professional roles (68%), 13% are in clerical roles and a minority are in other roles within the business.

No hard quotas were set for the business sample and post-weighting of the data was not undertaken.

“I had a friend who was looking to buy a new car... with cash. She walked into the dealer and was basically told that she ‘probably wouldn’t be interested in these types of cars’ and that she should look at some of the other businesses down the road.”
(65+ years)

A photograph of an older man with white hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt and khaki pants, standing at a construction site. He is holding a large white rectangular sign in front of his chest with both hands. The sign has the word "Healthy" written on it in a blue, sans-serif font. In the background, there are several blue construction cranes against a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The ground appears to be dirt or sand. A solid blue curved shape is visible on the left side of the image, partially obscuring the background.

Healthy

Chapter 2:

The context of ageing and age discrimination

Before discussing ageist behaviours and attitudes, it is important to understand the context in which these attitudes and behaviours are held. This chapter provides a summary of community and business perceptions of ageing, specifically:

- how ageing is perceived
- older Australians' experiences of age discrimination.

2.1 How old is 'old' in Australia

Ageing as a concept is clearly positioned from a negative standpoint. In almost all focus groups and across all age cohorts, discussions initially revolved around concerns and fears associated with the ageing process. A considerable degree of reflection was required before positives associated with ageing were discussed. When positives were mentioned, discussions quickly returned to the perceived negative aspects of the ageing process. In many ways the term 'ageing' is a loaded term which holds predominantly negative connotations:

"I'm afraid of getting older, afraid of some of the things that I can't control and worried about the future."
(55-64 years)

"It's terrible." (18-25 years)

"It's to be avoided." (65+ years)

Younger respondents (under 30 years) are generally more negative about the concept of ageing. These participants are less able to articulate specific concerns and more likely to simply be concerned about the broader issues associated with health, welfare, financial stability and housing access. Their views are more likely to be linked to the concept of loss associated with ageing (loss of health, loss of hearing, loss of mental capacity, loss of income). Members of this group find it extremely difficult to identify any benefits associated with ageing and many indicated it is simply not something they have given much thought to at this point in their lives.

All respondents were asked to indicate how old someone of 'old age' was and to indicate how old an 'elderly' Australian was. There is little difference in the perception of old age between community and business respondents, reporting a mean age of 61.7 and 62.5 respectively. Perceptions of the age of an 'elderly' Australian are also similar, reporting a mean of 70.5 at a national community level and a mean of 72 years in the business sample.

There are differences in perception between younger and older participants. Within the community sample, the mean age of ‘old age’ for respondents aged 18-24 years is 55.9 years, compared to 66.9 years for respondents aged 65+ years – a difference in perception of more than 10 years. The differences between age cohorts are similar when the concept of being ‘elderly’ is discussed. Younger respondents (those aged 18-24 years) indicate that an ‘elderly’ Australian is someone aged 66.7 years while those aged 65+ years indicate that an ‘elderly’ Australian is 74.4 years.

In addition to age, other factors impact on a respondent’s opinions:

- The average age of ‘old age’ is higher for females (62 years) when compared to males (61 years).
- Personal experience also has a major impact. Respondents who have a relationship with an older person have a higher average age for ‘old age’ when compared to respondents who have no relationship with an older person (60.7 compared to 56.6 years).
- There is also a notable difference in mean age between Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents. ‘Old age’ is seen to be much higher among non-Indigenous respondents (61.6 years) compared to Indigenous respondents (56.7 years). Similar differences are observed in relation to the concept of ‘elderly’.

Table 3: Ageing in context: mean age for old age and elderly

	Total	Respondent age					
	All respondents	18 – 24 A	25 – 34 B	35 – 44 C	45 – 54 D	55 – 64 E	65+ F
‘Old Age’							
Community	61.7	55.9	59.1	60.3	63.4	64.7	66.9
Business	62.7	60		64		65.2	
‘Elderly’							
Community	70.4	66.7	68.1	69.8 AB	71.3 ABC	73.2 ABCD	74.4 ABCD
Business	72	69.7		73.1		75.8	

Question: We often hear the term ‘older Australian’ in the media – how old do you think an ‘older Australian’ typically is?

Question: And at what age would you say someone becomes ‘elderly’?

Business ages collapsed to accommodate for smaller samples.

Base: All respondents (Community, n=2,020), (18 – 34, n=175), (25 – 34, n=436), (35 – 44, n=452), (45 – 54, n=448), (55 – 64, n=234), (65+, n=275) (Business, n=504) (18 – 34, n=225), (35 – 54, n=207), (55+, n=72).

A/B/C/D/E/F: Significantly higher at the 95% confidence level.

These findings are supported by discussions with older Australians during the qualitative phase (focus groups). Many older participants (55+ years) who participated in the focus groups felt that the term ‘old age’ did not apply to them and that the horizon of old age had shifted as they themselves have aged:

“I can’t think of ageing because the only way I look at ageing is someone around 70-90 years. I don’t think I am [old].” (55-64 years)

“I walk along the street and see my reflection in the shop window and think who is that old codger?” (65+ years)

“We are boomers most of us. None of our peers seem old.” (55-64 years)

For these participants, ageing and old age are not simply defined by numeric age. Rather they are underpinned by deeper perceptions of self and associations with health, wellbeing, life-balance and social interaction.

In contrast to older participants, younger people are more likely to see old age as a number. This is essentially someone who is older than 50.

Not surprisingly, the concept of a shifting horizon of old age or ageing was not discussed in as much detail in the younger groups. However, some participants in their middle years (30-40 years) recognise that when they were younger (in their 20s) they would have perceived someone in their 40s as 'old'. They indicate that as a result they would have projected some negative perceptions about ageing onto these individuals.

The differing perspectives of old age and ageing are seen to create a tension, with younger people seeing older people differently to how older people see themselves. As a result, misconceptions, underpinned by differing definitions of old age, were commonly discussed in the focus groups and appear to be related to many of the stereotypes observed and much of the discriminatory behaviour experienced.

The quantitative findings (online survey) lend support to these observations:

- Those classified as more likely to show *predominantly negative behaviours* (those who agree with four or more statements), are significantly more likely to feel that old age set in at a younger age than those who are not classified in this manner (a mean of 57.9 compared to 61.1 years). This difference is also seen in relation to those who hold predominantly negative attitudes (those who agree with 10 or more statements).
- Business respondents who hold predominantly negative attitudes estimate old age to be significantly lower than those who are less likely to be classified in this manner.
- Business respondents who are reluctant to recruit above a certain age are significantly more likely to feel that old age set in at a lower age (58.3 years), compared to businesses who are not reluctant to hire above a certain age (63 years). The same pattern is observed in relation to perceptions of the age of an elderly Australian.

“I’m afraid of getting older, afraid of some of the things that I can’t control and worried about the future.” (55-64 years)

2.2 Perceptions of age discrimination

(a) Commonality

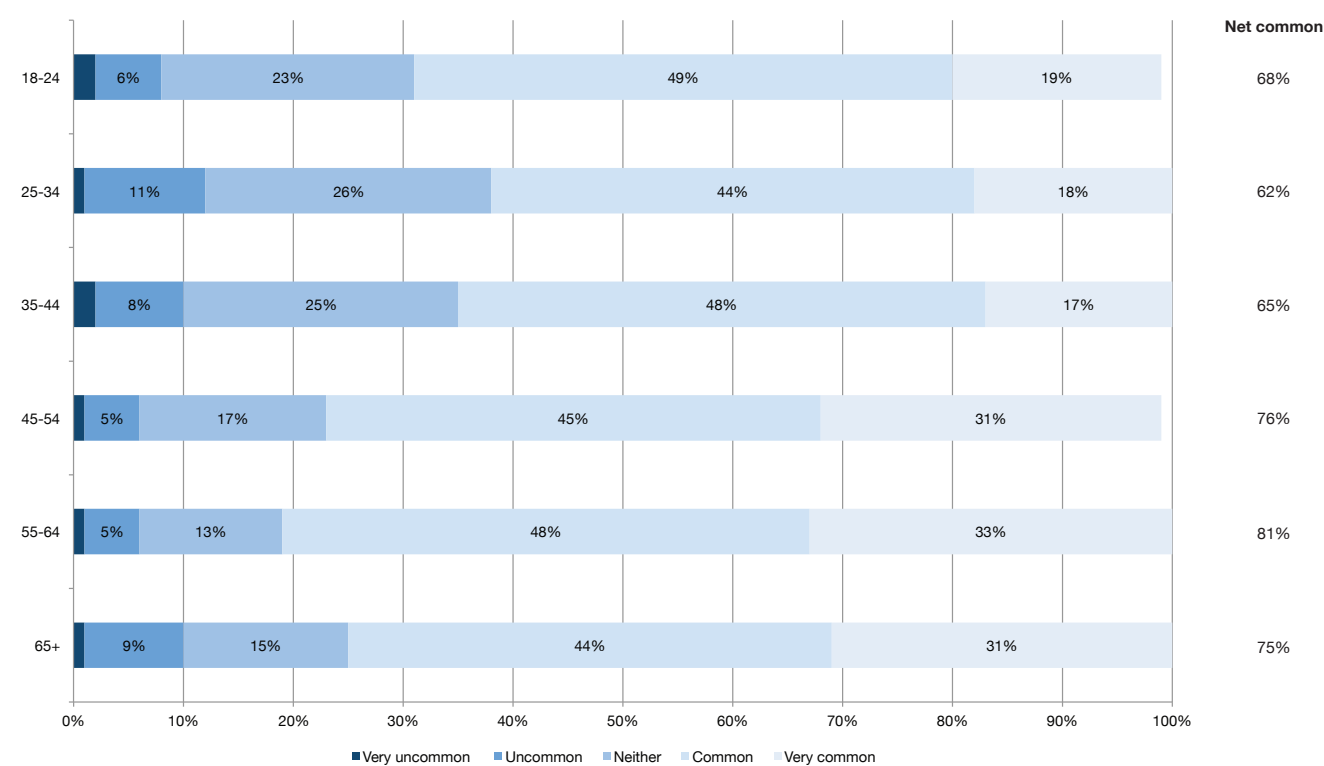
All participants were also asked to indicate how common they feel age discrimination is in Australia. As shown in Figure 3, a majority of respondents (71%) feel that age discrimination in Australia is common (47% common, 24% very common). Findings for business respondents are consistent with the consumer sample (53% common and 18% very common).

In line with comments from the qualitative stage (focus groups), younger respondents are less likely to feel that discrimination is common in Australia. The percentage of Australians who feel it is common is:

- 68% of those aged 18-24 years
- 62% of those aged 25-34 years
- 76% of those aged 45-54 years
- 81% of those aged 55-64 years
- 75% of those age 65+ years.

Experiences of discrimination peaked at 55-64 years, reflecting the negative impact of age-related discrimination in the workplace, as discussed in the focus groups.

Figure 3: Commonality of discrimination in Australia



Question: How common or uncommon do you feel age discrimination is in Australia?
Base: All respondents (Community, n=2,020), (18 – 34, n=175), (25 – 34, n=436), (35 – 44, n=452), (45 – 54, n=448), (55 – 64, n=234), (65+, n=275).

Specific sub-groups are more likely to feel that age discrimination is common in Australia. These include respondents:

- who have a relationship with an older person (70%), compared to respondents with no relationship (62%)
- from Queensland (76%), when compared to those in NSW and Victoria (69 and 70% respectively)
- from English speaking backgrounds (73%), when compared to those from non-English speaking backgrounds (57%).

There are also sub-groups within the business sample that are more likely to feel that age discrimination is common in Australia:

- businesses with less than five staff (74%)
- those aged 55+ years (77%).

In addition, respondents classified as holding *predominantly negative attitudes* or as displaying *predominantly negative behaviours* are significantly less likely to feel that age discrimination is very common in Australia.

Interestingly, for some younger participants (particularly those aged 26-34 years in Melbourne), age discrimination was not seen to be as negative as other forms of discrimination. Discrimination has a hierarchy, with other forms of discrimination considered to be more unacceptable than age-related discrimination:

“If you look at discrimination based on sex or sexual preference or religion it’s [age discrimination] sort of more socially acceptable to joke about and for banter.” (26-34 years)

“It just doesn’t seem to have that sting to it. If you look at other things like religion and sexual preference and sex and so forth, it’s so careful and there are such stringent HR policies and other things – whereas people seem to be able to have a laugh about the old bastard or something like that.” (26-34 years)

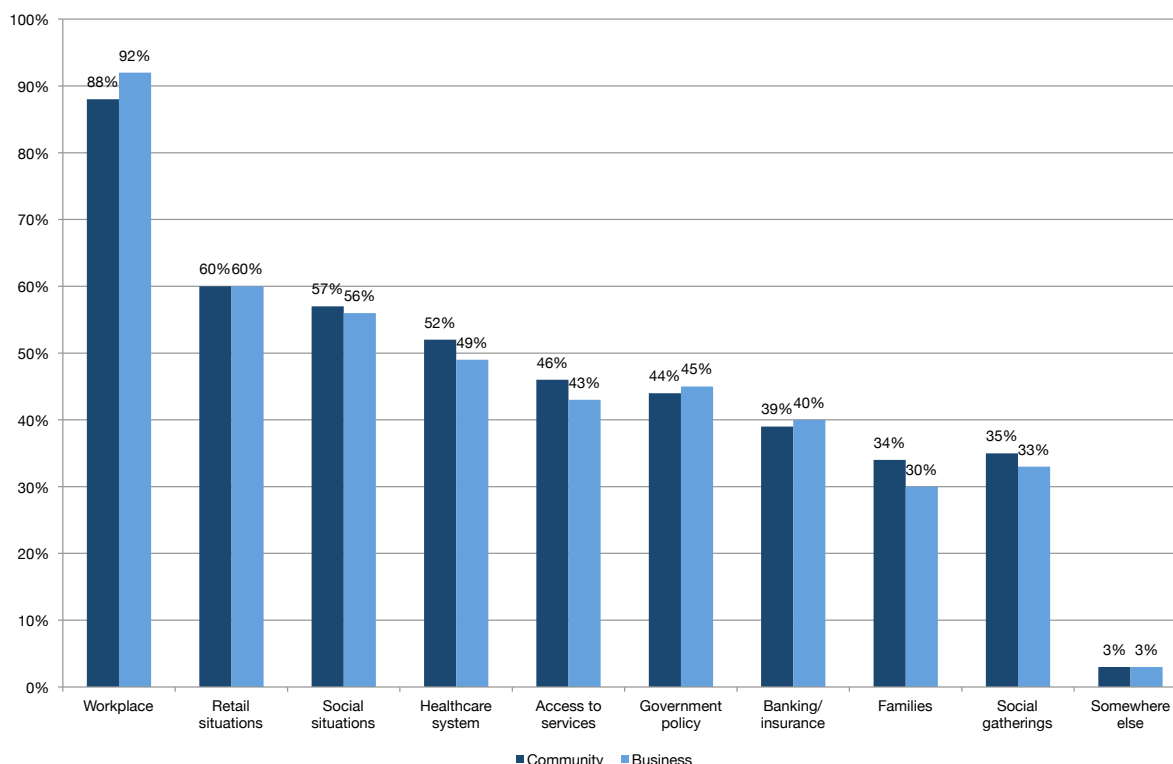
(b) Locations where discrimination was felt to occur

Respondents were also asked to identify the locations where age discrimination was most likely to occur. Most community and business respondents feel that age discrimination is likely to occur in the workplace (88% community respondents, 92% business respondents). Retail situations are also commonly cited (60% business and 60% community) as are social situations (56% business and 57% community).

Discrimination is also perceived to go beyond the scope of the community or business, with more than two in five reporting that discrimination is present within the healthcare system (52% community, 49% business), within government policy (44% community, 45% business) or in access to services (46% community, 43% business).

“It just doesn’t seem to have that sting to it. If you look at other things like religion and sexual preference and sex and so forth, it’s so careful and there are such stringent HR policies and other things – whereas people seem to be able to have a laugh about the old bastard or something like that.” (26-34 years)

Figure 4: Locations where discrimination was seen to be most likely to occur



Question: In what situations do you think age discrimination is most likely to occur?

Base: All respondents indicating discrimination exists (Community, n=1,836), (Businesses, n=435).

In general, perceptions about the commonality of discrimination in different locations, increases relative to the age of the respondent. The most significant differences between younger and older respondents are in relation to perceived discrimination within government policy, retail situations and access to banking and insurance products and services.

“I walk into a nice dress store, I don’t get served – they see me and they think that I can’t possibly be interested in something fashionable and that I am probably killing time waiting for my grandkids.”
(55-64 years)

Noteworthy sub-group differences include:

- Females are significantly more likely to feel that discrimination occurred in almost all situations, excluding government policy, the workplace or access to banking and insurance products and services. In the qualitative discussions, discrimination from financial institutions (for example, not being able to get a loan because of your age) is more often noted as an issue by males. However, when respondents were prompted, there appears to be no significant difference by gender.
- Respondents who had relationships with older people are significantly more likely to feel that discrimination occurred in the workplace, retail settings, within government policy and in relation to service access.
- Respondents from Queensland are significantly more likely to feel that age discrimination exists in the workplace (93%) compared to those in NSW (88%) or Victoria (86%).
- Those in regional areas (90%) are also more likely to feel that age discrimination exists in the workplace than those in metropolitan areas (87%).

Differences within the business sample were also seen:

- There are similar trends by age as those seen within the broader community sample.
- Females are significantly more likely than males to highlight age discrimination in social situations or within families.
- Respondents from businesses with 1-4 older staff are significantly more likely to see discrimination at the workplace or within government policy compared to respondents from large businesses (50+ older staff).
- Businesses which are less likely to encourage older applicants are significantly more likely to indicate discrimination occurring in the workplace (97%) compared to businesses which do not discourage older applicants (91%).

Consistent with findings associated with the perceived degree of age discrimination in Australia, respondents who hold fewer negative attitudes (or engaged in less negative behaviour) are more likely to be aware of age discrimination in almost all settings.

(c) Personal experience of discrimination

More than one third of respondents (38%) aged 55+ years have experienced age discrimination of some kind (35% of those aged 55-64 years and 43% of those aged 65+ years). The mean age at which this discrimination was experienced is at the lower end of the age cohort, at 56 years.

Those on higher incomes are less likely to report experiencing age discrimination in the online survey than those on lower incomes. This is linked to observations in the focus groups, where older participants who hold senior positions or work in industries where sole-contracting or self-employment is the norm feel they can avoid some forms of workplace age discrimination:

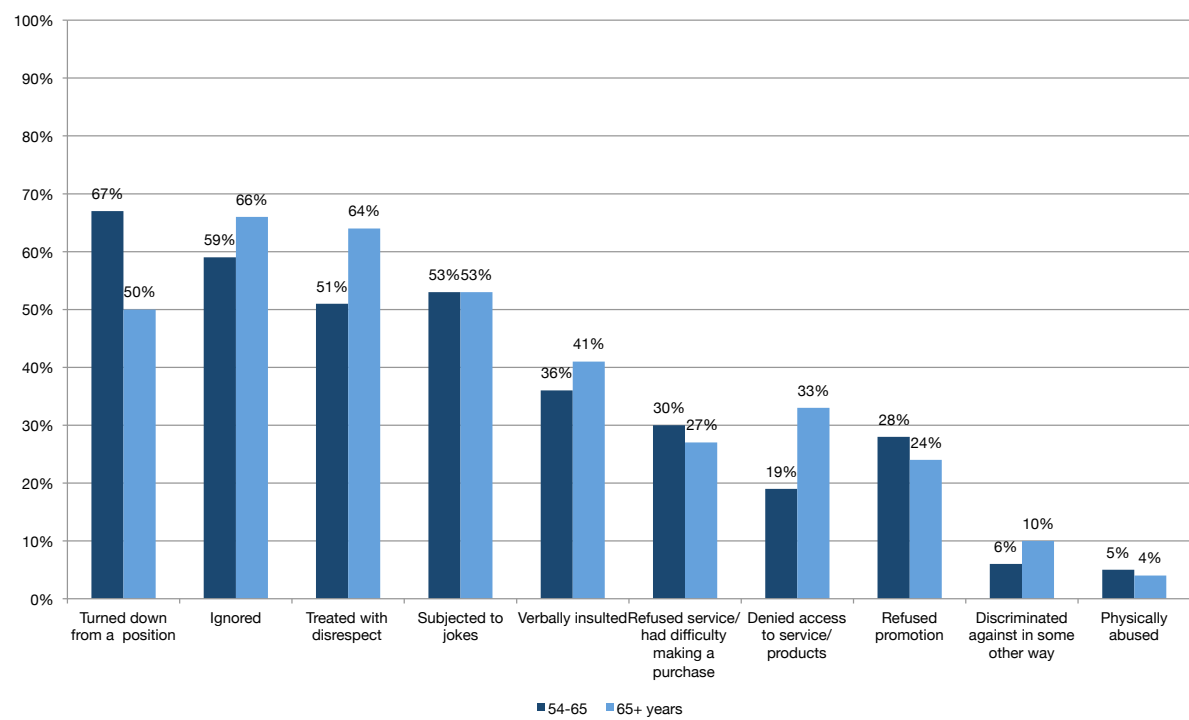
"It doesn't matter what you have learned, you are no longer employable unless you own the agency."
(55-64 years)

As shown in Figure 5 the most common types of discrimination experienced are *being turned down for a position*, *being ignored*, *being treated with disrespect* and *being subjected to jokes about ageing*, with all of these forms being experienced by at least half of the sample. Some of the research highlights include:

- The likelihood of **being turned down from a position** because of age is significantly higher among 55-64 year olds (67%) when compared to respondents aged 65+ (50%).
- **Being ignored** is more common among respondents living in a capital city (71%) when compared with respondents living in regional or rural areas (54%).

- **Being denied access to a service or product** is significantly more common among respondents aged 65+ years (33%) when compared to 55-64 year old respondents (19%). In line with findings from the focus groups, older participants (particularly women) feel that retail settings are geared to the needs of younger consumers. This is despite the fact that the older market often has a greater degree of discretionary spending power.

Figure 5: Specific experience of discrimination



Question: And have you been...?
Base: All respondents 55+ years who experienced discrimination (55 – 64, n=81), (65+ years, n=118).

These findings reflect comments from the focus groups with older people. The most discussed form of age-related discrimination was linked to employment. Many participants in the older age cohorts either personally experienced this form of discrimination or knew of others who had. Many younger participants also indicated that either their parents or older work colleagues had experienced age-related discrimination in the workplace. Many feel that this type of discrimination has increased since the global financial crisis:

“You try getting a bar job at 50.” (35-54 years)

“One of the things about being our age [over 65 years], is that we have passed one of the major age discrimination things and that is discrimination for a job – we have moved out of the workforce...in some ways we have moved beyond that little problem area...[not so] anybody who is 45-55 trying to get a job.”
(65+ year old participant discussing the fact that, because they are over working age, they will not face the issues with employment related age discrimination, but that others will)

Most older participants discussed a sense of being devalued by society and being isolated from one’s peers and colleagues. Some feel that their years of experience and their depth of knowledge have been overlooked:

“Of course it has an impact on you – I wanted to continue working – I was told ‘we don’t have suitable roles and duties for you anymore’ and that took me 12 months to get over. I had to have counselling because I thought that I still had a lot to offer and I still want to work therefore it affected my self-esteem.”
(65+ years)

Another commonly experienced form of age-related discrimination is the experience of invisibility. Many participants in the older focus groups had been made to feel invisible because of their age. For many, this invisibility manifests itself in different ways:

- **Service invisibility:** A feeling of being ignored or overlooked because those responsible for the service do not see value in spending time with an older person (who is deemed to either not have the spending power or not be 'in the market' for products being offered). Most feel that this was underpinned by a lack of understanding about the diversity of older people and a simple lack of engagement with the needs of older Australians:

"I walk into a nice dress store, I don't get served – they see me and they think that I can't possibly be interested in something fashionable and that I am probably killing time waiting for my grandkids."
(55-64 years)

"I had a friend who was looking to buy a new car...with cash. She walked into the dealer and was basically told that she 'probably wouldn't be interested in these types of cars' and that she should look at some of the other businesses down the road." (65+ years)

- **Product invisibility:** Many older participants feel that once they reach a certain age, they are ignored by corporate Australia. For many, this is underpinned by a lack of understanding about the financial capacity of older people (beyond spending on age-specific services such as 'insurance and funeral services'):

"There is a presumption that old people will have difficulty with the newer technology, the computer technology – they just design it in such a way and don't bother thinking about the older market."
(65+ years)

- **Relationship invisibility:** Many report that they feel like they are a burden or feel forgotten or ignored because of issues associated with ageing. Participants feel that this is underpinned by stereotypical views about the physical abilities of older people and a lack of understanding about the diversity of interests that older people have.

- **Cultural invisibility:** Some feel that there is a lack of representation in popular culture which leads to a sense that the important role of older people in the community is being overlooked, devalued or ignored. Many feel that this form of invisibility is driven by basic market forces. Older people are not seen to sell, to be interesting or to drive interest. As a result, older people do not play a prominent role in popular culture or media:

"The only thing I actually see from real advertising on TV is about funerals – and incontinence. There is nothing out there to say to just a normal run of the mill [older] person – 'let's have a bit of life'."
(55-64 years)

Others also feel that this form of invisibility is the result of programming or advertising decisions being made by younger people. Some people, particularly those from Melbourne, feel that younger people are in charge of programming and content and that these younger individuals are disengaged from the older audience. As a result, they do not see value in portraying older people beyond the more stereotypical roles of grandparent, carer or victim. For some older participants, this is of considerable concern, as they feel that younger people who may not have a family relationship with an older person rely on media and popular culture to gain an insight into the qualities of older Australians.

Denial of service or an inability to access specific services or products is also a commonly experienced form of age-related discrimination. This is particularly an issue when it comes to accessing financial services or, for some, health-related services. Many feel that this form of invisibility is underpinned by a lack of recognition of the needs of older Australians and a lack of awareness of the diversity and spending power that this cohort possesses:

"Being declined – I come back to travel insurance, being declined certain things and not having access to all of the facilities that one once had. It applies to credit I'm sure as well." (65+ years)

For some older participants, discrimination is seen to be more subtle and is often linked to a sense of condescension. These participants feel that, in some instances, a lack of understanding about the capabilities of older people leads younger people to ‘*assume the worst*’ and offer assistance when assistance is not warranted or needed:

“Sometimes I think there is an attitude in society towards older people who may be physically frailer – but there is an attitude that they are mentally frail when often they are as sharp as tacks.” (65+ years)

While these participants appreciate offers of assistance, it is the tone with which this assistance is offered that is problematic. The main concerns centre on the tendency for younger people to simply assume that an older person cannot do something or take part in an activity – essentially passing judgement without asking.

Being a source of amusement is also identified by some as a form of age-related discrimination. This is a complex issue, as the feeling of being discriminated against in this context depends on the relationship of the individual making a joke, the age of the person making a joke relative to the person being told the joke and the situation in which the joke is told. More important than age and relationship however, is the tone of the joke. If it is designed to be affectionate and inclusive, then most feel that this is simply part of the Australian culture. If it is designed to ridicule, belittle or bring someone down then it is classified as discriminatory.

While not discussed in detail, there is some discussion about the positive aspects of age discrimination, of being valued for being older and of younger people seeing diversity through the actions of older people:

“I see it as both sides – I like my bus pass and there are other things.” (65+ years)

“Something I have noticed on the tram, the aged get preferential treatment on the tram so there is a positive – in that you are actually giving them preferential treatment...although you never know if they are going to be offended or grateful!” (26-34 years)

“I have two boys, one got married last year and one is getting married this year. I’ve been invited to their friends’ bucks parties because I’m accepted among that group. I think they recognise my age, but not in a negative way.” (65+ years)

“All of the things I do I think they [younger people] are quite amazed – me being 72 and doing all that and cycling and travelling and playing tennis and everything else – so it’s not age discrimination but it’s a positive attitude toward ageing” (65+ years)

Respondents who had experienced age discrimination were asked to indicate how this makes them feel. The key themes are outlined in Figure 6.

Not surprisingly, some very strong negative emotional responses were reported – in particular, feelings of shame, anger or sadness. For a notable proportion, there are also direct impacts on personal perceptions of self-worth, and impacts on how they define ageing as a result of their experience:

“Made me feel angry and sad – my response to that person was one day you will get older too and somebody will say that to you.”

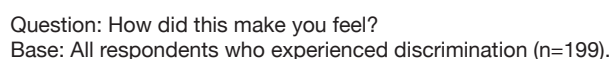
“Invisible, angry, my contribution to society, education etc. was not recognised or appreciated.”

“I call it being invisible...nobody sees you and your opinion does not matter. I feel very vulnerable.”

“Made me feel not a member of society, in fact very inadequate and I felt very distressed about it.”

Among the predominantly negative responses, there are also a small number who laughed it off or said it was “*water off a duck’s back*”.

The size of each word is directly proportionate to the number of mentions of that theme.



“Made me feel not a member of society, in fact very inadequate and I felt very distressed about it.”

A smiling woman with dark hair, wearing a bright green long-sleeved shirt, stands in a modern, brightly lit interior space. She is holding a white rectangular sign in front of her chest with both hands. The sign has the word "Active" written on it in a blue, sans-serif font. The background is a blurred view of a contemporary home or office, featuring a staircase with red carpeting, wooden paneling, and various decorative items. A large blue curved shape is visible on the left side of the frame.

Active

Chapter 3:

Australians' attitudes and behaviours

This chapter provides details of the prevalence of stereotypical attitudes and behaviours within the business community and broader Australian society.

3.1 The prevalence of negative behaviours

The outward expression of a negative stereotype is often negative behaviour. Building from discussions in the focus groups, a series of behavioural statements were developed, which describe behaviours deemed to be ageist in nature. Themes include:

- presumption/presupposition
- diminished physical capacity
- diminished mental capacity
- being a source of amusement (the concept of 'doddering' discussed in the qualitative stage)
- irrelevance or invisibility.

All respondents aged 18-54 years were presented with a listing of behaviours and asked to rate their level of agreement. Table 4 outlines the net agreement across all respondents with each behavioural statement as well as a comparison by age group. Agreement with most negative behaviour statements is relatively low. The exceptions to this are *feeling sorry for older people because of perceived complex health problems* (44% agree) and a perception that there is a *need to take extra time to explain complex topics* to older Australians (35% agree). While it is reasonable to assume that both of these statements reflect behaviours that could be seen as respectful, discussions during the qualitative phase indicate that this form of presumptive behaviour is often a concern and are indicative of deeply held misconceptions about older people.

Across a majority of statements, those aged under 34 years are generally more likely to exhibit negative behaviours than those aged over 35 years. Interestingly, it is older respondents (those aged 45-54 years) who are more likely to report telling jokes about older people. This supports findings from the qualitative research, where jokes about older people are considered to be more acceptable when they come from someone who is close in age to the recipient (a form of friendly teasing).

Table 4: Behavioural interactions – net agreement

	Total	18 – 24 A	25 – 34 B	35 – 44 C	45 – 54 D
I feel sorry for older people as they often have complex health problems.	44%	54% CD	45%	40%	41%
I often have to take extra time to explain complex topics to older people.	35%	42% CD	38% CD	30%	31%
I avoid conversations about technology with older people as I know explanations will take a long time and a lot of effort.	20%	28% CD	26% CD	14%	15%
I tend to speak louder to older people as I assume they cannot hear all that well.	13%	19% CD	15% CD	10%	10%
I sometimes tell jokes about older people.	11%	12%	9%	8%	14% BC
I don't stand in line behind someone who is older, because they are often slow to progress.	10%	13% D	15% CD	8% D	4%
I tend to be impatient with older people.	9%	13% CD	11%	7%	7%
I often avoid conversations with older people as they generally don't have anything interesting to say.	4%	6% D	7% CD	4% D	2%

Question: Thinking about older people, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: All respondents aged 18 – 54 years: (n=1,511).

A/B/C/D: Significantly higher at the 95% confidence level.

The relationship between negative attitudes and negative behaviours is clear. In all cases, respondents who are more likely to express negative attitudes towards older people are also more likely to agree with the negative behavioural statements listed above.

3.2 Perceptions of older employees' abilities

Business respondents were asked a range of statements relating to their beliefs about the abilities of older employees in the workplace. Their level of agreement with each statement is charted in Figure 7.

Of concern, 50% of business decision makers agree that older employees are at higher risk of being made redundant. This belief is significantly more likely to be held by smaller businesses (63% of those with less than five staff agree). Discussions during the focus groups support these conclusions, with many feeling that the global financial crisis has resulted in older employees being more likely to be made redundant than younger employees:

"Getting older means you are more likely to lose your job." (35-54 years)

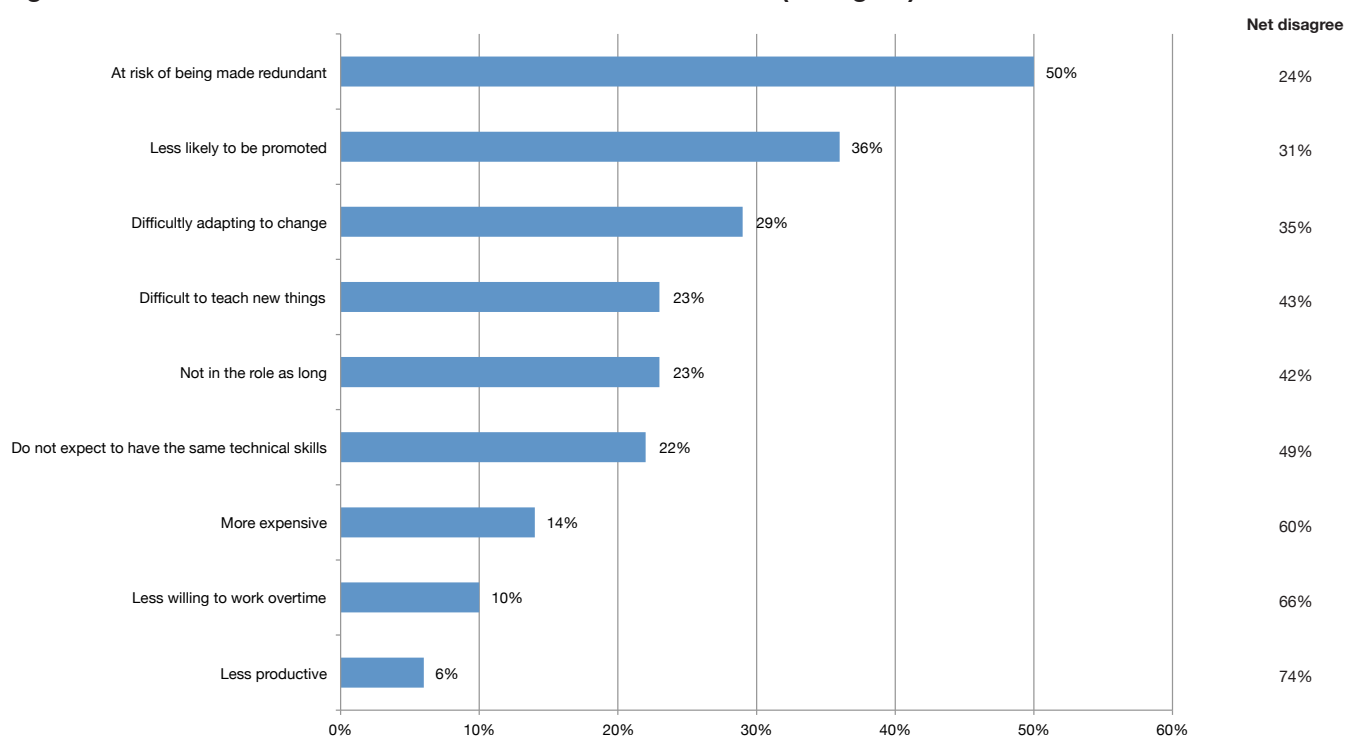
"Many people don't disclose their age in the workplace, because they know that others may make presumptions about what that person might be thinking or doing...there are others who modify their age." (65+ years)

More than one third (36%) of business decision makers believe that older employees are less likely to be promoted and 29% believe that older employees have difficulty adapting to change.

Around one quarter (23%) agree that older employees will not be in the role as long as younger employees and that it is difficult to teach older workers new things. A similar proportion (22%), agree that they do not expect older employees to have the same technical skills as younger employees.

Younger business respondents (those aged 18-34 years) are more likely to agree with most statements. However, they are less likely to feel that *older employees have difficulty being promoted*.

Figure 7: Business behaviours in relation to older Australians (net agree)



Question: Thinking about older employees (someone aged 55+ years), how strongly do you agree or disagree that, compared to younger employees...

Base: All businesses: n=504.

Beliefs about older employees' abilities in the workplace are directly related to willingness to employ an older worker. Business respondents who indicate that there is a certain age over which the business is reluctant to recruit (9% of the sample with a mean cut-off age of 50 years) are more likely to agree with almost all negative statements about the abilities of older employees. Related to this, those who encourage older employees to apply for positions (48% of the sample) are more likely to disagree with all statements.

Findings from the qualitative phase provide insight into the prevalence and impact of age-related discrimination in the workplace, with many participants feeling devalued, depressed and isolated after experiencing discrimination on the grounds of age:

"It was discrimination. I had turned 65, I had an injury and they said they didn't have suitable duties for me anymore and gave my job to a young girl who was only 33. They knew there was a loophole because I had turned 65 and I could get the pension but they didn't realise that my husband works so I get nothing."
(65+ years)

3.3 Attitudes and stereotypes

All respondents were asked a series of attitude statements which were designed to assess the prevalence of specific stereotypes within the Australian community. Building from the qualitative research and the review of literature, the statements were designed to understand stereotypes which tapped into the following themes:

- **Invisibility:** Perceptions that older people's views, opinions or experiences are not taken into consideration
- **Financial drain:** Perceptions of the negative impact that the older cohort has on the financial status/capability of younger cohorts
- **Cognitive ability:** Perceptions that older people have difficulty learning new tasks or may be slower to adopt new technology
- **Productivity:** Perceptions that older people do not contribute to the workplace or workforce
- **Social capability:** Perceptions that older people are grumpy, short-tempered or do not have intimate relationships
- **Victimisation:** Perceptions that older people are more likely to be victimised.

The phrasing of the questions was different for older and younger respondents. Older respondents were asked to indicate whether they feel younger people hold these views, while younger respondents were asked to indicate whether they personally hold these views. As such, a total population figure is not available and findings are present by age cohort.

(a) How younger people feel about older people

No single stereotype theme is consistently more likely to be considered to be true. Rather, there is a mix of perceptions across all stereotypes measured. Stereotypes mentioned by at least half of all respondents include perceptions that older people:

- **Are often isolated and lonely (59%):** This is a key concern for many older participants in the qualitative research (focus groups). Many feel that younger Australians do not understand the diversity present in the older community and appreciate the fact that relationships and activities continue well past the numeric ceiling of 55 years.

"I am doing more energetic things now than then." (65+ years)

- **Are more likely to be victims of crime (52%):** Discussions during the qualitative phase (focus groups) indicate that both older and younger participants feel that the media underpins perceptions that older people are more likely to be victims of crime.

"If you are in your 80s, you are hardly going to get mugged coming home from a club...come on, it's a beat up." (35-54 years)

Findings from the media scan support these qualitative comments:

- » Unknown older people (i.e. those who did not hold a prominent public profile) are most often mentioned in the analysed news and current affairs coverage as victims of crime, reinforcing the stereotype of older people as frail and vulnerable.
- » In print media, four of the five front-page articles identified in the scan refer to crime peaks.
- » Social media discussion of older people is similarly focused around reports of older people as the victims of crime, or as otherwise physically vulnerable or at risk of illness.
- » These characteristics are reinforced in advertising, where older people are often presented as vulnerable (emotionally, physically or financially).

- **Are more likely to be forgetful (51%):** This is despite the findings from the media scan which show that there was a distinct absence in analysed coverage of the portrayal of older people as lonely, alone or forgetful.
- **Do not like being told what to do by someone younger (43%).**
- **Do not like change (41%):** Findings from the media scan show that, when older people are at the heart of a ‘feel good story’ they are generally shown as competent and able to adapt. However, the overall dearth of stories focusing on the positives of ageing and older people in the media (the invisibility discussed previously) leads to a belief of this stereotype.

Table 5: Behavioural interactions – net agreement

Older people...	Total	18 – 24 A	25 – 34 B	35 – 44 C	45 – 54 D
(Social) Lonely or isolated	59%	50%	58%	59% A	65% AB
(Victimisation) Victims of crime	52%	46%	49%	56% A	55% A
(Cognitive) Forgetful	51%	50%	52%	47%	55% C
(Social) Don't like being told what to do by someone younger	43%	43%	47% C	40%	42%
(Social) Don't like change	41%	46%	49%	54%	49%
(Health) Likely to be sick	36%	51% BCD	39% CD	31%	26%
(Productivity) Don't want to work long hours	32%	37%	30%	31%	30%
(Cognitive) Are bad drivers	27%	26%	31% D	32% D	20%
(Cognitive) Have difficulty learning complex tasks	26%	33% CD	29%	25%	23%
(Cognitive) Have difficulty learning new things	26%	30% D	31% D	27%	22%
(Financial) Are a significant cost to the Australian health system	24%	18%	27% A	26% A	23%
(Temperament) Don't understand the pressures that younger people face	24%	26%	26% D	23%	20%
(Cognitive) Prefer not to use technology	23%	34%	29%	27%	29%
(Social) Complain a lot	22%	21%	24%	22%	20%
(Social) Don't have sexual relationships	18%	24% CD	21% CD	15%	15%

Older people...	Total	18 – 24 A	25 – 34 B	35 – 44 C	45 – 54 D
(Social) Are grumpy or short-tempered	17%	15%	20%	16%	17%
(Productivity) Are less likely to contribute at work	12%	15%	13%	11%	10%
(Social) Don't care about their appearance	8%	17% CD	12% CD	5%	5%
(Financial) Don't contribute to the Australian economy	7%	8%	9% D	8% D	4%
(Social) Are boring	5%	5%	8% CD	4%	4%

Question: With this in mind, do you personally agree or disagree that older people...

Base: All respondents aged 18-54 years, (18 – 24, n=175), (25 – 34, n=436), (35 – 44, n=452) (45 – 54, n=448).

A/B/C/D: Significantly higher at the 95% confidence level.

60% of all respondents aged 18-54 years can be considered to hold *predominantly negative attitudes* (i.e. agreement with 10 or more negative attitude statements). Respondents who fit this profile are significantly more likely to be:

- university graduates (46% of those classified as having *predominantly negative attitudes*, compared to 37% of those who are not classified as having *predominantly negative attitudes*)
- those aged under 35 years (47% compared to 43%)
- on higher incomes (27% compared to 24%)
- full time employees (49% compared to 44%)
- CALD respondents (17% compared to 13%)
- those who do not have a relationship with an older person (20% compared to 15%)
- living in a capital city (62% compared to 52%)
- males (50% compared to 40%).

What was also clear was that younger people are more likely to hold stereotypical views of older people across almost all statements assessed. This is particularly the case when data for respondents aged under 35 years is compared to those aged 35-54 years, with significant differences between cohorts seen across many attitudes.

(b) How older people feel they are viewed

Older respondents (those aged 55+ years) were asked to comment on whether they feel younger people agree with particular behavioural statements about older people (see Table 6).

Interestingly, there is a reasonable degree of alignment between how older people feel younger people perceive them as a cohort and comments from younger respondents (see Table 5). For both younger and older respondents, the attitudes perceived to be most commonly held are *that older people are forgetful, don't like change, are lonely or isolated or are likely to be victims* (although the order for older Australians is slightly different to younger Australians). Similar patterns are also seen between older respondents in relation to the least likely attitudes to be held and those that younger respondents report.

Table 6: Behavioural interactions – net agreement for older Australians

Younger people think older people...	55 – 64	65+
(Cognitive) Are more likely to be forgetful	75%	70%
(Social) Don't like change	73%	65%
(Social) Are often lonely or isolated	65%	63%
(Victim) Are more likely to be victims of crime	62%	61%
(Social) Don't have sexual relationships	58%	61%
(Temperament) Don't like being told what to do by someone younger	68%	61%
(Cognitive) Have difficulty learning new things	59%	59%
(Cognitive) Have difficulty learning complex tasks	63%	58%
(Cognitive) Are bad drivers	60%	57%
(Financial) Are a significant cost to the Australian health system	56%	54%
(Social) Are grumpy or short-tempered	52%	54%
(Productivity) Don't want to work long hours	48%	54%
(Health) Are more likely to be sick	51%	53%
(Cognitive) Prefer not to use technology	49%	51%
(Social) Don't understand the pressures that younger people face	47%	51%
(Social) Are boring	39%	47%
(Productivity) Are less likely to contribute at work	44%	46%
(Social) Complain a lot	48%	45%
(Financial) Don't contribute to the Australian economy	32%	43%
(Social) Don't care about their appearance	20%	25%

Question: With this in mind, do you personally agree or disagree that younger people feel older people...

Base: All older respondents (55 – 64, n=234) (65+ n=275).

(c) How business decision makers view older workers

Business respondents (those in charge of strategic decisions including recruitment) were also asked to indicate which attitude statements they were likely to agree with in relation to how they viewed older people (see Table 7).

Across all statements, business respondents are less likely to agree than respondents from the broader community sample, although the order of the top statements remains relatively consistent. Business respondents are more likely to agree that older people:

- don't like change (37%)
- are often lonely and isolated (36%)
- are more likely to be forgetful (33%)
- are more likely to be victims of crime (32%).

Around one in five business respondents agree with attitudes which could be more closely related to discrimination in the workplace:

- are more likely to be forgetful (33%)
- do not like being told what to do by someone younger (31%)
- have difficulty learning new things or complex tasks (23%)
- do not want to work long hours (22%)
- prefer not to use technology (20%).

However, contribution in the workplace is generally not seen to be an issue associated with ageing, with only 5% of business respondents agreeing that older people are *less likely to contribute at work*. This is despite the fact that almost one in ten business respondents have an age above which they would not recruit and 22% do not encourage applications from older workers.

Table 7: Behavioural interactions – net agreement for business

Older people...	Business
(Social) Don't like change	37%
(Social) Are often lonely or isolated	36%
(Cognitive) Are more likely to be forgetful	33%
(Victimisation) Are more likely to be victims of crime	32%
(Temperament) Don't like being told what to do by someone younger	31%
(Financial) Are a significant cost to the Australian health system	24%
(Cognitive) Have difficulty learning new things	23%
(Cognitive) Have difficulty learning complex tasks	23%
(Productivity) Don't want to work long hours	22%
(Cognitive) Prefer not to use technology	20%
(Cognitive) Are bad drivers	15%
(Temperament) Complain a lot	15%
(Temperament) Don't understand the pressures that younger people face	15%

(Health) Are more likely to be sick	13%
(Temperament) Are grumpy or short-tempered	11%
(Social) Don't have sexual relationships	8%
(Social) Don't care about their appearance	5%
(Social) Are less likely to contribute at work	4%
(Social) Are boring	3%
(Financial) Don't contribute to the Australian economy	3%

Question: With this in mind, do you personally agree or disagree that older people...

Base: All older respondents (55 – 64, n=234) (65+ n=275).

Almost half (47%) of business respondents can be considered to hold *predominantly negative attitudes* (i.e. agreement with 10 or more negative attitude statements). Business respondents who fit this profile are significantly more likely to be younger (60% of those aged 18-34 years), when compared to older respondents (41% of those aged 35-54 years and 25% of those aged 55+). There were few other differences across business demographics.

“It was discrimination. I had turned 65, I had an injury and they said they didn’t have suitable duties for me anymore and gave my job to a young girl who was only 33. They knew there was a loophole because I had turned 65 and I could get the pension but they didn’t realise that my husband works so I get nothing.”
(65+ years)



Dynamic

Chapter 4:

The role and influence of the media

This chapter provides a review of the role of the media in constructing and reinforcing stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes toward older Australians.

4.1 The context of media consumption

Before providing detailed analysis of the perceived influence of the media on the formation of stereotypes, it is important to review media consumption as reported by community and business respondents. Not surprisingly, there are differences between younger and older respondents (see Table 8). Younger respondents are generally more likely to consume digital media and to engage with social/peer-to-peer platforms than older participants, including:

- accessing social media
- watching online television including streaming, catch-up TV and Apple TV
- watching movies including renting, downloading, streaming or going to the movies at a cinema.

Older respondents are more likely to engage in more traditional media, including:

- free-to-air television
- newspapers.

Table 8: Media consumption by audience

Older people...	Total	18 – 24 A	25 – 34 B	35 – 44 C	45 – 54 D	55 – 64 E	65+ F	Business
Watch free-to-air TV	92%	83%	90% A	92% A	97% ABC	95% AB	97% ABC	90%
Listen to the radio	74%	62%	74% A	79% AF	79% ABF	73% A	70%	80%
Read newspapers (either paper or online)	67%	49%	61% A	67% A	72% AB	77% ABC	77% ABC	78%

Older people...	Total	18 – 24 A	25 – 34 B	35 – 44 C	45 – 54 D	55 – 64 E	65+ F	Business
Use social media including Twitter or Facebook	66%	91% BCDEF	81% CDEF	70% DEF	57% F	53% F	39%	59%
Watch movies, including renting, downloaded or going to the cinema	56%	78% BCDEF	66% CDEF	54% EF	54% EF	42%	36%	51%
Read magazines	36%	41%	35%	32%	34%	42% CD	36%	37%
Watch Pay TV	30%	26%	27%	33%	35% AB	27%	31%	40%
Watch TV online	26%	43% CDEF	35% CDEF	27% DEF	20% F	16%	10%	29%

Question: During a typical week, do you...

Base: All respondents (Community, n=2,020), (18 – 34, n=175), (25 – 34, n=436), (35 – 44, n=452), (45 – 54, n=448), (55 – 64, n=234), (65+, n=275), (Business n=504).

A/B/C/D/E/F: Significantly higher at the 95% confidence level.

Key differences in consumption of media by demographic group include:

- females are significantly more likely to be accessing social media (72%), when compared to males (59%)
- males are more likely than females to report engaging with:
 - » newspapers (70% compared to 64%)
 - » pay TV (33% compared to 28%)
- those with university qualifications are more likely to report engaging with most media sources (with the exception of magazines, free-to-air TV and pay TV) than those whose highest educational attainment is high school or below
- a similar pattern is seen for those on higher household incomes (\$100k or more) and those employed full time, with these respondents being more likely to consume all media sources other than magazines when compared to those on lower incomes or other employment arrangements
- those who have children living with them are significantly more likely to listen to the radio (80%), when compared to those living alone (71%) and those living with a partner without children (73%)
- those living with a partner without children are significantly more likely to read newspapers (76%) compared to those who live alone (61%) or those who live with children (67%).

There also appears to be some link between the consumption of social media and negative attitudes. Those who are more likely to be classified as holding *predominantly negative attitudes* (including younger respondents, university graduates, and full time workers) are also more likely to be accessing social media (such as Twitter and Facebook), when compared to those who are not classified in this manner. Findings from the audit of social media identify that peaks in social media discussion about older people are focused on reports of older people as the victims of crime, or as otherwise physically vulnerable or at risk of illness.

4.2 The invisibility of older people

Discussions during the qualitative stage (focus groups) indicate that many older people feel some sense of invisibility. The media is seen as a contributor to this sense of invisibility, with many of the older community members in the focus groups feeling that older Australians are invisible within the media. This includes invisibility from the perspective of stories and also from the viewpoint of role models and media leaders:

“If you look at the percentage of people, the age bracket in a particular show, I think Australian-made television has a very low average age of perform[ers] compared to something coming out of Europe.” (65+ years)

“It’s kind of middle-age or ancient...there is no middle ground.” (18-25 years)

“Even like presenters and stuff on TV have an expiry date where they are no longer useful.” (18-25 years)

These qualitative comments are supported by quantitative findings from a scan of Australian media content, with this scan indicating that older people are clearly underrepresented in the media. This is the case across editorial news, current affairs content and advertising. From analysis of a sample that was drawn from the highest-rating and widest-circulating outlets:

- people aged 65+ featured in 4.7% of the advertising content
- people aged 65+ were mentioned in 6.6% of the editorial media content
- people aged over 55 were referred to in 11.5% of the editorial media content.

Given that in 2012, people aged 65 or more made up 14.2% of the Australian population and people aged 55 or more made up 25.6%, this analysis indicates that older people are invisible in the media relative to their presence in the population.

4.3 The influence of the media

Almost all participants in the focus groups felt that the media has an impact on attitudes and behaviours and many felt that the impact is negative.

Some feel that the media has a strong and pervasive impact on views about older people and that it is often at the heart of views and perceptions which are commonly held:

“Since most of us have no other independent way of learning how the world goes, one way or another pretty much everything we get comes through the media. It may not come to us first hand through the media, it may filter through the opinions of other people who have seen that or other things but you can’t get away from the fact that most of the opinions you have on almost anything have come through the media in some form and it may be quite convoluted...but it is there.” (65+ years)

“We subconsciously absorb it as well and then when you see an older person all these things come up. You don’t know where they come from but they’ve come from everything that you have seen.” (18-25 years)

“Kids are like sponges.” (18-25 years)

“We subconsciously absorb it as well and then when you see an older person all these things come up. You don’t know where they come from but they’ve come from everything that you have seen.” (18-25 years)

“It’s huge...because the majority of the population are either insufficiently educated and I don’t mean school...[they don’t] really look into things and they are receptive to slogans or headlines.” (65+ years)

“The influence is subliminal, for those who are not constructive enough in their lives to form their own views.” (65+ years)

However, for others the strength of the media in influencing views depends on the degree to which someone has contact with an older person. If someone knows an older person (e.g. their grandfather), then this individual will hold views based on their experience, with limited influence from the media. If an individual does not have contact with an older person, then perceptions will be limited to those available in the media:

“I still think personal experience trumps everything – everyone here has a strong view because they knew their grandparents or something when they were sick...no matter how many ads that is going to trump it every single time. Problem is, if you don’t have connections with a family member you are more reliant on advertising and television.” (35-54 years)

Others also feel that personal experience reinforces positive opinions of ageing and old age, while negative perceptions are often reinforced through the media. The main example given in relation to this interaction is the perception that older people are more likely to be *victims of crime*. Most who feel that this statement is true do not personally know an older person who has been a victim, although all have seen stories in the media and feel that victimisation is a common occurrence. In contrast, their reaction to the stereotype that *all old people are the same* is vehement in its rebuttal, simply because their grandparents had been interesting, different, fun etc, and different from other older people they knew. Personal experience with someone older overcomes the issues of homogeneity and invisibility discussed in relation to the media.

To understand better the relative impact of the media on negative attitudes, all respondents in the quantitative study who *agreed* or *agreed strongly* with specific negative attitudes were asked to indicate how much influence different information sources had on the formation of these attitudes. In addition to media (including visual media, print media and advertising), the relative impact of the following were assessed:

- personal experience
- cultural background
- educational attainment
- work colleagues
- the perceived Australian ‘youth culture’.

Across all negative attitudes, *personal experience*, *stories seen in the media* and *stories read in the media* are the strongest contributors. While influences including cultural background, educational attainment, colleagues and Australia’s youth culture do have some impact, this influence is muted, with generally less than one third of respondents feeling that these aspects have an influence on their attitudes about older people.

In line with findings from the qualitative phase (focus groups), across most attitudes, personal experience is considered to be the main driver behind attitude formation in most instances. This is particularly the case with attitudes related to cognitive deficiencies of older people, where more than seven in ten respondents feel that their personal experience has contributed to their beliefs about older people. While findings from the media scan do not indicate a skew toward stories focusing on the negative cognitive abilities of older people, discussions during the qualitative phase indicate that commercial programming (particularly drama series) is often seen to show older people as forgetful. As such, there is some scope for the media to assist in breaking down these attitudes by providing alternative views of ageing in commercial programming.

It is clear that the media (both print and visual) has a key role in the formation of several commonly perceived stereotypes about older people:

- **Victimisation:** Almost three-quarters (73%) of respondents feel that stories they see in the media have an influence on the belief of older people as victims. A similar proportion (71%) feel that stories they read in the media have an influence while less than half (41%) feel that this belief is based on personal experience. This is consistent with findings from the qualitative research, where stereotypes related to victimisation are seen to be reinforced and encouraged through external sources rather than personal experience:

“You hear about it in the media – if an old lady has been broken into and she’s been hit on the head you are going to hear about it in all the media and the papers and stuff – whereas young people are getting assaulted all the time but I think the media hones into it more [when it is an older person].” (35-54 years)

Some sub-groups are more likely to feel that the media has an influence on their perception of older people as victims. These included:

- » women
- » those with a university qualification
- » CALD respondents.

Findings from the media scan confirm that a considerable volume of media content focuses on stories which portray older people as victims – ‘unknown’ older people were most often mentioned in the analysed news and current affairs coverage as the victims of crime.

52% of those aged 18-54 years agree that older people are more likely to be victims and there is evidence that this negative attitude is driven to a considerable degree by the media.

- **Lonely and isolated:** The perception that older people are lonely and isolated also appears to be heavily influenced by media (both print and visual), although personal experience also has a role to play. Six in ten (63%) of respondents feel that stories they see in the media have an influence on their perception that older people are lonely and isolated and a similar proportion (60%) feel that stories they read in the media have an influence. However, two-thirds (65%) also feel that their personal experience has contributed to their belief that older people are lonely or isolated.

This is in contrast to the findings from the media scan. In both mainstream news media and advertising, older people are rarely presented as isolated, alone or lonely. In news media, they are almost as likely to be pictured in a social or public setting as in a domestic or private setting. However, findings from the qualitative phase show a strong link between the concepts of physical frailty, victimisation and the concept that older people are isolated and lonely. In many ways, one results in the other from a participant view – if an older person is afraid of being victimised or if they are too frail to leave the house, then their ability to socially engage is directly affected.

“Kids are like sponges.” (18-25 years)

- **More likely to be sick:** Personal experience and the media have a strong influence on the perception that older people are more likely to be sick. More than half (58%) of respondents feel that stories they read in the media have an influence on this perception and a similar proportion (61%) feel that stories they see in the media have an influence. Personal experience is most likely to influence this perception, with 68% stating that this is influential in attitude formation.

Findings from the media scan indicate that media coverage does skew toward a portrayal of older people as sick and vulnerable. Mainstream news media content most often presents older people as passive, vulnerable and frail and these traits were frequently associated with older people in the contexts of ill health. Peaks in social media discussion of older people are similarly focused around reports of older people as physically vulnerable or at risk of illness. There is perceived influence of the media on perceptions that older people are more likely to be sick and 36% agree that this stereotype is an accurate reflection of the older population.

- **Are bad drivers:** 62% of respondents feel that media they see has an influence on their perception that older people are bad drivers and the same proportion again (62%) feel that media they read has an influence. Personal experience also plays a role, with 73% feeling that their experience underpins their perceptions of the driving abilities of older people.

The media scan indicates that coverage of accidents in relation to older Australians is notable and that traffic accidents are often a focus of this coverage. While it is not possible to confirm whether media stories related to traffic accidents place older people at fault, there is scope for the media to assist in the breakdown of this stereotype by reinforcing the positive traits associated with elderly drivers.

Other attitudes where a majority of respondents feel that the media has contributed to their perceptions of older people include:

- a perception that older people are a **significant cost to the health system**: 66% feel that stories they see in the media have an influence and 65% feel that stories they read in the media have an influence
- a perception that older people **complain a lot**: 53% feel that stories they read or see in the media have an impact on their perception that older people are likely to complain.

“You hear about it in the media – if an old lady has been broken into and she’s been hit on the head you are going to hear about it in all the media and the papers and stuff – whereas young people are getting assaulted all the time but I think the media hones into it more [when it is an older person].” (35-54 years)

Table 9: Influence of specific levers on key attitudes (order of most frequently mentioned by those aged 18-54 years)

	Personal experience	Stories seen	Stories read	Ads	Culture	Education	Work colleagues	Youth culture
(Social) Lonely and isolated	65%	63%	60%	35%	27%	29%	25%	25%
(Victimisation) Victims of crime	41%	73%	71%	36%	21%	28%	19%	23%
(Cognitive) Forgetful	74%	47%	44%	31%	21%	26%	31%	15%
(Productivity) Don't want to be told what to do by someone younger	70%	39%	38%	28%	30%	29%	46%	28%
(Social) Don't like change	75%	42%	39%	27%	28%	29%	41%	20%
(Health) More likely to be sick	68%	61%	58%	47%	27%	38%	36%	17%
(Productivity) Don't want to work long hours	67%	33%	32%	26%	26%	25%	44%	19%
(Cognitive) Are bad drivers	73%	62%	62%	43%	24%	27%	37%	21%
(Cognitive) Difficulty learning complex tasks	71%	39%	38%	29%	26%	27%	36%	21%
(Cognitive) Difficulty learning new things	71%	40%	34%	30%	25%	30%	41%	21%
(Financial) A significant cost to the health system	62%	66%	65%	42%	25%	38%	32%	23%
(Social) Don't understand the pressure younger people face	66%	38%	39%	28%	30%	34%	39%	30%
(Technology) Prefer not to use technology	73%	44%	41%	32%	24%	29%	41%	23%
(Social) Complain a lot	67%	53%	53%	30%	26%	22%	37%	25%
(Social) Don't have sexual relationships	36%	33%	31%	26%	23%	21%	20%	17%
(Social) Grumpy	62%	47%	44%	28%	27%	21%	32%	24%
(Social) Are boring	45%	33%	39%	35%	24%	27%	28%	27%
(Financial) Don't contribute to the Australian economy	52%	54%	57%	41%	37%	32%	29%	34%
(Productivity) Don't contribute to the workplace	48%	38%	40%	26%	30%	34%	35%	25%
(Social) Don't care about their appearance	53%	33%	33%	32%	27%	28%	35%	26%

Question: Thinking about how younger people view older people, how much of an influence do the following have on these perceptions.

Base: All who indicated they 'agreed' or 'agreed strongly' with specific attitudes (varies by question).

Bold figures: Highlight stereotypes where more than 50% of the community sample feel the media has contributed to their perceptions about older people.

Business respondents were asked about the overall influence of different information sources as opposed to the influence of these sources on specific attitudes. Findings from business participants can be seen in Figure 8.

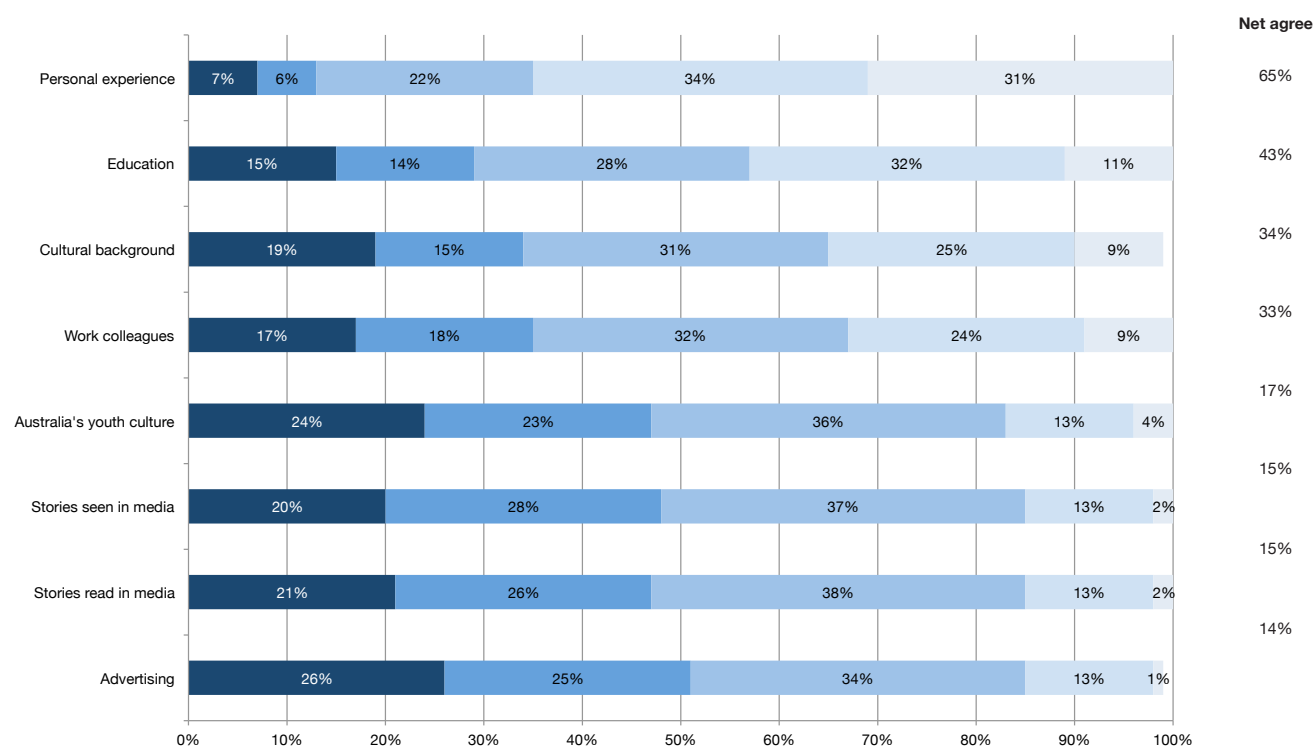
As with the broader community, personal experience is the strongest driver of perceptions of older people, with 65% of all businesses either *agreeing* or *agreeing strongly* that their experience has influenced their perceptions. Education is the second most influential factor, with 43% feeling that this has an influence.

Around one third of business respondents feel that cultural background (34%) or work colleagues (33%) have an influence on their perceptions of older people.

Business respondents are least likely to feel that stories they see in the media (15%), stories they read in the media (15%) or advertising (14%) have an influence.

There are few differences by demographics in perceptions of influence for business respondents.

Figure 8: Business influence of specific levers on key attitudes about older people



Question: Thinking about how younger people view older people, how much of an influence do the following have on your perceptions.
Base: All business respondents (n=504).

“Even like presenters and stuff on TV have an expiry date where they are no longer useful.” (18-25 years)

4.4 Media and advertising portrayal of older people

To understand how respondents perceive media and advertising portrayals of older people, all respondents were asked to think about everything they had seen and heard in media and advertising and to describe words most commonly used to portray older people. The findings for media generally, and advertising specifically, are provided below.

(a) Media

Figure 9 presents the themes most commonly mentioned by respondents in relation to the portrayal of older people in the media generally.

Descriptors associated with negative portrayals of the cognitive or physical capabilities of older people are often mentioned, with many respondents feeling that the media portrays older people as *forgetful*, *frail*, *slow*, *fragile*, *sick* or *grumpy*.

These findings are reflected in the media scan, where ‘unknown’ older people are most often seen to be portrayed as frail and weak, as victims of crime or as in poor health. There is also a correlation between perceived portrayals of older people in the media and the most commonly held negative attitudes in relation to older people. This reflects the potential influence of the media identified in section 4.3. Respondents are most likely to agree that older people are forgetful and vulnerable, aligning with the most commonly used descriptors for the portrayal of older people in the media. These findings suggest that community members are taking on board the portrayals currently available in the media and that this portrayal may be influencing deeply held attitudes about older people.

There are no real differences in perceptions of media portrayal between business and the broader community.

Figure 9: How older people are portrayed in the media

The size of each word is directly proportionate to the number of mentions of that theme.



Question: Thinking about everything you see and hear in the media (including on TV, online, on the radio and in newspapers and magazines), how does the media portray older people?

Base: All respondents (n=2,020).

Critically, when asked whether the portrayal of older people in the media is a fair representation of the older population in Australia, more than half (61%) say that it is not. This suggests possible misalignment between how community members view members of the older cohort and how the media portrays older people.

There are relatively few demographic differences in relation to those who feel that the media portrayal of older people is not fair. This perception is uniform across almost all sub-groups. However, those classified as holding *predominantly negative attitudes* are less likely to feel that the portrayal is unfair (54%), when compared to those with more positive attitudes in relation to ageing (64%). Older respondents (65+) and CALD respondents are also more likely to feel that the portrayal is unfair when compared to younger and non-CALD respondents.

Supporting these macro-level findings, one in five or fewer community respondents (see Table 10) agree that:

- there are generally as many positive stories in the media about ageing as negative (21% agree, 42% disagree)
- the media portrays older people in diverse ways (19% agree, 35% disagree)
- there are enough older role models portrayed in the media (16% agree, 45% disagree).

Older respondents are consistently more likely to disagree with all statements and the findings for business respondents are in line with those observed for the broader community.

Table 10: Perceptions of media portrayal – net level of agreement

Net agree	Total	Age						Business
		18 – 24 A	25 – 34 B	35 – 44 C	45 – 54 D	55 – 64 E	65+ F	
The media portrays older people in diverse ways	19%	14%	17%	16%	20%	21%	29% ABCDE	16%
There are generally as many positive stories in the media about ageing as there are negative stories	21%	17%	21%	19%	22%	21%	28% ABC	17%
There are enough older role models portrayed in the media	16%	18%	18%	14%	16%	16%	16%	14%

Question: And how much do you agree or disagree that...?

Base: All respondents (Community, n=2,020), (18 – 34, n=175), (25 – 34, n=436), (35 – 44, n=452), (45 – 54, n=448), (55 – 64, n=234), (65+, n=275) (Business, n=504).

Other demographic differences are also apparent:

- males are significantly more likely than females to agree that there are enough older role models portrayed in the media, potentially reflecting issues related to gender and ageing as discussed in the qualitative research (where female participants felt that older women are less present in the media)
- CALD respondents are also significantly more likely than non-CALD to agree that there are enough older role models portrayed in the media, or that there are generally as many positive stories in the media about ageing as there are negative stories

- respondents who think that the portrayal of older people in Australia is a fair representation are significantly more likely to agree with all three statements compared to those who do not think the portrayal was fair.

Linked to findings from the media scan and qualitative research, community respondents are most likely to feel that the unfair representation of older Australians is a result of a lack of diversity of older people in the media (21% of all those who feel the portrayal is unfair). A further 10% feel that the unfairness is a result of media stereotypes and similar proportions feel that unfair portrayals are the result of a lack of focus on the contributions older people can make (9%) and the fact that older people can still be healthy and active (8%).

(b) Advertising

The perceived portrayal of older people in advertising appears to differ from that of the broader media (see Figure 10). While aspects of cognitive and physical deficiencies continue to feature, descriptions of products specific to the older audience are also present (including insurance and funerals). Interestingly, positive descriptors such as *happy*, *caring*, *funny*, *wise* and *active* are more likely to be associated with advertising than with the media more generally. Victimisation is less frequently mentioned for advertising than it is for media more generally.

There is little variation between findings for business and consumer audience.

Figure 10: How older people are portrayed in *advertising*

The size of each word is directly proportionate to the number of mentions of that theme.



Question: Thinking about advertising that you have seen (including on TV, online, on the radio and in newspapers and magazines), what three words describe how older people are portrayed in advertising?
Base: All respondents (n=2,020).

When asked whether the portrayal of older people in advertising is a fair representation of the older population, almost half of all community respondents (47%) said that it is not. A higher proportion of business respondents do not feel the portrayal in advertising is fair (65%). This supports the conclusion that there is a misalignment between how members of the community see the older cohort and, in this case, how advertising portrays older people.

Again, reflecting the findings from the media scan and qualitative research, community respondents are most likely to feel that the unfair representation of older Australians is a result of a lack of diversity of older people in advertising (19% of all those who feel the portrayal is unfair). A further 15% feel that the unfairness is a result of a lack of focus on the fact that older people can still be healthy and active. 8% feel that the unfair portrayal is the result of an overly rosy image of ageing, 7% feel that it is a result of a focus on funeral advertising.

As with perceptions of the media, there are relatively few differences by demographic and sub-group about the fairness of advertising portrayals of older people. Again, those classified as holding *predominantly negative attitudes* are less likely to feel that the portrayal is unfair (39%), when compared to those with more positive attitudes in relation to ageing (48%).

4.5 Preferred portrayals

Respondents who feel that current media or advertising portrayal of older Australians is not fair (1,242 respondents) were asked to describe how they would like older people portrayed in the media. Across both media and advertising, respondents want to see one of three things:

- **A more neutral representation:** There is a strong call for older people to be represented as they are – *just normal people living normal lives*. Linked with this, many respondents express a desire for the media to stop ‘*lumping together*’ older people – these respondents want the media to show diversity within the older population and to reduce reliance on stereotypical portrayals of older people in news, print and entertainment media:

“Just as they are – a diverse group with interests other than superannuation, insurance and funeral plans”.

“As a true cross-section of what is the reality. Interviews of ‘famous’ elderly and victims is not a true cross-section”.

“As diverse. You do have frail, dodderly old people – there’s no escaping that fact. There are also some that are active and alert until they die suddenly at the age of 103”.

“Just like young but with more wrinkles”.

“To be portrayed for who they are, not how old they are. They cannot be painted with the same brush so to speak”.

“The same as any other social group – many great things to offer, and some not so great! Realistically so to speak”.

“Like everyone else. Age doesn’t need to be factored into it”.

“The same as any other social group – many great things to offer, and some not so great! Realistically so to speak”.

“As being capable of contributing, being active, interested and willing to participate”.

- **A more positive and encouraging representation:** Respondents also feel that there is a need for the media to show more respect to older members of the community and to provide images and messages which reinforce the contribution that older people make to Australia. Importantly, respondents feel that retrospective portrayals of contributions are not sufficient. Many feel there is a need for the media to demonstrate how the current cohort is contributing rather than dwelling on the impact that older people had on society in their youth (for example war stories):

“Intelligent people who can still contribute – either in business or with the family. More recognition of the skills they can contribute”.

“More focus on the different roles that older people are engaged in. How many older people, though retirees, are called on to support their families”.

“As people that know a lot about a lot of things and could teach young people and help them by passing on what they know”.

“As being capable of contributing, being active, interested and willing to participate”.

“As people who contribute to society, from still being in the workforce, to charity or community work, not just lazy, retired people”.

- **Breaking down fear:** Many feel that there is a need for the media to actively break down fear-based stereotypes, particularly those to do with health and victimisation. Positivity is at the heart of many of the comments in relation to breaking down stereotypes:

“While some older people are fearful, a lot are not. I believe that older Australians are often influenced by the media, which means that they are often “made” to be fearful by inaccurate reports, which then becomes a cycle of fear”.

“In a positive way. We do see from time to time, but I love to see elderly people that study or still play sport rather than those that can’t pay their electricity bill. I do feel for those people but they also need to be seen as a positive influence on the community too”.

“More happy and loving towards their families. Also, my grandparents have an iPad each and a DS each, so they need to be shown on ads using technology”.

- 1 Deloitte Access Economics, *Increasing participation among older workers: The grey army advances* (2012), p i. At http://www.humanrights.gov.au/age/publications/mature_age/index.html.
- 2 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Population projections, Australia, 2006 to 2101*, Catalogue no 3222.0 (2008). At <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/3222.0Main%20Features12006%20to%202101?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3222.0&issue=2006%20to%202101&num=&view=>.
- 3 Advisory Panel on the Economic Potential of Senior Australians, *Government responds to the Final Report of the Advisory Panel on the Economic Potential of Senior Australians* (2012). At http://archive.treasury.gov.au/EPsA/content/publications/government_response/contents.asp.
Note: in the budget papers this project is referred to as: Economic Potential of Senior Australians – countering negative stereotypes and promoting positive media portrayal of older Australians.

Further Information

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