

MEDIA RELEASE

AUSTRALIA'S OVER 50s GOING STRONG DURING COVID-19

New research reveals that despite challenges Australian seniors have adapted to the current climate and have high hopes for the future

SYDNEY, June 2020 – Nationwide social distancing and isolation measures have caused dramatic disruptions to Australians everyday routines. And although challenging, many are rallying through – particularly those over 50 with a vast majority (89.9%) saying they have adapted to the current health crisis surprisingly well.

New research from Australian Seniors, *Connectivity in the Age of COVID-19*, reveals a large portion (82.9%) of Australians over 50 feel their families have made extra efforts to stay connected and support them through these times. However, a vast majority (83.1%) have sorely missed being able to see their children and/or grandchildren in person.

Australian Seniors spokesperson, Sarah Richards said “The current health crisis has presented us all with challenges, unfortunately the senior community have been one of the most impacted groups given their vulnerability to the effects of the virus on their health. As a business who are passionate about the wellbeing of our senior community, we wanted to better understand the hurdles Australia’s over 50s have gone through, and are continuing to go through, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although our research tells us that many have been feeling the brunt of isolation, it’s reassuring to see the new ways in which people are connecting and how the community spirit of Australia has come alive during this period”.

Loneliness and social isolation: The reality

The research detailed just over three in five (62.8%) have not been doing anything in particular to take better care of their own mental health during this period. This is regardless of the fact three in 10 (30.1%) feel their mental health has been negatively impacted from social distancing and isolation. The proportion note these feelings would increase (40.8%) if the current measures last for another three months.

However, three in five (59.2%) claim self-isolation has had no impact on their personal feelings of loneliness, yet more than one-third (35.8%) feel they have become increasingly lonely. A quarter (24.3%) have been self-isolating alone, while over half (56.2%) are doing so with a partner.

Those who admit to loneliness note a few reasons for feeling this way: the lack of physical contact and face-to-face company (72.3%) and the inability to see family (68.5%) and friends (65.1%) as frequently, or at all.

On the other hand, a quarter (23.9%) are making efforts to care for their mental health citing staying connected with family or friends by phone (73.1%), focusing on hobbies and personal interests (64.5%) and maintaining positive thinking and hope about the future (63.7%) as key things they have been doing.

Maintaining healthy lifestyles jeopardised

Australia's over 50s admit the top thing they are most keen to change in their life post - COVID-19 is being healthier. The report points out, that since lockdown restrictions began more than one in three have felt the following a challenge to maintain: spending time outdoors (37.5%), following their usual exercise routines (33.1%) and avoiding overeating (33.0%).

In addition, close to half (49.6%) have found themselves sitting more than before and four in 10 (42.5%) have not attempted any new ways of exercising. For those that have embraced new ways of exercising, walking is common (74.9%) as is exercising at home (44.4%).

Furthermore, two in five (44.7%) respondents also state they have had less contact with health care providers during this time. This is despite the availability of telemedicine and a large portion (88.5%) agreeing that Australia will see a major increase in the use of technology such as telemedicine to help service seniors' health care needs.

Regardless of the hurdles Australia's over 50s have faced both mentally and physically over the course of the pandemic, two in five (40.0%) found that this period has motivated them and provided the time to pursue self-improvement efforts. These include, engaging in hobbies (48.4%), cooking (46.4%) and putting in more effort to connect with, and support family and friends (34.3%).

Yvonne Wells, Professor of Aged Care Research and Policy Development at La Trobe University notes that it's not surprising there have been increases in anxiety over the past three months, given news from overseas and fairly drastic changes to people's everyday routines, and worries about health threats to one's own and older and younger generations. However, she points out the research also demonstrates how older Australians adapt and build resilience during turbulent times:

“What strikes me from the results of this survey is the great adaptability seniors have shown in the face of the coronavirus restrictions. Most said they adapted to the crisis surprisingly well, many had developed new hobbies, and most had made efforts to stay connected with family and friends. Many of those working have actively looked for new opportunities to generate income streams. A majority had re-evaluated the importance to our community of people like nurses and teachers. This is convincing evidence to counter ageist stereotypes of older people as unable to change.

“The advice that senior Australians gave in this survey for maintaining mental health—staying active, physically, mentally and socially, and having a positive attitude—are exactly the sorts of recommendations mental health professionals would give. Many older people have learnt life skills and gained the wisdom that they need to help them cope with adversity. Overall, this result from the research shows how older people often cope well with adverse life events.”

Making the most of technology

The continued use of, and uptake in technology is not necessarily surprising given the current climate. Most are spending their time at home connecting with their loved ones virtually and by phone, using platforms such as WhatsApp and Zoom. Three-quarters (73.8%) say their family have discovered new ways to spend time together and keep each other entertained.

A large majority (84.0%) did not have to invest in digital technology to stay connected. And many say they are relying on their technological devices to inform them (68.0%) and distract them (56.7%) more than ever before. In addition, more than half (52.0%) have been staying in touch with their family and friends through video conferencing.

And, for those over 50s still in the workforce 83.1 per cent say dealing with technology for meetings and new work processes has been easy.

Over 50s have a new perspective now, and for the future

Looking forward, nearly all Australians over 50 believe that the COVID-19 crisis could open everyone's eyes to the importance of sufficiently funding health and education (93.1%) as well as other global threats and society's capacity to act on them (90.4%).

The majority of respondents (71.2%) say the most exciting developments in the provision of health care in the coming decade are a vaccine for COVID-19, followed by improved prevention and treatment for dementia, cancer or heart disease (70.4%).

Although, most (85.8%) agree that the COVID-19 crisis may have permanent scarring effects similar to what was seen as a result of the Great Depression.

Despite the shake-up, seven in 10 (70.8%) seniors believe that the world is likely to emerge better and stronger from this crisis – a true representation of adaptability and strength of the human race.

-ENDS-

Further findings from the research:

The role of grandparenting:

- 61 per cent have been unable to care for their grandchildren due to isolation measures
- Over a quarter (27.0%) have been playing a similar role to the one they always have
- While 14.3 per cent are still watching over them but keeping a safe social distance
- Some (15.0%) have been creative and provided care via technology
- More than a half (56.3%) believe the current health crisis is refreshing the role grandparents play in childcare

Interactions with communication platforms:

- The majority (85.5%) of seniors find the quality of personal interaction with other people these days by phone calls as either good or very good
- More than half find the quality of online chat services such as WhatsApp and Messenger (53.4%) and video messaging service such as FaceTime (53.3%) as good or very good

Personal Hygiene:

- The majority (80.6%) of seniors have spent more time washing their hands on a weekly basis compared to three months ago
- More than a third (35.1%) say they have spent more time cleaning
- On average, seniors spend 23 minutes washing their hands every day

For media enquiries, please contact:

Emma Miller
Senior Account Manager
Hill+Knowlton Strategies
m: 0405 761 339
e: emma.miller@hkstrategies.com

About *Connectivity in the Age of Covid-19* Report

The latest instalment of the Australian Seniors Series, *Connectivity in the Age of COVID-19*, explores the impacts the current health crisis has had on this demographic in a range of ways. From the effects of social isolation on mental and physical health, loneliness, increased use of technology, grandparenting and even those things that this cohort would like to see remain long after COVID-19 is a distant memory. This research challenges the assumptions some may have regarding seniors and their response to the pandemic.

The research was conducted between 16 April and 1 May 2020. The total sample size is 5,003 Australians aged 50 years and above. The sample has been weighted to the general Australian senior population.

About Australian Seniors

Australian Seniors launched in 1998 to meet the needs of the often ignored over 50s market. Since then, we've helped countless Australians protect the most important things in life – whether it's their family's future, valuable assets, or even their long-planned retirement.

We strive to be different through the diverse offering of our funeral insurance, home and contents insurance, landlords insurance, travel insurance and pet insurance products. By carefully selecting underwriters that share our vision of providing insurance that's simple, easy to understand, and affordable. That's why our policies have helped everyone from hard-working over 50s to self-funded retirees take control of the things that matter most.