

# Census 2021: Numbers that matter

A strategic compendium for Australia's for-purpose  
leaders, boards and philanthropists

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## **Acknowledgement of Country**

Perpetual acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which our company is located and where we conduct our business.

We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past and present. Perpetual is committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.

## **About Perpetual**

Perpetual's Philanthropy and Not-for-Profit team is one of Australia's largest advisory teams working with philanthropic individuals, families and for-purpose organisations, helping them have an impact with their giving, investments and communities. For not-for-profits we provide governance, investment management and spending policy advice. We work with philanthropists to develop their giving strategies, set up the most appropriate giving approach for their circumstances and help them assess, choose and support the organisations and causes that matter to them. We work to bring these two groups together and to support them with thought leadership and analysis that helps them achieve more for their communities.

## **About Seer Data & Analytics**

Seer Data & Analytics is a technology company turning data into action for people creating a better world. Our mission is to make data accessible, usable, and shareable for people of all skillsets. The Seer Data Platform hosts Open Data alongside customers' private data, data that's been shared, and Seer created machine learning data products. Our users are assisted in generating their own data assets via self-service data collection and ingestion tools, and in discovery of insights by our AI-assisted querying and Smart Insight features. We are bridging the data divide by democratising data access, data sharing, and storytelling so that people of all skillsets can engage in problem-solving to benefit society.

Published September 2022

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## How to read this paper

This paper is divided into seven core themes.

For each theme we have curated a series of data insights drawn largely (but not completely) from the 2021 Census and integrated and presented by our partners, Seer Data & Analytics. You can view all of these Census highlights on the [Seer Data platform](#).

For each theme, we've also asked experts from Perpetual and other social sector organisations to reflect on some of the big issues facing our communities.

This paper is designed to be both a snapshot and thought starter, a strategic compendium that helps philanthropists, not-for-profit leaders and board members ask and answer the big questions about how to make our society better for all.

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# Introduction

Every five years there's great excitement about what the latest Australian Census will say about our nation. It's invaluable information – as we hope you'll see from the data in this report put together with our partner, Seer Data & Analytics.

But the Census is only ever a partial picture. It is a snapshot in time that provides us with important data points; but insights can only be drawn when that is mixed with the experiences of people closely in touch with our communities.

That's why we must find ways to ensure that valuable data we gain from the Census is judged alongside lived experience. That our policy makers, our grant makers and our social leaders don't design solutions based on data alone. In this document you will find lots of usable data, but you'll also hear the voices of those working with our communities every day, under all kinds of difficulties.

The Census provides us with the data that fuels our questions. It is incumbent on us as social sector leaders to design the answers.

We can see that Australia is a nation with a population that is ageing, and the data suggests that as we age our mental health burdens grow. How do we invest to build a nation whose people age with joy and connection and dignity?

The Australian dream of owning a home continues to put an incredible financial burden on young families. How do we tackle housing affordability and keep that dream within reach of all?

Today, women are carrying greater levels of responsibility for unpaid caring and domestic duties while our gender scorecard goes backwards. How do we chase a more equal society for women and girls?

These are just some of the challenges the Census puts to us. We must rise to meet the challenges of our times. We feel positive about the sector stepping up to that challenge because we have more tools to use – like the data in this report. And we have the insight and judgement and sheer hard work of people like the civil society leaders who've contributed to this paper.

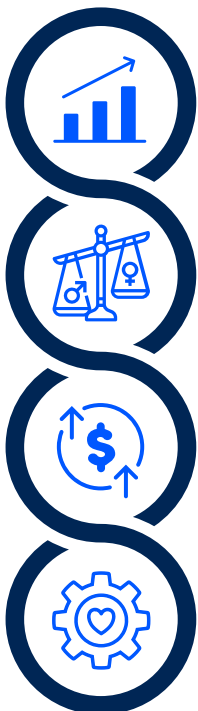
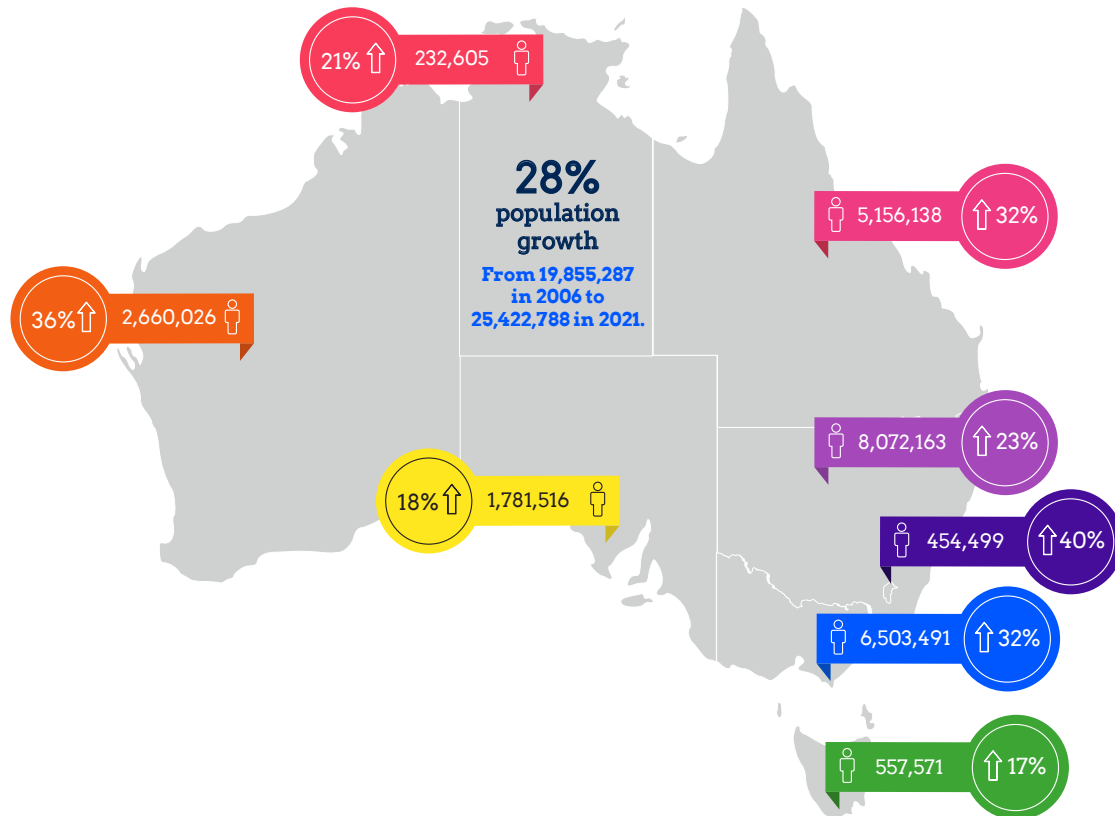
They give us hope.

**Caitriona Fay, Managing Partner, Community and Social Investment, Perpetual Private**

**Jane Magor, National Manager, Philanthropy & Non Profit Services, Perpetual Private**

# Australia in snapshot

## Population growth by State 2006 - 2021.



### Ageing population

The retirement age population (aged 65+ years) has grown by 65.56% from 2,644,369 in 2006 to 4,378,092 in 2021. Between the 2016 and 2021 Census counts, the retirement age population increased from 15.71% of the total population to 17.22% of the total population in 2021.

### Income and gender pay gap

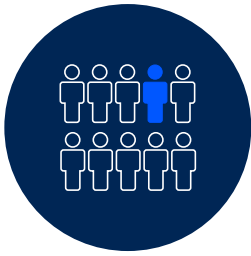
The number of households reporting Total Household Income above \$4,000 per week more than doubled (increased 103.35%) from 566,811 households in 2016 to 1,152,627 households in 2021. Men are significantly more represented in all personal weekly income brackets above \$1,000 per week. For the highest income bracket of \$3,500 or more 73% are men and only 27% are women.

### Increasing living costs

The number of mortgages with monthly repayments greater than \$5,000 increased 60.92% from 81,947 in 2016 to 131,873 in 2021. In the 12 months since the 2021 Census, all 5 household types reflected in the ABS Living Cost Indexes have risen by between 4.6% and 5.2%. Age pensioner households had the highest annual increase with the rising cost of Transport the main contributor from Jun Qtr 2021 to Jun Qtr 2022.

### Relationship status

- The number of people never married increased 43.66% from 5,278,608 in 2006 to 7,583,392 in 2021.
- The number of people divorced increased 40.17% from 1,306,915 in 2006 to 1,831,952 in 2021.
- The number of people in de facto marriages increased 74.47% from 1,242,792 in 2006 to 2,168,347 in 2021.
- LGBTQI+ communities were not reflected in relationship status despite advocacy and campaigning.
- The number of same-sex couples in Australia increased 67.68% from 46,770 in 2016 to 78,425 in 2021.



### More than 1 in 10

More than 1 in 10 Australians between the age of 15 and 54 reported suffering a long term mental health condition (including depression or anxiety).



### More than 1 in 5

More than 1 in 5 females between the age of 15 and 44 report suffering from one or more long-term health conditions.



### 12.6%

Around one in eight (12.6%) Baby Boomers are providing care for other peoples' children, often their grandchildren. Two thirds are female (67.5%). They are also the generation most likely to volunteer and provide unpaid assistance to others.



### 25.5 million people

The 2021 Census counted nearly 25.5 million people in Australia, excluding overseas visitors, on Census night – an increase of over two million people or 8.6%, since the 2016 Census.



### Not seen

LGBTQI+ communities were not reflected in 'relationship status' despite advocacy and campaigning.

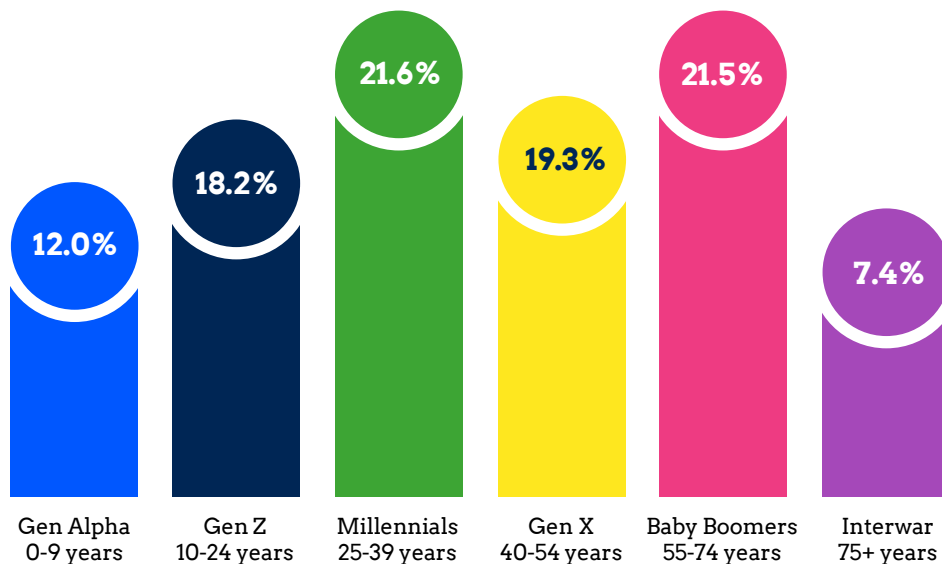


### 25% increase

The population who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander increased by 25% from 2016 to 812,000 people in 2021.

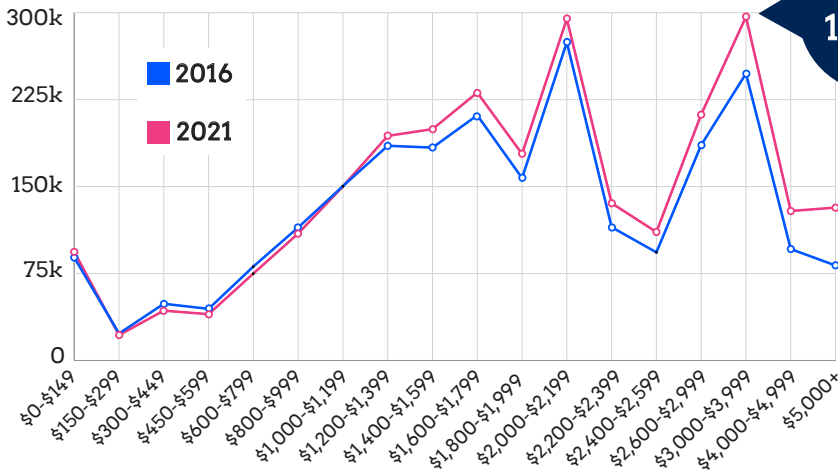
## Generations of Australians

### 2021 generational population composition



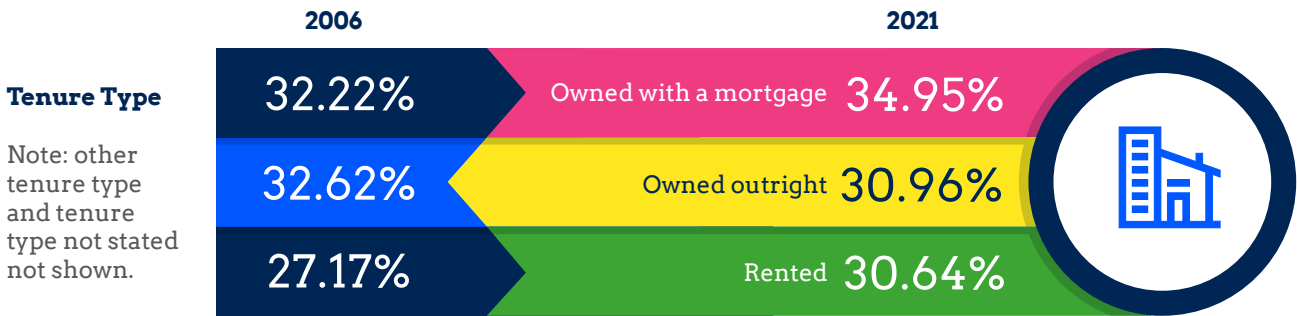
# 1: Population and prosperity

## Mortgage repayments monthly

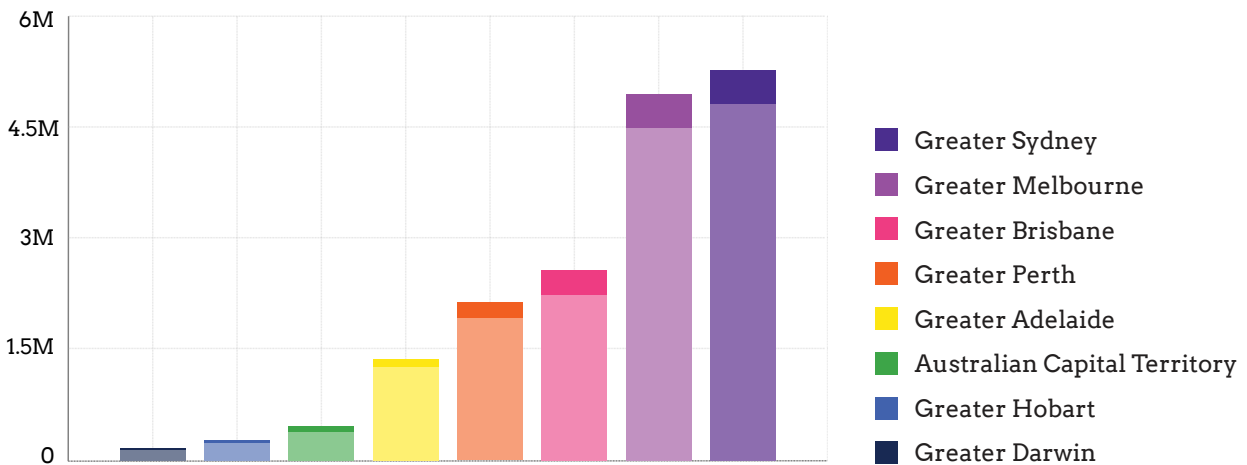


The number of mortgages with monthly repayments between \$3,000 and \$3,999 increased nearly 20% between 2016 and 2021, while those greater than \$5,000 increased over 60%

## Accommodation status



## Population growth 2016-2021



### 20.7% Increase in Capital City population

People living in Australian Capital Cities increased by 2.9 million (20.7%) between 2011 and 2021.



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## 1: A safe place to call home – Marion Bennett, Mission Australia

On Census night 2016, over 116,000 people were experiencing homelessness and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has indicated this is likely to be an underestimate. With the 2021 Census homelessness numbers yet to be released it will be telling to see the updated figures.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, most of us were fortunate enough to have somewhere safe and secure to shelter. But our research at Mission Australia shows that during this time one in 20 young people experienced homelessness for the first time in their lives.

The longer-term effects of COVID-19 on youth homelessness will take time to play out. But our report [Without a home: First-time youth homelessness in the COVID-19 period](#), offers some valuable insights into the risk factors. Of those experiencing first-time homelessness:

- More than one-quarter (28.0%) were personally concerned about family violence, compared to 11% of those who were not first-time homeless
- Almost half (49.3%) were personally concerned about family conflict, compared to just 17% of those who were not first-time homeless.
- More than half (55.5%) experienced high psychological distress – double those who were not first time homeless.

Early intervention and prevention responses need to be prioritised to address these issues. Responses need to be comprehensive and integrated because research tells us that if we don't address the risk factors that drive first-time homelessness, they become entrenched – with terrible consequences for the individual and our society.

We know that early support and stable housing can radically change the life trajectory of young people. Doing so will ensure that young people are adequately supported to avoid homelessness and reach their full potential.

I have seen lives turned around and transformed by our services. Our specialists can identify the risks of homelessness, offer support and work with young people and their families (when it's safe to do so) in a holistic way.

Another area of concern that has come to light during the COVID-19 pandemic is the increase in mental health issues. This increase – alongside the distressing number of one in 10 Australians reporting they suffer long-term mental health conditions – highlights the need to increase access to mental health services, and improve mental health screening and support offered through schools and workplaces.

We must listen to the voices of young people so that the negative impacts of the pandemic don't cause ongoing problems for a generation that has already gone through so much.

Marion Bennett is Executive – Practice, Evidence & Impact at Mission Australia. Mission Australia is a national Christian charity which delivers homelessness crisis and prevention services, provides social and affordable housing, assists struggling families, addresses mental health issues, fights substance dependencies and supports people with disability.

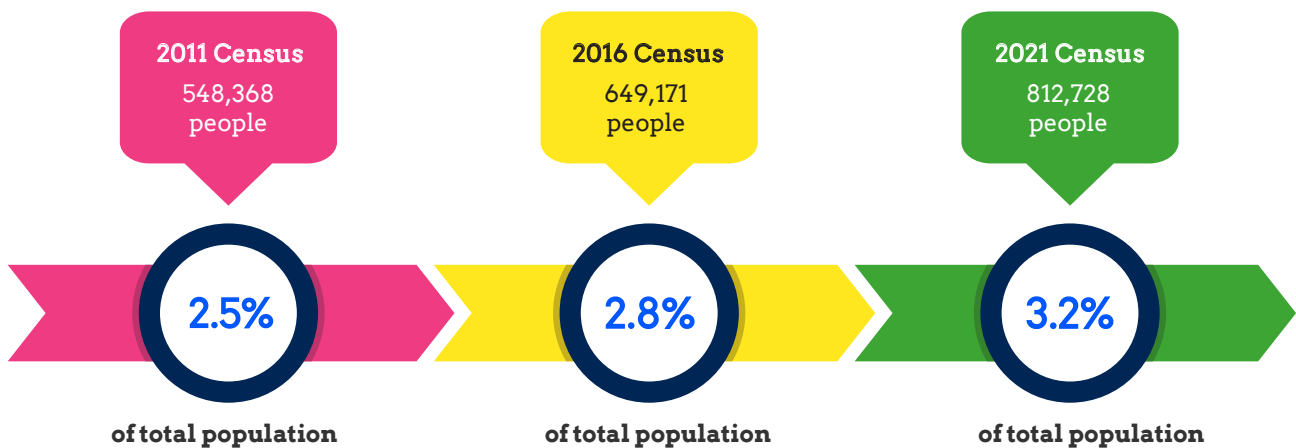
## 2: First Nations



### 25% increase

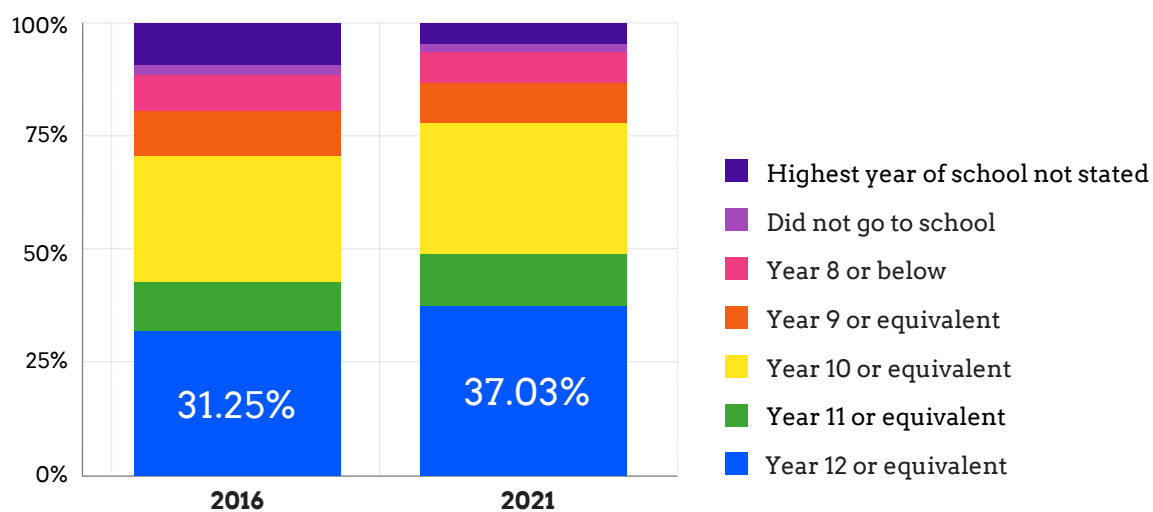
The population who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander increased by 25% from 2016 to 2021.

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples population count



**Footnote:** Indigenous status is collected through self-identification and any change in how a person chooses to identify affects the count of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Census.

### Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population who report completing Year 12 and below.



Amongst **non-Indigenous** Australians, Year 12 completion rose from nearly 58% in 2016 to 62% in 2021.

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## 2: Time to tick yes – Sharna Meinertz, Perpetual

In 1967, Prime Minister Harold Holt called a referendum to make two small, but incredibly significant changes to the wording of the Australian Constitution. Firstly, to remove the words “other than the Aboriginal race in any state” and secondly, to delete Section 127 of the Constitution, which stated that “Aborigines not to be counted in reckoning population”. The referendum was overwhelmingly supported by the Australian public, with a 91% Yes vote, enabling these changes to occur.

In 1971 the Census became the first to officially recognise Aboriginal people as part of the population of Australia.

The 2021 Census marked the 50th anniversary since the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been included in this population count. Once again, the release of this data takes place in the shadow of another significant referendum which will ask Australians to consider constitutional change for the further recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

As is for all Australians, the Census is a blunt tool of statistics and lacks a more detailed look at who the First Nations people are.

The 1971 Census listed 115,953 Aboriginal people representing 0.9% of the Australian population. On Census night 2021, this lifted to more than 812,000 people or 3.2% of the total population.

The raw data does not address the differences in the last 50 years; namely the increased willingness to participate in the Census, the value of anonymity to feel safe enough to disclose and acknowledge one’s identity and many from the Stolen generation feeling ready to make a connection back to community.

The 2021 Census does tell a story of improved outcomes over time for the First Nations people. [The National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) utilises this data to improve how governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Soon, all Australians will once again be asked to consider constitutional changes, this time to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a greater voice to Parliament.

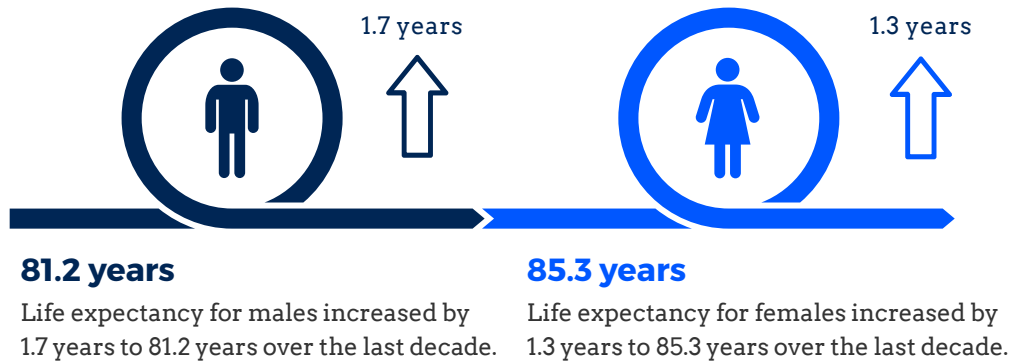
As leaders, I urge you to demonstrate your support of this defining moment in our history. Through words and actions, actively lift First Nations voices in your workplace. Provide a welcoming seat at the table – don’t just tick a box, listen.

The Census may provide the data, however we ask you to engage with the stories, to hear our voices, to see the work carried out by our communities and in our communities, to witness the strength of our determination. Trust in our voice that we can help design a better future for ourselves, for our children, and for all Australians.

Sharna Meinertz is a Senior Financial Adviser at Perpetual and a Yued Whadjuk Noongar woman. Sharna specialises in working with mission-driven clients, in particular philanthropists, not-for-profit organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. She is Chair of Perpetual’s Reconciliation Action Plan working group.

# 3: Age in Australia

## Life expectancy increase by sex - 10 years to 2020



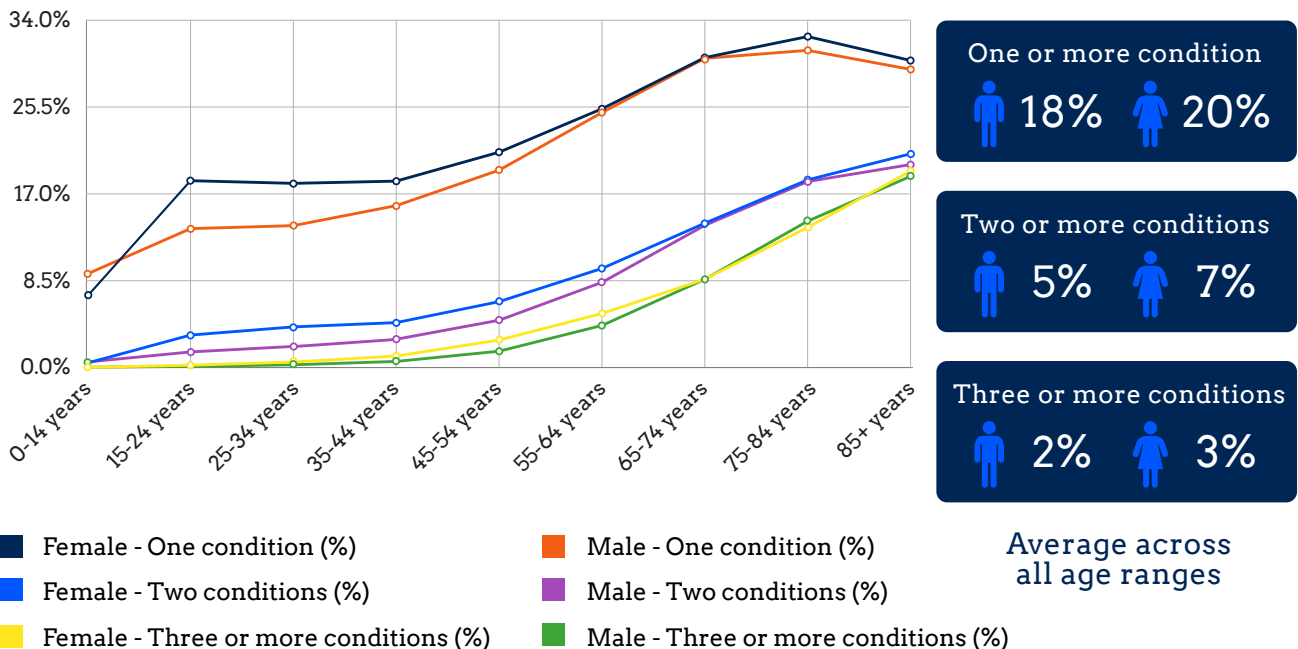
Source: ABS Statistics

## Long term health conditions by age and condition



### More than 1 in 5

More than 1 in 5 Australians over the age of 65 reported suffering two or more long term health conditions in the 2021 Census.



### Increased need for assistance

38.72% of males and 51.56% of females aged 85+ years had a core activity need for assistance in 2006, compared with 42.42% and 53.43% respectively in 2021.

### 3: A view from above – Tobias Dawson, Illawarra Retirement Trust (IRT)

#### **You're viewing images from a drone flying above ageing Australia. What do you see?**

Some good things. Life expectancy increasing into the mid 80s. Older Australians are far healthier, more active and engaged than before. A clearer view of real human needs. That the guy down the street we used to call a "grumpy old man" is actually a lonely man struggling with depression and anxiety.

But what you'd also see, everywhere, are gaps.

Today, there are over 20,000 homeless Australians aged 55 or over<sup>1</sup> and women are massively over-represented within this population. Woman or man, aged homelessness is a tragedy. Most people in that population die within five years.

From above we can see that aged care service provision is incredibly complex – there are a range of support options and multiple providers, but that complexity creates equity of access barriers that affect anyone struggling with mental or physical health, poor education, literacy or digital access.

Within residential aged care we see familiar hurdles blocking available support. Many residents need a referral to access services – but we can't get doctors into centres and there's a major shortage of mental health professionals with experience. The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety painted a picture that the care home sector is not an attractive place to live – or work. Low pay and competition from other sectors are just two of the reasons there are 22,000 job vacancies in the sector. A problem compounded by the halving of the volunteer workforce since 2016.

We're seeing more people ageing at home, a good idea for many, *if* they are supported by a network of social services – doctors, nurses, occupational therapists – and even more importantly, if we can find ways to keep them connected to their community.

What does this all mean? That we need investment in system-agnostic service delivery that ensures an ever more diverse and complex ageing population get what they need from a range of high quality, expert service delivery agencies. That these agencies seamlessly intersect in sharing data, ideas – and care. We need lots of different service models that have one thing in common – they're focused on the person. Because that person is my mother or father – and your mother and father. And one day it will be me. And you.

That's why we need increased philanthropic investment in this sector and research joined-up with government policy. So we can all have an old and happy life rich with connections and purpose.

Tobias Dawson was Head of Strategic Partnerships at Illawarra Retirement Trust, one of Australia's largest community-owned providers of independent living, aged care and home care. Today he is a partner in a social impact consultancy, Tomorrow Together, that helps businesses maximise their social impact.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/census-population-and-housing-estimating-homelessness/latest-release>

# 4: Women and girls



Of 6.73million families recorded in the 2021 Census data, over one million are single-parent families. In four out of five of those families, the parent is the mother.



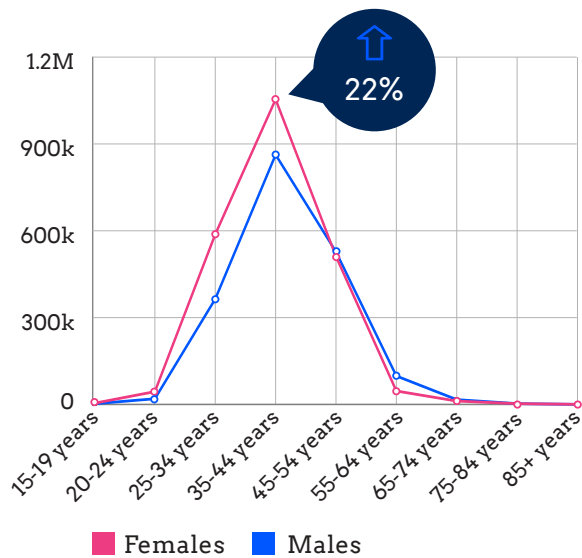
The percentage of females who have completed school year 12 or equivalent increased from 54.94% in 2016 to 60.35% in 2021.



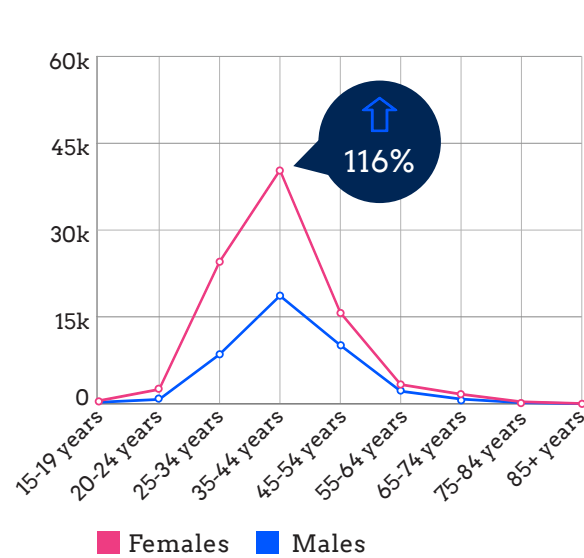
Females continue to report caring for their own and other children at higher numbers than males across all age ranges.

## Unpaid childcare by age range and sex

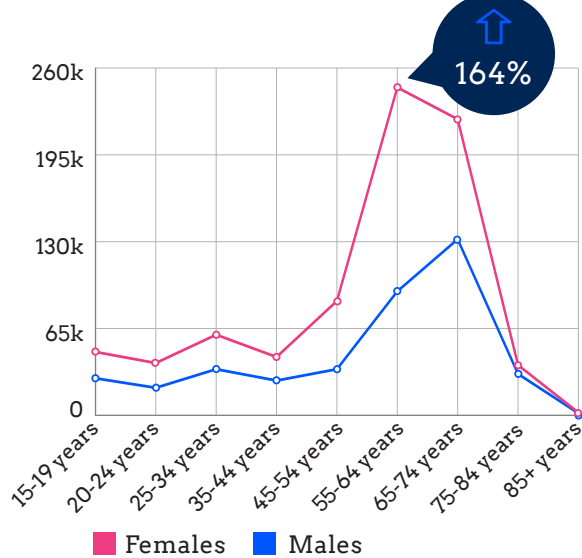
### Own child/children only



### Own child/children only and other child/children



### Other child/children only



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## 4: Harsh human realities – Julie Reilly, Australians Investing In Women

The latest Census data highlights the economic and social disadvantage affecting women at different life stages. These are not new issues and the statistics are telling. For many women, living through COVID-19 was just another harsh reminder of inequities in our economic participation – and in our homes.

Today, more girls complete secondary and tertiary education. But the gender pay gap persists, in part reflecting our gender-segregated labour markets. Women dominate in part-time, lower-paid occupations, particularly in the care economy. That's one reason the burden of COVID-19 fell so heavily on them.

The number of single parent families is growing – and women make up 80% of those one million single parent families. Yet again more of the caring and financial burden falls on women. At the same time, we're seeing a fall in the number of people over 55 looking after children not their own (e.g. grandchildren). That's reversing a previous upward trend and can be attributed to COVID-19 restrictions. However, there's no guarantee that grandparent support will come back. In the minds of many, the COVID-19 threat continues. Older Australians may simply fall out of the habit of helping (we're seeing that in volunteering). This is something we need to watch.

Women continue to do more unpaid housework than men and this remains proportionately higher despite an increase in men's unpaid housework during COVID-19.

### **The homelessness issue**

Older single women continue to be the fastest growing homeless population<sup>2</sup> with women calling on specialist homeless services in higher numbers than men.

Why? Because of our gender-segregated workforce, the associated gender pay gap, overrepresentation in lower paid caring roles, part-time work and time out of the workforce due to disproportionate caring responsibilities. All these factors compound to push down women's earnings – and their super balances – and increase the risk of aged poverty.

As we see too often in our newspapers, domestic and family violence remains a constant threat for women and women with children and drives the search for both crisis and long-term housing assistance.

### **What does this mean for giving?**

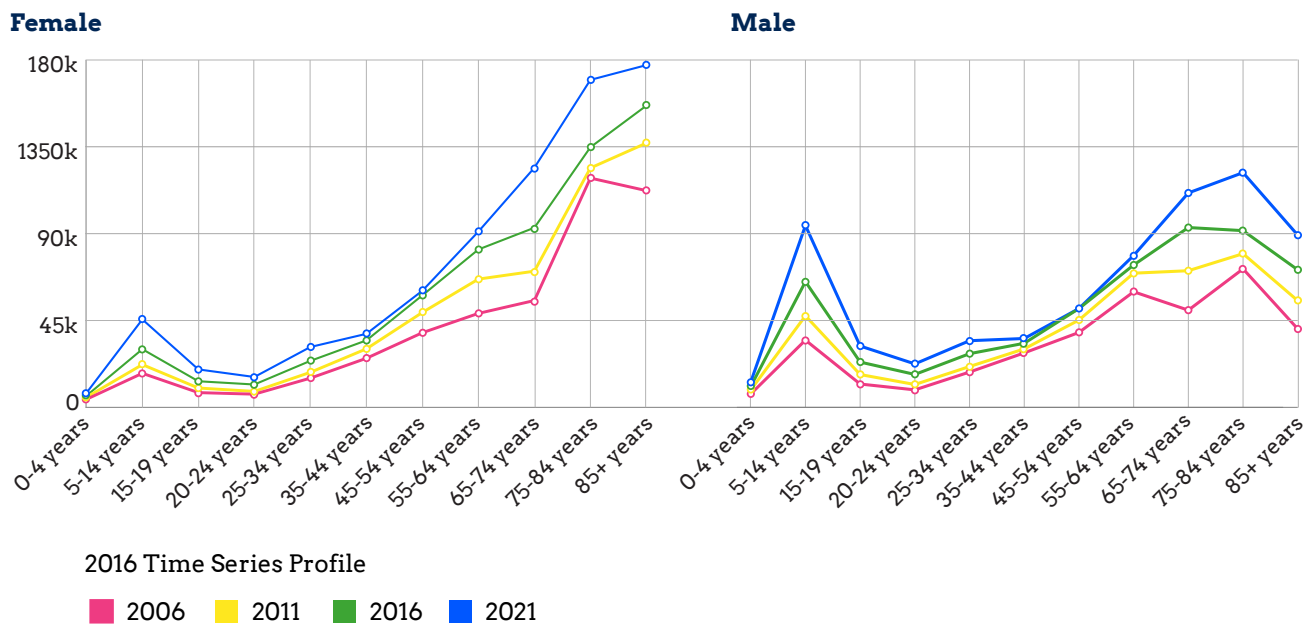
To help our society deal with these harsh, sometimes tragic human realities, philanthropists, policy-makers and not-for-profit program designers must use a gender lens in their giving strategies and in the design of social initiatives. It's crucial to building equity and inclusion for women and girls. Australian Investing in Women's gender-wise resources are available to download and utilise <https://www.aiiw.org.au/gender-wise/>

Julie Reilly is the CEO of Australians Investing In Women, a not-for-profit that advocates for gender-wise philanthropy and investing in women and girls.

<sup>2</sup> With Census 2021 homelessness data not yet released at the time of writing, access to Specialist Housing Services, Census 2016 data, and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data have been referenced.

# 5: Health, disability and wellbeing

Graph 1: Core activity need for assistance



## 170% increase

The population of males aged 5-14 years with a core activity need for assistance has increased 170% from 2006 to 2021.

**5.78%** of males aged 5-14 years had a core activity need for assistance in 2021, compared with 2.53% in 2006.



## 158% increase

The number of females aged 5-14 years with a core activity need for assistance has increased 158% from 2006 to 2021.

**2.95%** of females aged 5-14 years had a core activity need for assistance in 2021, compared with 1.35% in 2006.

\*Core activities are those essential to everyday living: self-care, mobility and communication.



## 5: Seeing past the NDIS – Terry Symonds, Yooralla

The great benefit of data is that it helps you take a wider view.

- One in five Australians live with some form of disability according to Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) numbers
- There's a smaller but still sizeable group who need some help with daily living
- There's those eligible for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), 500,000 people today and perhaps 600,000 in the next year

The story of disability in Australia is not the story of the NDIS, though the Scheme dominates debate. I've spoken to philanthropists and funders who effectively ask, "Isn't the NDIS covering that?" The data reminds us that the vast majority of people with disability who need help and access to resources and providers aren't in the NDIS. But if they don't get the help and support they need, they will end up in the Scheme and that in turn will affect its cost, reach and effectiveness.

### **Age and Disability**

When I survey the disability field, I see a series of strange patterns. Today, the fastest growing cohort entering the NDIS is children. Approximately 1 in 10 boys aged 5-11 are in the NDIS with an autism diagnosis, or related behaviours. The State education systems may be well placed to help these kids, but due to lack of resourcing and appropriate policy design they can't or don't.

To take another example, our policy solutions have irrational age cut-offs. If you're under 65 and have a disability – you're in the NDIS. Yet if you're 65 and over, you're in the Aged Care system dealing with different funding arrangements, different regulations and providers. We have a Disability Scheme focused on younger people, yet we know that age is the key driver of disability. Our vision needs to be broader. To ask: "Do you need help?" rather than, "Which policy basket do you fit into?"

### **Force us to ask the right questions**

Philanthropists and funders play a very specific and valuable role here. They help us span boundaries and reach communities that fall between the cracks in government policy and eligibility criteria. Governments appreciate this. They know there's a patchwork of responsibilities and agencies – State and Federal, Health, Aged Care, the NDIS and more – and that purposeful philanthropy can extend to hard to reach communities. Just as importantly, we've found that philanthropists push us to make better policy – to drive an approach based on who we serve rather than what is funded.

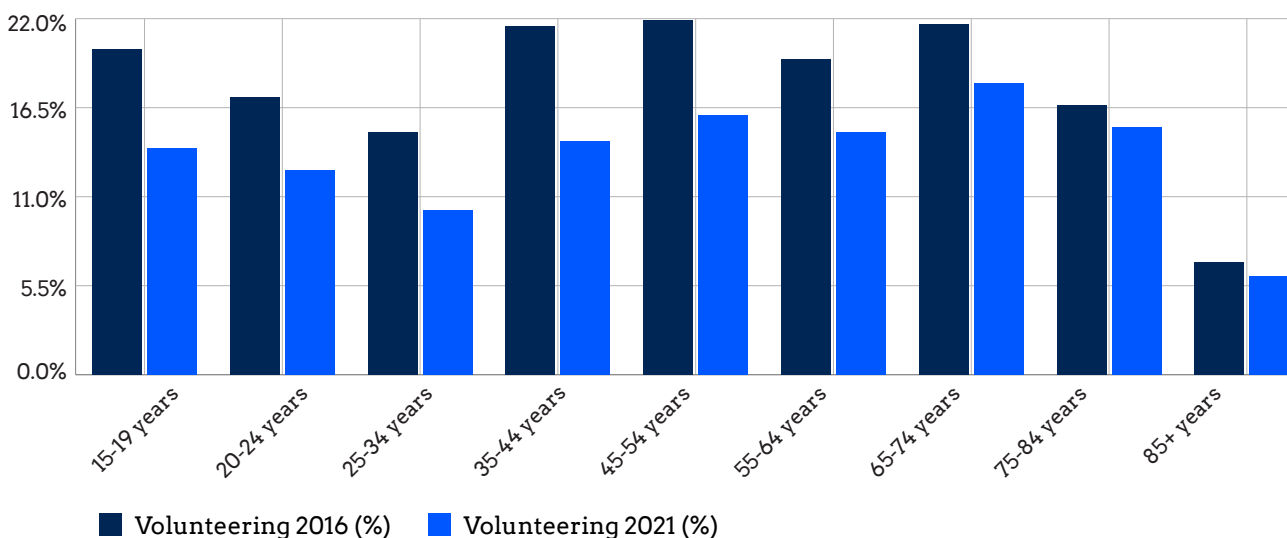
Terry Symonds is CEO of Yooralla, a not-for-profit with a 100-year history of working with people with disability. Yooralla's services include accommodation alternatives, in-home support, therapy, attendant care, assistive technologies, employment, education, recreation, training and practical skills for daily living.

# 6: Volunteering

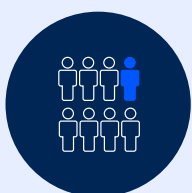


## 26% decrease

The volunteering rate in Australia has decreased 26% from 19% in 2016 to 14.1% in 2021.



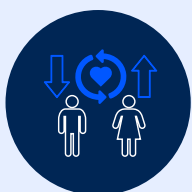
From 2016 to 2021, rates of volunteering have fallen across all age ranges, most significantly among people aged 35-44 years. The rate of volunteering in that group has fallen from around 21% in 2016 to 14% in 2021.



## 1 in 8

Around one in eight (12.6%) Baby Boomers report caring for other peoples' children – especially grandchildren. Of these, two thirds are female. They are also the generation most likely to volunteer and provide unpaid assistance to others.

Source: ABS Statistics



Females volunteer at a higher rate than males in every age group under 75 years of age. The difference between female and male volunteering rates peaks in the 35-44 years age range, with females volunteering at a rate of 16.6% in 2021 and males at a rate of 12.2%.

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## 6: Not putting their hands up – Lindsay Dawson, Perpetual

Volunteering is a glue that binds our society together. Volunteers are crucial to charities and the social sector – according to Australia giving trends, 60% of charity workers say their organisation relies on volunteers. We know they play an important role in education and policy in professional bodies, that they're the bedrock of community sport, constantly there for fundraising and extracurricular activities at schools.

Unfortunately, volunteering rates have decreased from 19.0% in 2016 to 14.1% in 2021 – that's a decline of 26%. And that decline occurs across all age ranges – a huge concern for the community sector and anyone who cares about how our society breathes.

### **Why the fall?**

Financial stress is a factor. According to the Census, the number of mortgages with payments exceeding \$5,000 a month increased 60% since 2016. Pressures on the home balance sheet mean more people are working full-time however research tells us that it is women working part-time who do a vast amount of volunteering.

Rates of volunteering have fallen most significantly in the 35-54 age range. These are the people most likely to volunteer but they're also the "sandwich generation," responsible for their children and caring for their ageing parents. Because people have children later in life – and our parents live longer – the sandwich generation sees the demands on their time both increased and extended.

### **Why people volunteer**

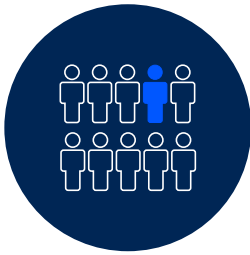
COVID-19 has obviously played a role here. With most sport and extracurricular activities cancelled over the past two years, are volunteers still anxious about the impact of COVID-19? Or have we lost that sense of community and fallen out of the good habit – and it is a habit – of giving up our time to share our unpaid 'work' with and for others?

I volunteer at Bondi Icebergs Club, manage my boys' rugby team and supervise 18 kids on the weekend at Nippers. It's a fantastic part of my life but in 2022 it's a constant struggle to find volunteers to help. So what can be done?

First we need to remember – and celebrate – how crucial volunteers are in everything from sport to the arts to life-saving and life-altering social services. We need to help people move sensibly past the fear of COVID-19. As we re-open up our communities in a post COVID-19 world we need to remind people that governments can't do everything and that being part of your community through volunteering is what makes our society better. Whether you're a not-for-profit, philanthropist or a government agency, helping to revive our volunteer culture should be part of your mission.

Lindsay Dawson is Philanthropy Research & Insights Manager at Perpetual. She oversees \$120 million in annual distributions from Perpetual clients back into the sector. Lindsay is the Perpetual Philanthropy team's data and insights expert and drives outcomes for clients utilising data to help them make better decisions.

# 7: Mental health



## More than 1 in 10

More than 1 in 10 Australians between the age of 15 and 54 reported suffering a long term mental health condition (including depression or anxiety).



## More than 1 in 5

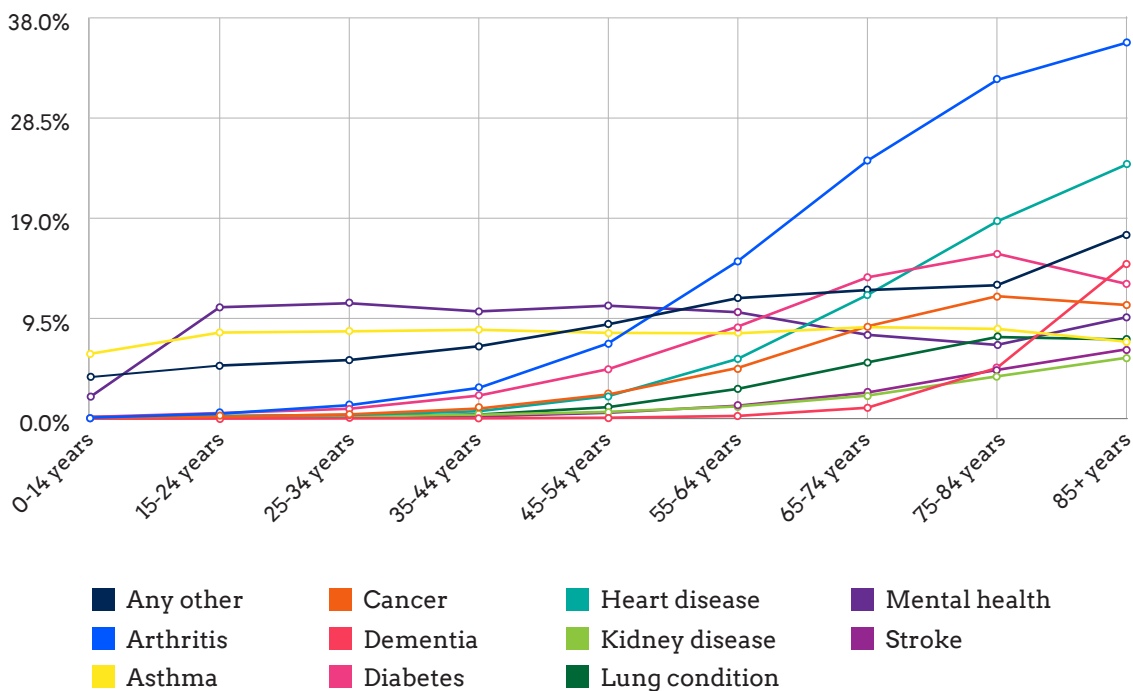
More than 1 in 5 females between the age of 15 and 44 report suffering from one or more long-term health conditions.



### There are significant differences in the prevalence of long-term mental health conditions between states and regions.

- New South Wales and Victoria exhibit higher rates of long-term mental health conditions in the regions.
- Tasmania has among the highest rates of long-term mental health conditions in Australia in both metro and regional areas.
- All areas exhibit higher rates of long-term mental health conditions among females, particularly aged 15-54 years.
- All areas exhibit higher rates of long-term mental health conditions among females aged 85+ years compared with females aged 75-84 years.

## Long-term health conditions by age



## 7: Too much to lose – Rob Goudswaard, Orygen

“Life, to be sure, is nothing much to lose,  
But young men think it is, and we were young.” A. E. Housman

Read World War One poems and what you hear is a stark cry about what we lose when we lose the young – their lost gifts, their lost contribution and creations.

At Orygen, that’s what we feel when we consider the toll mental illness takes upon our young. The ABS’ national survey of [Mental Health & Wellbeing](#) released in July says nearly 40% of people aged 16 to 25 had a mental illness in the previous 12 months. This alarming figure echoes the numbers we’ve seen in the Census.

Untreated, or left too late, mental illness can last years – or decades – and lead to physical illness too. People with mental illness are 30% less likely to finish high school, so much more likely to be unemployed and on welfare.

### **A flood tide of tied funding**

How are we as a society dealing with this crisis? We’ve seen important increases in Government funding for treatment. At Orygen we’ve put some of that money to work in our communities where we combine leading-edge research with a clinical service that helps over 6,000 people aged 12-25 each year.

Our sector has also seen an increase in donations from individuals and corporates funding specific youth mental health research or services. This is good news. But it’s not good enough.

What we need to start winning the war against youth mental illness is less tied funding and more flexible funding so we can target it intelligently where it will have the most impact. Right now, Government funding typically covers only 60% of our research cost. So we’re searching for the other 40% – or scaling back research in a way that slows our path to important answers.

Our own experience shows the power of untied funding. Our Chief of Research, Eóin Killackey, did early career research funded by a repeating donation from Australian Rotary Health. With it he helped design a program focusing on returning mentally ill youth to school and work. His research led to the Headspace Individual Placement and Support program now used by thousands of people every year.

A life on welfare costs the taxpayer about \$500,000 per person<sup>3</sup> (and that’s before we count lost production and tax income). So the economic value created by the right research is staggering. And that’s before you consider what society gains from young Australians who get to reach their potential.

What we need, from government and philanthropists, are funds we can use to help our youth. And trust that we can find a better way to do it.

Rob Goudswaard is on the board of Orygen and the Chair of Orygen Foundation. The Orygen Specialist Program provides specialist mental health services for people aged 15 to 25 in west and north-western Melbourne. It runs the Orygen Research Centre and delivers acute care, ongoing care and support for health professionals.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dss.gov.au/review-of-australias-welfare-system-australian-priority-investment-approach-to-welfare/2018-valuation-report>

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# Words and numbers

We'd like to thank the people and organisations that lent their time and thinking to this paper. They've helped add a layer of insight to some of the stark statistics that remind us how much we have to do to make our society a better and safer one.

We hope this compendium of data and ideas helps philanthropists and for-purpose leaders think strategically about the sectors they work in and helps them direct energy, money, people and resources at the right parts of society's problems.

At Perpetual we're privileged to work at the meeting point of so many social sector stakeholders – we work with not-for-profits, with government, with philanthropists and with partners like Seer Data & Analytics – and we see and acknowledge their efforts.

We'd like to help where we can. So if a fact, figure or idea in this paper drives you towards action, reach out to Perpetual and we'll see how we can help. Perpetual's Philanthropy and Not-for-Profit team is one of Australia's largest advisory teams working with philanthropic individuals, families and for-purpose organisations, helping them have an impact in their giving, investment and communities.

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