

# What do people of different ages think about getting older?

ATTITUDES TO AGEING SURVEY





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## ATTITUDES TO AGEING SURVEY COTA TASMANIA

### Summary

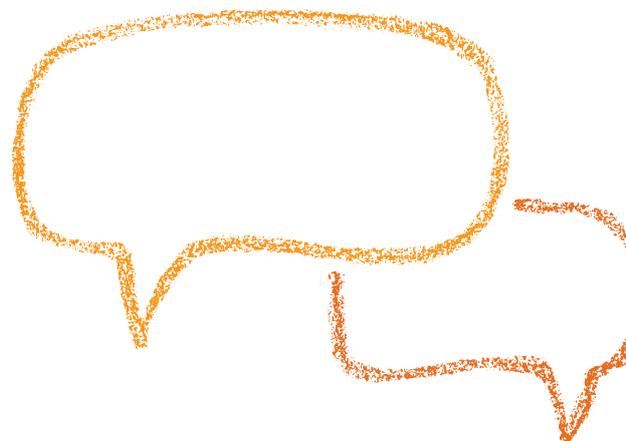
The Attitudes to Ageing Survey was conducted by COTA Tasmania over the latter half of 2020. The survey was designed to increase understanding of what Tasmanians of different ages think about ageing.

Most respondents had mixed views overall about getting older — many people could see both positive and negative aspects of ageing.

In terms of negative perceptions, most of the responses focused on the health side of getting older and decline of faculties, whether physical or mental. Even if they could see some benefits to getting older, many people felt that getting older, or the thought of getting older, was scary or anxiety provoking.

There were also several very positive views of ageing with certain participants acknowledging there are actions individuals can take to make ageing easier or more fulfilling: preventative health and staying involved in social, creative and community activities were seen as important. Many respondents commented that being or feeling old is a mindset and societally imposed.

Perceptions of ageing could be less favourable if the respondents themselves, or their family and friends, were experiencing difficulties such as illness, hard economic circumstances, or lack of support.



# Survey demographics

## Total survey respondents

A total of 224 people responded — 180 online (including three from outside Tasmania) and 44 in writing. Within Tasmania, responses came from 62 postcodes across the state, with the strongest representation from 7307 in the northwest, and 10 or more responses each from 7000 (Hobart), 7018 (Greater Hobart), 7250 (Greater Launceston), 7310 (northwest) and 7330 (northwest). For more details see the table of postcodes in the Appendix.

## Age ranges

Age range	No. of respondents
Under 29	11
30-49	39
50-69	108
70+	65
Unstated	1

The weight of responses in the survey came from the 50-69 age category (50 responses from 50-59, 58 responses from 60-69). This meant the survey provided more information from people who had reached an age at which the commonly assumed “effects of ageing” (whether anticipated or experienced) were possibly starting to be of more personal interest.

## Gender breakdown

Gender	No. of respondents
Female	177
Male	43
Other/Non-specified	4

## Regions

Region	Approximate percentage
North and Northeast	20%
South	47%
Northwest and West	33%

(Further regional information can be found in appendix)

# Specific responses

## At what age do you think someone becomes “old”?

While many respondents gave an exact number, about a third of responses (68) did not list an age or gave a wide range. Most respondents in this category gave some thoughts about age as a “mindset” or “attitude” rather than a number:

*“Never. It is just a number and society determines when we are ‘old’ or ‘frail’ by what we can or can’t do, and what we look like.”*

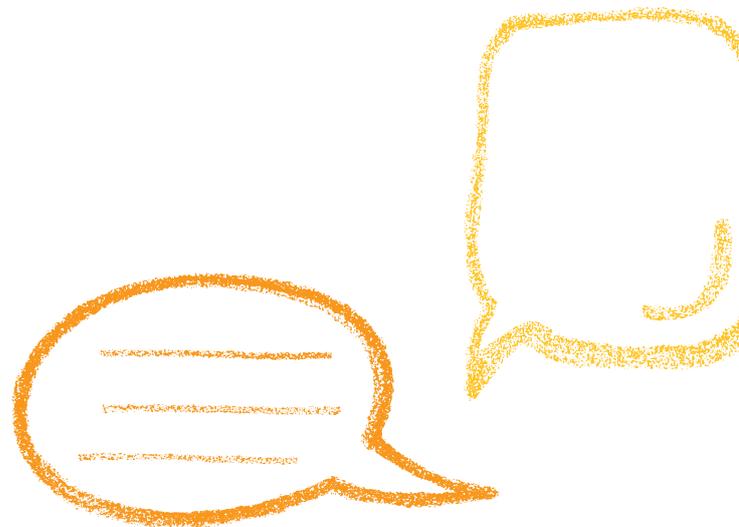
*“Varies from person to person. Attitude dependent to some degree”*

*“Any age - it’s your attitude to ageing”*

When respondents did give an exact number, this too varied. Surprisingly, this question’s responses did not change much with the respondent’s age: we received a mix of responses right across the different age brackets.

Interestingly, the two respondents who thought people became old at ages under 50 were themselves already older than those ages.

Age at which you think someone becomes old?	Number of responses
Under 50	2
50-59	10
60-69	16
70-79	49
80	52
90+	12
Non-specific age	68



## What do you like about your current age?

- » Younger people valued having time to learn, physical capability and ability, as well as having more freedom to socialise, especially those who had just finished school.
- » People in the mid-age ranges tended to value the emotional maturity, greater understanding, and relatively good health.
- » Older people typically liked having wisdom from experience, time away from work, and the feeling of being more self-assured and having less societal pressure or expectations.

Something that was valued in both the older and younger age ranges was a sense of “freedom”. Whilst this may mean different things for these different age groups it was interesting that this occurs at multiple stages:

- » Young people are coming to an age where they may have more freedom from school and family expectations and be able to access more socialisation opportunities. A greater sense of independence and control over what they do with their time after childhood or adolescence is likely to be at the centre of these feelings.
- » In the case of older people, the notion of freedom is similarly centred on having time to do things that are important to them. People around this age may be retired or have children who are now adults, freeing them up from some of the responsibilities of middle age. Coming through this period into retirement may give many the sense that they have more time to focus on themselves.

## What do you dislike?

People under 30 and the younger age ranges disliked the instability of social, environmental, and economic pressures at the current time. People in this cohort said they disliked feeling pressure to make things work financially in times of uncertainty. They also disliked the fact that uncertainty and lack of control might be a feature of their lives long term.

Older people mostly had comments around health, particularly the decline of faculties, loss of mobility or aches and pain. “Not being able to do what I used to” was a very common response.

There were also quite a few responses about the appearance of getting older, particularly from those in the 40-60 age bracket. Greying hair, wrinkles and changing conceptions of appearance were among the things people did not like about ageing. This response is also perhaps more common in this specific survey sample, given the weight of responses coming from females over 50. With more societal pressure on the “looks” of women when younger, dealing with this change is perhaps an underrated consideration as people age.

This appearance and mobility focus reflects a tension about some of the responses in the previous questions; being old is a mindset, but changes to body — both in terms of perceived changes in appearance and in decline of faculty — can be difficult to overcome or unavoidable and are significant points of stress or anxiety.

Responses in this section support COTA Tasmania’s decision to focus on positive ageing, tackling ageism and supporting and building preventative health and activity opportunities and structures.

## How do you feel about getting older?

Answer	No. of responses
Positive	75
Mixed or Neutral	98
Negative	48

There were mixed responses to this question, with just under half of the responses outlining both positive and negative aspects to ageing or a middle of the road feeling:

*"I have some anxiety about this, particularly as I don't have children - worried I might be lonely. However, I am looking forward to being able to pursue my passions and interests, wholeheartedly without worrying what others think."*

**Female, 48**

*"It's not something I'm fighting - it's a natural part of life, but I do struggle with some aspects of it like feeling and seeing my body begin to age. I really struggle with seeing my parents (in their 70s) age. I sometimes feel wistful about leaving more youthful/carefree days, but overall I'm really happy where I am and optimistic about the future as I age."*

**Female, 37**

*"It's okay although I'm not looking forward to not being able to do the things my body can do now."*

**Female, 36**

Negative responses centred around issues such as disconnection from friends and family, declining capabilities, being seen to be past a "use by" date, or not being able to experience and do everything they would like to do in their lifespan. A sense of time "running out" could also be garnered from some of these responses:

*"Fearful, I'm not enjoying the process at all. I'm scared for my future, how I'll survive and dread potentially losing some independence. My world already seems to be getting smaller as I get older."*

**Female, 59**

A good number of responses outlined the positives of ageing or a determination to keep living life on their own terms, and experience new and fulfilling things:

*"It's inevitable but keeping well occupied, interested in family affairs, being supportive and encouraging and enjoying nature enables one to still feel useful."*

**Female, 79**

*"I am excited! Getting older just means living, and I want to keep living experiences, learning new things. Getting older means 'the future' and the future is exciting. I know I'll take care of me well enough that I won't age prematurely, so it's all good"*

**Gender non-specified, 28**

Some responses also acknowledged that getting older is also a privilege that not everyone gets to experience:

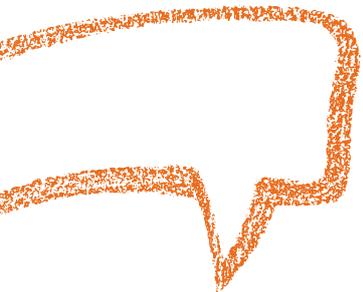
*“Being terminally ill — it feels unfair to be dying so young, I wish I could. I would love to grow old. Every year is a blessing ... I can’t stand that we as a society have this ridiculous horror of ageing. I felt that way before getting sick too. Growing old is wonderful! Ageing is wonderful. Every wrinkle and grey hair should be a sign of a life well lived.”*

**Female, 35**

Less peer or societal pressure was seen as another favourable aspect to getting older. Many people who were older themselves commented that they felt less pressure and could have time for their own interests or do what they liked, rather than having to conform to others’ expectations.

## Ageing is NOT an obstacle for a good life

Answer	No. of responses
False	19
True	205



# Online-only questions

Three extra questions were asked to online participants:

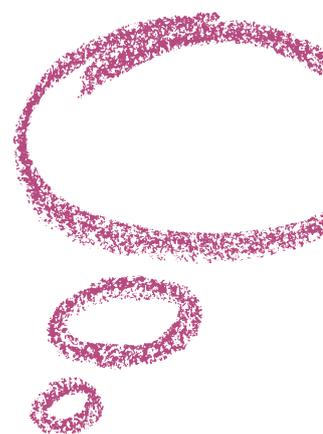
## Which age group do you feel most judged by?

Answer	No. of responses
I don't feel judged	45
Children	3
Teenagers	20
Young adults	49
Middle aged adults	26
Older adults	9
Unsure or blank	51

Young adults and teenagers were under-represented in the survey.

It is possible that a more even age distribution among respondents would have resulted in more people saying they felt judged by older age groups.

The results were fairly split across age groups, with people feeling most judged by young adults, and then middle-aged adults. About half the total responses didn't feel judged, were unsure or blank.



## What three words would you use to describe ...

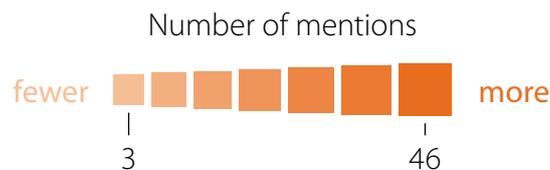
younger people?

fit healthy fresh enthusiastic life carefree lucky  
inexperienced self active free **young** lazy  
**energetic** busy vibrant impatient hopeful challenged  
naive engaging healthy innocent fit



older people?

confident happy relaxed considered calm resilient **older** wisdom  
**interesting** smart **experienced** knowledgeable  
**wise** settled **slow** kind **knowledgeable** caring tired  
conservative **content** patient



## Do you have any other comments about ageing?

Further comments tended to centre on a few main areas:

### Health

*"I'd like to think it's NOT an obstacle, but health is such a huge part of what I see as a good life and health seems to go downhill as we get older."*

**Female, 43**

*"Like everyone - I just want to age healthily. It's not about the 'number' but the quality of health that influences quality of life. None of us want to end up in an aged care facility with dementia! :("*

**Female, 40**

*"It's better if your health is good"*

**Female, 41**

*"Only worries are losing mobility and flexibility, also caring for disabled husband is restricting."*

**Female, 73**

### Ageism

*"Older people are such a valuable part of our community. They should be cherished and respected more than is currently the norm."*

**Female, 41**

*"I worry about the attitudes towards older workers. It seems that we don't actually value experience and maturity, despite the rhetoric."*

**Female, 42**

*"Society increasingly values people purely and primarily on the way they look while valuable contributions are largely ignored. There is so much pressure to not look your age; especially once you're over 45."*

**Female, 49**

*"I realise I can't find 3 words to describe either the young or old without using stereotypes!"*

**Female, 42**

*"I've always looked younger than I am so I get less respect than others at my age"*

**Female, 43**

*"Age discrimination in hiring practices is a real thing. Somewhere along the line I seem to have become too ugly and wrinkly for retail."*

**Female, 49**

*"Ageism is thriving, and maybe indicative of the fear and uncertainty these days. Every man for himself is alive and well, so an obvious physical sign (age) of presumed impairment can be cause for dismissal and being seen as being of no use/worth."*

**Female, 63**

## Comments about poor services or economic conditions for older people

*"More affordable rental accommodation is desperately needed, especially safe accommodation for single women such as myself."*

**Female, 65**

*"As a former aged care nurse I believe that age is no barrier to a good life, unfortunately we don't have the infrastructure and services available to ensure our older people can remain independent for as long as possible, especially in regional and rural areas, especially in terms of in home palliative care."*

**Female, 40**

*"I don't believe that any level of government is doing enough about issues faced by people getting older. Job security, employment options do seem to get harder as you get older, especially if you take a break from the workforce. They also are not doing enough to ensure that people who need help are able to receive it and then all the issues surrounding aged care and the lack of willingness to make much needed improvements to that sector."*

**Female, 44**

*"Yes at the moment in this current day and age now that i am recognized as a Senior citizen I find that now that I'm out of the work force after 40 years of being a Tax payer due to Government edicts and regulations for both state and federal I find myself with few assets, having to survive on a much reduced Robodebted disability pension thru no fault of my own and find I can't afford to live and can't afford to die either so I guess it's welcome to old age NOT."*

**Male, 64**

*"More home care for those that may need a little help"*

**Female, 69**

*"I am fortunate in that I own a home and have a good support system in place. I know this is not the case for many, especially women. How are we going to care for older women when there is so little recognition of the realities?"*

**Female, 52**



## Positive and Active Ageing

*"It's important to keep active and to keep living a fulfilling life; keep learning something new. Don't just tread water to see out the years, live them, and that might mean change."*

**Female, 64**

*"I think one's attitude toward ageing has a lot to do with how fit they are and how much they continue to learn. The more active you are and the more willing you are to keep learning, the younger you feel. :)"*

**Female, 53**

*"I have some friends my age who are 'old' in their thinking and attitudes...but many are embracing ageing"*

**Female, 54**

*I feel very lucky to have reached my age, my sister died at 59, all life is precious. I play sport, and still feel young at heart, I look forward to becoming fitter, and am careful about myself more, I like to care for others too. I like myself more at my age now.*

**Female, 59**

## Participants who are in difficult situations and recognising the value in being able to have a healthy ageing experience

*I feel very angry when people I know complain about hitting age milestones. It's highly offensive to me. I would LOVE to celebrate my 80th birthday or my 90th or 100th but might not even get to my 40th, a birthday people I know have sometimes lamented. I can't stand that we as a society have this ridiculous horror of ageing. I felt that way before getting sick too. Growing old is wonderful! Ageing is wonderful. Every wrinkle and grey hair should be a sign of a life well lived.*

**Female, 35**

*I'm currently homeless, unemployable and have no future/happiness to look forward to after decades of DV (husband and father). I am poor and left without anything... I HATE everything, there's nothing to look forward to about getting older. So many woman over 55yr have lived an itinerant / transient lifestyle in buses/vans/cars. We have worked and raised children, gone through nasty marriage breakup and left with nothing. I have only \$10-\$20K superannuation. Thank god they've passed euthansia laws in Tassie.*

**Female, 57**



# Appendix

## Respondents by postcode

Postcode	Number of respondents	Postcode	Number of respondents	Postcode	Number of respondents
7000	10	7108	1	7262	2
7004	5	7109	6	7264	1
7005	4	7112	1	7268	2
7007	1	7113	3	7270	2
7008	2	7116	2	7276	1
7009	6	7120	1	7277	1
7010	6	7140	2	7300	1
7011	2	7150	1	7301	1
7015	7	7155	3	7303	1
7016	1	7170	2	7304	4
7017	1	7173	2	7306	2
7018	12	7178	1	7307	29
7019	1	7190	1	7310	14
7020	1	7215	1	7315	4
7021	1	7216	1	7316	2
7027	1	7248	1	7320	8
7030	1	7249	2	7321	2
7050	7	7250	14	7325	4
7052	4	7253	1	7330	10
7053	1	7260	3	7407	1
7054	5	7261	1	Outside Tasmania	3





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