In the year 2050 the Australian population will look vastly different than it does today. By that time, people aged 50 and older will comprise 40 per cent of Australia’s population and the number of people aged 65 and older will exceed those aged 15 or younger.¹ A higher population density in urban environments is anticipated as a result of all Australian capital cities experiencing a higher percentage of population growth compared to respective overall state and territory growth.¹

Consequently, these demographic changes will present numerous challenges, not only for the Australian government, but for businesses and communities alike. By the year 2050, population projections highlight that for every one person aged 65 and older there will be 2.7 people of ‘working age’, down from 5 people in 2010.² Over the same period, health spending on older Australians is expected to increase around seven-fold and aged care expenditure will grow from 0.8 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2009-10 to 1.8 per cent of GDP in 2049-50.²

Therefore, expenditure on pensions, health and aged care is likely to rise significantly with a growing and ageing population while revenue generated from income tax decreases.

Being unprepared for future demographic changes not only presents economic challenges but also impacts upon the very foundation of Australia’s social fabric. Preparedness requires the development of infrastructure, programs, services and environments that are adaptable and suitable for the changing needs of an ageing population. Adequate planning for the future can therefore offset the potential high public costs of ageing and increase productivity and social inclusion.

**Age friendly environments**

Developing age-friendly cities and homes is one of the most effective policy responses to population ageing. An age-friendly city is one that encourages people of all ages to age actively by enhancing opportunities for health, participation, productivity and security in order to improve the quality of life of an individual and community alike.³ There are 8 key areas for focus, consideration and development for age friendly environments which are as follows:

- Outdoor spaces
- Transportation
- Housing
- Social participation
- Respect and social inclusion
- Civic participation and employment
- Communication and information
- Community support and health services.

Governments can better accommodate an ageing population by forming and implementing policies which enhance structural and psycho-social factors of society. The following structural design elements contribute to an age friendly environment:

- Well maintained, smooth level and non-slip paths
- Well-designed roads, appropriate traffic islands, overpasses and underpasses to assist pedestrians to cross busy roads safely
- Visual and audio traffic signals
- Clean and easily accessible public toilets
- Affordable and appropriate housing that enables people to move freely and safely.³
The facts on age friendly cities and homes

National Seniors research4 has found that older Australians see independence as a key priority, yet just over one-third of Australians aged 50 years and over (38 per cent) have plans in place to prepare for getting older.

Despite the lack of preparation, over two-thirds of people aged 50 and older want to remain within their own home as they age. However, 36 per cent do not have homes with any design features suitable for ageing.

The following are the changes most necessary to allow older Australians to age at home:

Evidently, policy responses to population growth and ageing are timely. It is crucial that government, business and the Australian community work together to develop progressive and innovative programs and structures that are not only suitable for current population needs but also endure the challenges of the future. Each and every policy decision that Australia makes in the coming years should be influenced by the necessity to accommodate an ageing demographic.

Ageing well is everyone’s right.

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