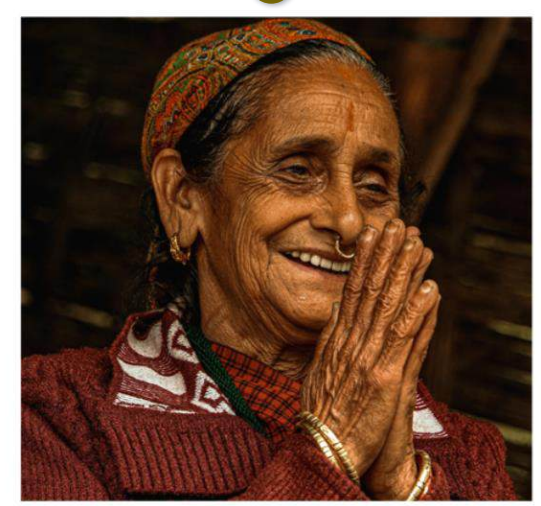




What makes older Australians happy?



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Introduction

National Seniors Australia is a member-based, not-for-profit research and advocacy organisation representing Australians aged 50 and over.

Every year we survey thousands of older people on diverse topics relevant to their lifestyle and wellbeing.

This report is based on a 2025 survey question about happiness.

Throughout this report, all the words in boxes with quote marks are comments from one of the 2516 older people who responded to our survey question. The commenter's gender (F, M, or NB), age, and state or territory is noted after each quote except where the respondent did not give it.

How did older Australians respond when we invited them to tell us about something that would help maintain or increase their happiness?

Most of us would agree, we want happiness for ourselves and for those who we love. Aristotle elevated the status of happiness more than 2000 years ago when he said, 'Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim, and the end of human existence'. More recently, the biochemist turned Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard spoke of happiness as a 'deep sense of flourishing' and as an 'optimal state of being'.

Being happy is not just an internal state. Research within the biological and social sciences shows happiness is associated with better health, living longer, social cohesion and economic well-being. As such, happiness has become an important indicator of countries' relative socio-economic prosperity and provides an [umbrella measure of quality of life](#).

There is evidence that happiness is both an outcome and a cause of positive life circumstances. A recent [review](#) encompassing studies from over 100 countries and 44 cultures found that the factors determining happiness can be classified into three broad categories of Health, Hope and Harmony.

On the other hand, longitudinal studies (studies of the same people over time)

have demonstrated that happiness causes [positive life outcomes](#), including [better physical health](#) and being more [socially connected](#). These outcomes are particularly relevant as people get older.

Later life can be a period where people are faced with increased risk of declining health, of grief, caring responsibilities, and other challenging life circumstances.

Social policies directed toward fostering happiness in later life could help build resilience and promote older people's social contributions.

As an advocacy organisation for older people, we wanted to ask our survey respondents to tell us in their own words what keeps them happy and what would make them happier.

Overall, we identified 11 kinds of response, framed as 11 personas. Each persona represents a different way of thinking about how happiness fits in one's life. But any given individual may fit more than one 'persona'. Even though we asked people to talk about something (i.e. one thing), many mentioned more than one thing.

You can meet our 11 happiness personas in the following pages.





SURVIVAL REALISTS

Happiness is having enough money to cover the basics including housing, and where possible a little bit extra.

Too many of us are struggling to pay for rent, bills, groceries, healthcare, and the rest of life's necessities. Many survey respondents said more money or cheaper goods and services is the thing that would make them happy. Others desperately need secure, affordable housing. Some would be happier if they had a little extra to go out for coffee or take a holiday sometimes, and wealthier respondents said having enough money makes them happy too.

“free of debt”
M 84, NSW

“To be able to afford the basics without
scrimping. The age pension is inadequate.”
F 70, WA

“win lotto”
M 76, QLD

“To have a little more
money to treat myself
to some luxuries”
F 80, QLD

“Not having to worry
about how I am to
afford the things that
make life run
smoothly. I don't need
a lot of money but I
would like to be able
not to worry every
fortnight if I am going
to have enough
money to pay the bills
and buy food. The
thought of something
breaking down like an
appliance or my car
fills me with dread.”
F 68, VIC

“A nice increase in the pension.”
F 78, QLD

“to retire and have a secure and
affordable place to call home for my
last 10-20 years on earth” F 69, NSW

“More income, savings. I
could afford to go out and go
away occasionally.” F 71, QLD

“No financial
stress”
F 59, QLD

“To feel safe knowing my husband
and I will be able to access social
housing when I need to retire. I'm
already over age but can't afford to
stop work.” F 68, QLD

FIERCE INDEPENDENTS

Happiness is staying independent through great health, wealth, and care, and having control of my life choices.

Independence was a strong theme for some respondents as the most happy-making quality to have in life. As comments specified, this can mean remaining fit, healthy, and mobile, or having access to high quality aged care when it is needed. Plenty of money is also a factor. But independence also means choices over every aspect of life and also how one's life ends.

"At this stage in life I am still independent, healthy and self-sufficient, there are no specific services that I require at 71." F71, SA

"Maintaining health and financial independence brings the ability to be independent and to help my grown children. This makes me happy." F 75, WA

"Easy access to home support services to allow me to remain independent and in my own home for as long as possible." F 77, WA

"Total control over my end of life choice(s)." F 66, VIC

"It will be important for me to be able to be independent and active physically and mentally" F 70, QLD

"Financial freedom (obvious), being healthy and able to do what I wish." M 53, SA

"Healthy and active. If so, you get to control your own life for a longer period" M 75, VIC

"Allow me to keep my drivers licence, just for maybe a 10km radius from my home. It is my independence" 78, TAS

"Keeping my health and being able to look after myself" F 83, QLD

"Ability to maintain my independence & ability to make choices for myself. Knowing I can live well within my income & take care of unexpected needs." F 73, SA



KEEN PARTICIPATORS

Happiness is the time, money, and ability to pursue my interests, be they travel, hobbies, work, or volunteering.

For many older people surveyed, having the resources to stay (or get) involved with life is essential to happiness. It is contributing, being a part of things, experiencing different people, seeing new places, or just being able to do the activities we have always enjoyed.

"What would make me happy is the ability to maintain a sense of purpose and be able to contribute meaningfully. I am not interested in sitting in a deck chair waiting for God as people expect." F 75, ACT

"access to more cultural activities, plays, musicals, galleries, book festivals, appearances from radio personalities" F 75, QLD

"Travel, travel and more travel. Both domestic and overseas." M 67, QLD

"A passion for something that keeps you interested and motivated to get up in the morning. Otherwise what's the point?" M 69, QLD

"A part time job because I like working and for the communication with work mates." M 76, VIC

"Classes (eg cooking, painting, pastels, cheesemaking, pilates) at the local neighbourhood house plus some local groups (eg craft, drawing) have given me joy. Also, i go weekly to Ladies' day at my local Men's Shed (not all Men's Sheds accept females. I am lucky!) Access to nature, peace and quiet. having plenty to occupy me. Feeling needed. Having time at last for my own interests: a good internet connection (we were years with a lousy one) enables me to join in webinars on topics of interest from all over the world! Having a smart phone means easily keeping in contact with colleagues, news, quizzes, phone, text messaging, photos sharing." F 64, VIC



NEST FEATHERERS

Happiness is a great home life with a wonderful location, loving partner or solo bliss, and pets if I want them.

For a lot of respondents, a home that is comfortable, convenient to facilities and in pleasant surroundings is key to happiness. Many said happiness is (or would be) sharing life with an intimate partner, while some felt their happiness had gone because their spouse had passed on. For others, happiness is living alone or with a companion animal.

"To feel safe is most important to me."
F 70, NT

"The love & companionship of a good partner - which I have. Support for each other, encouragement, sharing all - the good & the bad"
F 74, NSW

"We are happy being together"
M 80, TAS

"Happiness is living with a loving partner in a safe rural environment. in a small town community that has caring networks, a hospital and a chemist, a grocery store, coffee shops, school, clothing shops, enough pubs and sporting clubs and churches art gallery and a Town Hall."
F 85, SA

"I am very happy in my own home with my cat and lovely garden"
F 83, TAS

"To be able to live out my days with my bride (of 47 years) knowing that we are safe and secure in our home"
M 71, VIC

"Having time and a safe area to walk my dog, to be out in the fresh air, the bush and lake"
F 61, NSW

"Have my husbands visa application approved so I'm not alone and have someone here to support me in all ways" F 72, NSW

"A good home near the beach."
M 75, NSW

"Finding a partner to share life with is about all I can think of. Difficult in a small rural town."
M 75, SA

"I would be happier if my husband was still alive"
F 78, VIC

"Being independently well off enough to move into a house or [unit] for myself - separate from my husband" F 68, QLD

"A lift so I can take my clean clothes upstairs easier. To use on days when my knees are too sore to walk without maximum pain and just to make my life easier." F 73, NT

SOCIAL CONNECTORS

Happiness is relationships with family, friends, or community members, and the means to find like-minded others.

A lot of older people surveyed said that, for them, happiness is found in human connection with the people in their circle, from kids or grandkids to neighbours, from old best friends to friends they haven't yet met. Socialising is an essential ingredient of happiness for so many of us.

"Regular visitors"
F 97, WA

"A network of like-minded people." M 72, QLD

"Maintaining social contacts. I feel it is important because friendships and contact with lots of different people is good for continuing good mental health" F 68, NSW

"My children living closer to me and being able to afford to visit regularly" F 65, TAS

"To have caring people around you when you need them most be it family, friends or paid care." F 84, QLD

"A community network of supportive friends to socialise with" F 67, NSW

"Maintain rich social network. Everything works better with sharing." M 74, NSW

"To maintain my happiness I need my family and friends around me." F 76, WA

"socially connected including volunteering" NB 67, QLD

"As a low care resident I find it lonely being surrounded by people who are either bedridden or bordering on dementia. Happiness depends on being with people more like yourself." F 92, QLD

"A wider social network. I am a widower, living alone. My family lives in another state. I have a diminishing circle of friends thru death and disability. I am a reasonably introverted person, formerly very happy with my marriage and small circle of close friends. Now, with my wife's death and the death/disability of those in that small circle of friends, loneliness is looming." M 81, VIC

POLICY ENTHUSIASTS

Happiness is improvements to retirement income, aged care, and other ageing support systems.

Older people aren't just interested in their personal happiness. Many commenters outlined strategic reforms to Australia's ageing supports that would make them very happy. Some see inequities to be addressed or poor service delivery to be improved. Letting pensioners work without penalty, more concessions for self-funded retirees, faster access to home care packages, more respite care – these and much more are all pathways to happiness.

"Allow retirees 67 and over to work and not lose pension, I plan to teach 1 day a week or more but will lose pension, stupid as it will not encourage teachers etc. who we desperately need to remain in the workforce." M 61, VIC

"Ability to access pension without the volumes of paperwork"
M 76, QLD

"Every person who reaches Age Pension age should be paid a pension regardless of their assets and income, particularly people who have worked their whole life and contributed to the wealth of the country by paying taxes." F 70, QLD

"very strongly believe if you choose to move in with a partner their income should not be taken into account as it takes away your independence in that relationship because you would be relying on the other person to support you." F 66, WA

"I worry about what the future looks like for the aging population. There seem to be a lot of people who apply for care packages which take forever to get assessed and then generally just a phone call. Then are told they're approved but it will take 9-15 MONTHS for it to be put in place. I see this all around me with those that are older than me by 15-20 years waiting for dementia beds for a spouse. It's just awful to see the stress they are under. In both cases their spouse died whilst waiting!" F 62, QLD

"Assistance for Carer to help me keep husband at home. Carers get nothing. We need access to the mythical beast of fed gov Respite. In our case 63 days pa. Not been able to access since 2019. Have not met a single Carer who has been able." F 65, ACT

"Would like to be able to transition to smaller house, low level and high level care smoothly i.e. without involved transactions." M 81, VIC

GLOBAL IDEALISTS

Happiness is an active civil society, government integrity, and changes that protect the environment, social justice, and peace.

Altruism and political idealism are common to every age group and many older Australians would be happier if the nation and the world were better places. Respondents disagreed as to what exactly would make things better, with the views of some contradicting the views of others. But happiness definitely goes beyond self-interest for many older people. Making the future better would make them happy.

“Cost of living stability
Action on climate change”
F 76, QLD

“I am pretty happy now, but I would like to live in a less polarised society. I think that media and political interests have created imaginary divisions between groups of people.” F 61, QLD

“Dispatch Putin, Trump and the Israeli Govt. Ameliorate climate change. Housing for all. Equity on the planet. Care for the environment and all non-human animals. This would all help tremendously with my happiness and that of my daughter and grandchildren.”
F 68, ACT

“Peace in the world”
F 77, WA

“A kinder and respectful society for all. Love thy neighbour, encourage inclusion and not isolation.” M 68, VIC

“Justice Justice Justice!
Fairness. Truth. Trust. Loyalty. Integrity. Love.”
F 87, NSW

“A return to the happy days when governments lived within their means and spent money on key government services instead of vanity projects.” F 73, NSW

“I would be happier if average Australians could afford to buy a home. Government have failed Australians very badly.” M 69, QLD



STABILITY SEEKERS

Happiness is a sense of security and certainty, or assurance that the life I've planned for won't be upended.

Some older Australians used words like stability, security, and certainty to describe what would make them happy. This pertained to financial and housing security but also other aspects of life. Some were worried by recent policy changes around aged care and superannuation. A few were concerned with technological or other cultural changes that they felt were too rapid.

"To be sure that the pension will cover daily living expenses and not having to worry about rising inflation." F 65, VIC

"To have stable housing would lower my anxiety at every lease signing and allow me to relax and enjoy the rest of my time" F 68, QLD

"reassurance that affordable high quality aged care to meet my needs (home & residential) will be available when I need it" F 79, WA

"Peace of mind"
M 70, WA

"As you age, I believe, that happiness is very closely linked to security and certainty." F 69, QLD

"Stop fiddling with plans that were set in concrete 20 years ago. Also known as SUPERANNUATION" M 78, QLD

"More surety on superannuation laws, thresholds as this will be my major income source, the current Government seems to be changing the rules. I am also concerned about franking credits - they should be left as is." M 61, SA

"No more changes to technology"
F 81, WA

INNER PEACENIKS

Happiness comes from my own mindset, attitude, and approach to life, or my faith and spiritual connections.

Some survey respondents told us only they were responsible for their happiness. Feeling grateful was a pathway to it that some mentioned. Kindness or doing for others was another. Having a positive mindset was a listed key to happiness too. Faith and a strong relationship with one's god or spiritual practice were also important sources of happiness for older Australians.

"As happiness comes from within, it is important to keep the right mindset."
F 76, NSW

"Put others' needs before your own, or expressed another way, do to/for others what you would have them do to/for you."
F 74, QLD

"To continue to wake up each day full of the joy of living
Enhances my positive outlook on life and my sense of well being"
F 73, WA

"Gratitude for life and its riches. I believe that gratitude brings positivity." F 72, NSW

"a stronger relationship with God"
M 66, QLD

"It is important for me to access a centre of worship and have pastoral care."
M 79, NSW

"being content with what you have
have positive outlook
accept your situation"
F 81, QLD

"I focus on the Buddhist principles of happiness, more like comfort with the current situation, favourable or unfavourable."
M 85

RESPECT WARRIORS

Happiness is respect for the contributions older people make and have made and eliminating ageism.

Many older people would be happier if governments and other members of society treated them with more respect. Respect can mean not being ageist. It can mean treating individuals fairly. It can also mean showing appreciation for and acknowledgement of the contributions older people have made to society during their lives and continue to make in later life.

“Always having connection with people and feeling valued. Not feeling that you have passed your use by date. Being respected for the contribution I have made to my family, friends, my local community and during my professional life. (50 years a nurse).” F 68, WA

“Respect and value for experience rather than just considering someone's age.”
M 68, VIC

“society values your existence”
F 66, NSW

“A territory and federal government that considers older people an asset and a source of history and knowledge.”
M 85, ACT

“Greater respect for the elderly - often we're either invisible or considered a nuisance.” M 72, NSW

“more job choices for older working Australians and less ageism to stay employed.” F 57, QLD

“People need to start listening to those who have lived a longer and more active life. It may make for a more caring and compassionate society”
F 77, VIC

“Better community attitude towards mature community members. More training and harsher punishment for Elder Abuse related crimes. More visibility of mature aged community members across the media and volunteering sectors.”
F 68, WA





UNIQUE INDIVIDUALS

What makes older people happy can be idiosyncratic: reiki, a broader range of sport on TV, or more reliable businesses.

Some of us share values, but all of us are different. Older people – like people of any other age – can be quirky, funny, and passionate about our special interest topics. What makes us happy is what makes us happy.

“Recreational drugs”
M, NSW

“free sex therapist”
M 70, NSW

“Put some decent TV shows on, not reality shows that do nothing but degenerate/ denigrate people.” F 72, WA

“Advocate for the CFA to stop 70-year-olds getting on fire trucks”
M 69, VIC

“I’m in drought. I would like rain to be happy.” M 81, SA

“More cruises going from or to Fremantle” F 70, WA

“Brisbane Lions to win two in a row.” M 81, QLD

“government subsidised red wine”
M 69, QLD

“Nice quiet life no dramars”
M 76

“a natural burial, (organised) in a wonderful South Coast burial forest in Bodalla” F 79, NSW

“remove the barriers for the aged and people with slight disabilities to have safe access from the land to our NSW Waterways” M 79, NSW

“I would like a fast train to Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane and cheaper air fares for pensioners” F 75, ACT

“Living a Dan Beutner’s Blue Zone lifestyle”
F 72, NSW

“Having someone who can explain, help with questions that I have about anything”
F 72, NSW



WE SEE YOU

Your brand of happiness matters to us here at National Seniors Australia.

We originally asked a survey question about happiness to identify the key things that would – or do – make older people happy. But there were too many of these to count.

What we discovered instead is so much more interesting and important: that older people think about happiness in very different ways.

How we understand the question of our own happiness varies with our values, our priorities, and our dreams. It varies with the roads we have already traversed in this life and the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Our experience matters.

Some organisations and individuals out there try to reduce older people to generational stereotypes – to Baby Boomers versus Gen-Xers, for example, with all the clichés that entails. But this report demonstrates just how superficial such approaches can be.

This report reflects some of the great diversity of older people who make up the NSA membership, our subscribers, and our fellow travellers who participate in our National Seniors Social Survey.

It provides an indication of the diversity of the 9 million+ Australians aged 50 and over, who each want different things.

It shows us the complexity of what older people want from life, given the same person may fit more than one of the personas we describe here.

From NSA to the community of older Australians, we want to say: we see you. We value you and your differences. We appreciate you for who and what you are. Your experience matters to us.

May your life be blessed with whatever it is that makes you happy.

Methods

The information in this report comes from the 2025 National Seniors Social Survey, conducted in March 2025.

Anyone aged 50 or older who resides in Australia was welcome to participate in the NSSS. The survey received ethics approval from Bellberry Ltd prior to implementation (approval 2023-11-1424-A-1).

The survey included a free-text question about happiness: “Happiness means different things to different people. To inform our advocacy work, please tell us about something that would help maintain or increase your happiness in the near future. Also please tell us why it would help.” Around half of the survey respondents answered the question, by writing a relevant comment (n=2516 out of the approximately 5000 total survey respondents).

Responses were analysed for this report using the thematic analysis framework described by Braun and Clarke. We identified themes via inductive analysis guided by a critical realist approach that aimed for accuracy and objectivity in interpreting respondents’ views.

Rather than focusing on the fine details of people’s life circumstances as has been the case for many of our previous reports, in this report we sought to characterise the range of approaches respondents took to thinking about happiness.

Quotes from survey respondents were selected to illustrate some of the variety and prevalence of ideas expressed. Where possible they are reproduced verbatim, occasionally omitting or altering parts for clarity or anonymity (indicated with square brackets []). Minor typos were corrected for readability (no brackets). We retained all other phrasing idiosyncrasies.

Each year when inviting people to participate in the NSSS, we strive for greater inclusivity and maximising participation, rather than seeking numerical representativeness of the population. This is especially relevant to open-ended questions such as the one analysed here, because experiences are the focus, not statistical patterns, and some demographic groups are more likely to write a comment than others. For this reason, we describe the sample below for readers who wish to compare it to national numbers.

Sample

The percentages below characterise the demographic traits of the 2516 respondents who answered the happiness question with an interpretable response. No question was compulsory, so some rows do not add up to 100%.

Age group	50-64 years 10%	65-74 years 50%	75-84 years 34%	85+ years 5% (oldest 97 years)
Self-rated health	Excellent 12%	Good 54%	Fair 26%	Poor/very poor 8%
State or territory	ACT 3%	NSW 24%	NT 1%	QLD 33%
	SA 10%	TAS 2%	VIC 17%	WA 10%
Gender	Female 60%	Male 39%	Non-binary 1 person	
Education	School up to Year 10 13%	Year 12, cert or dip 39%	Degree or higher 46%	
Savings including super	<\$100k 25%	\$100k-\$500k 24%	>\$500k 32%	
Not metro	Regional 28%	Rural 11%	Remote 1%	
Diversity groups	First Nations, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander 1%	Living with disability 7%	LGBTI 2%	Veteran 4%
	CALD background 3%			

*Survey data unweighted.

The head office of National Seniors Australia is located in Brisbane/Meanjin but we represent older people from right across this great continent.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land and waters of our office region, the Turrbul People, and all other First Nations, Aboriginal, and Torres Strait Islander people.

We honour and value their continuing cultures, contributions, and connections to Country, and pay our respects to Elders, past and present.

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