

Introduction

In this chapter, you will learn about older people, like Ron and Ruth, and ways the current generation of older people is challenging previously held myths and stereotypes of growing old and being old in Australia and New Zealand. Never before has there been such a heterogeneous group of people entering old age; this makes working with and supporting older people an exciting challenge for registered nurses and other health professionals. This chapter provides an overview of the diversity of older people in Australia and New Zealand and is the basis for many of the subsequent chapters. Being aware of how older people perceive their ageing, where older people live, what they do, how they contribute to society and the diversity in their **cultural backgrounds** provides a holistic picture so that you can develop an appreciation of this group and the best way to work with them.

Cultural background > the ethnic, religious, racial, gender, linguistic or other socioeconomic factors and values that shape an individual's upbringing; a cultural background can be shaped at the family, societal or organisational level

1.1 GETTING TO KNOW THE COUPLE: RON AND RUTH'S STORY

Ron and his wife are retired farmers who sold their property and moved into a large country town. They bought a three-bedroom home in the suburbs as they often have their children and grandchildren come to stay. Apart from a few minor aches and pains, both Ron, 67, and Ruth, 69, are in good health and physically very active after years living on the farm. However, Ron was initially a bit depressed and had some difficulty finding things to occupy his time; he was not settling into 'town life' after managing a big property. He has recently

started a part-time job as a yard manager in a small manufacturing business and is now much happier to be active and settling better into the new lifestyle. Ruth has joined a local painting class at the Senior Citizens and volunteers as a driver to deliver Meals on Wheels one day per week, as well as looking after the grandchildren on a regular basis. They both like camping and intend to travel around Australia in their camping van now that they are not tied down to farm commitments ▶

FOCUS QUESTIONS

Before, during and after reading this chapter, ask yourself these reflective questions:

- ✦ What do you think of when you hear the words 'aged', 'ageing', 'elderly' or 'old'?
- ✦ What age do you think is 'old'?
- ✦ How many 'old' people do you know?
- ✦ What do you think you will be like when you are 'old'—any different from how you are now and, if so, in what ways?
- ✦ Might someone think you are 'old' now?
- ✦ What are some of the stereotypes about elderly people? Would you say they are mostly positive or negative?

Australia's population is steadily ageing and by 2026 the number of people aged over 65 years is anticipated to be over five million or 20 per cent of the population (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). In New Zealand, the 'over 65 years' cohort has nearly doubled since 1981, increasing from 14.3 per cent of the population to an anticipated 23.8 per cent by 2043 (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). One of the issues confronting governments and social planners is the best way to meet the needs of older people living in Australia and New Zealand to ensure that ageing is a positive

xperience. The future generations of older people living in Australia and New Zealand are likely to be healthier, wealthier and better educated than previous generations. This chapter provides a snapshot of older people living in Australia and New Zealand: who they are, what they do and where they live. In addition, it outlines the range of aged-care services that are available to support older people and the types of carers.

How old is ‘old’?

The concept of ‘old age’ or ‘growing old’ is regularly discussed both in the general community and by government policy-makers, yet a concise definition as to when old age begins has yet to be determined. Prior to the 20th century, definitions of old age were based on ability and function rather than chronological age.

“ *The aged were those who were infirm, frail, and suffering incapacities of body and mind to the extent that they could no longer fully support or take care of themselves, and who also gave the appearance of being old.* ”

(Roebuck, 1979, p. 417).

Unlike other developmental life stages such as infancy or puberty, clear physiological markers do not define old age. As a result, the definition often accepted by investigators studying ageing has relied upon a more behavioural approach based upon the government definition of ‘retirement age’ or ‘pension age’ (Roebuck, 1979). The United Nations defines an ‘older’ person as someone who is more than 60 years of age (United Nations, 2013).

The definition of what it is to be ‘old’ is a socially constructed concept defined by cultural norms. In the developed world, retirement from paid work often signals the beginning of old age at around 60–65 years. In the developing world, chronological time has little or no importance in the meaning of old age (Gorman, 1999). An Australian study using in-depth qualitative interviews with 18 people aged between 65 and 89 years (Minichiello, Browne & Kendig, 2000) revealed that they viewed oldness as a state of being and more about how a person viewed themselves rather than in chronological terms. However, being considered ‘old’ was viewed with negative stereotypes such as:

“ *not trying, withdrawn, isolated, irritating, self-oriented, living outside the mainstream, unattractive, uninteresting, frail, senile, silly, over the hill, narrow-minded, a burden, lonely, vulnerable, dowdy, and unproductive.* ”

(Minichiello et al., 2000, p. 259)

More recently, the framing of ageing as a positive experience has emerged and the World Health Organization (WHO) promotes ‘active ageing’ as the ‘process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age’ (World Health Organization, 2008, p. 10).

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- + What are your current thoughts about your own ageing and old age?
- + At what age should individuals start thinking about ageing?
- + Can we influence our ageing experience?



George’s comments on how old is old? “Some people are old in their 40’s...”

Ageing population

Decreasing mortality » a lowering in the number of deaths per thousand of population

The United Nations (UN) report *World Population Ageing 2013* (2013, p. 3) defines ageing as ‘the process that results in rising proportions of older people in the total population’. Population ageing occurs due to the combination of **decreasing mortality** and a decline in fertility, resulting in people all over the world living longer. Ageing is a process that begins at birth, continues throughout life and is an individual experience that may vary within different cultures. It is a dynamic process as more babies are born each year and people are living longer, causing the number of older people to continue to increase.

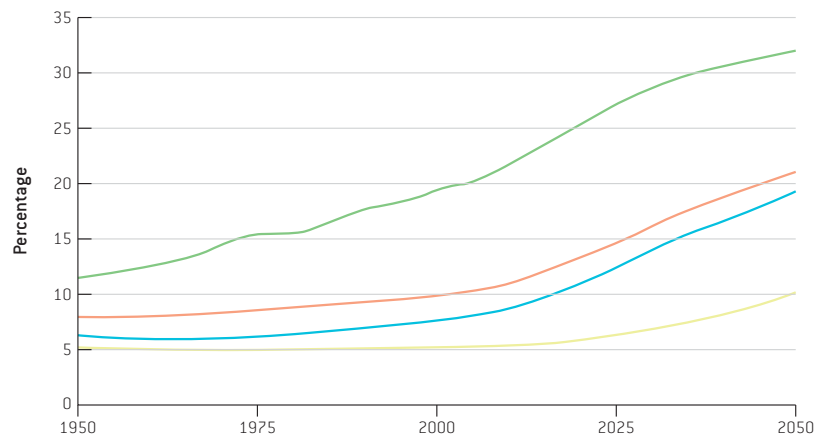
The importance of the ageing of the population was recognised in 1996 when the government of Brazil, in collaboration with the Programme on Ageing of the World Health Organization, convened in Brasilia to develop an agenda for the future. The meeting of multi-disciplinary experts from Brazil and 21 other countries produced the ‘Brasilia Declaration on Ageing’, which agreed upon three principles:

- *Ageing is a development issue;*
- *Ageing is universal affecting every individual, family, community and society; and*
- *Ageing is a normal dynamic process, not a disease.*

(United Nations, 2013)

Ageing is taking place *in* the world’s adult population and *within* the older population itself. The proportion of people aged 80 years or over within the older population increased from 7 per cent in 1950 to 14 per cent in 2013 (United Nations, 2013). According to the United Nations (2013) projection, this proportion of ‘oldest-old’ within older people is expected to reach 19 per cent in 2050 and 28 per cent in 2100. If this projection is realised, there will be 830 million people aged 80 years or over by the end of the century, seven times as many as in 2013 (United Nations, 2013). Figure 1.1 shows a comparison in the projected trend in world population growth of people aged over 60 years. A greater percentage of people will be living to an older age in both developed and developing countries.

FIGURE 1.1
PROPORTION OF
POPULATION AGED 60
YEARS OR OVER: WORLD
AND DEVELOPMENT
REGIONS 1950–2050



(United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2013, p.12)

Ageing has profound consequences on a broad range of economic, political and social processes. It presents **fiscal and economic challenges** and changes the gender composition of the population, as women tend to live longer than men. The increase in numbers of older people has triggered much debate in Australia and New Zealand as governments endeavour to balance the funding of health care and aged services with diminishing workforce participation (Warburton & Savy, 2012).

Fiscal and economic challenges » the amount of government spending and taxation needed to meet the demand of caring for the increasing number of older people

Who are older people in Australia and New Zealand?

Like other developed countries, the rate of ageing of Australia's population has been steadily increasing since the 1970s. At the time of Federation in 1901, older people constituted only 4.0 per cent of the population, but this slowly increased to 8.5 per cent in 1961 and was 14 per cent in 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012a). In 2011, women formed 15 per cent of the population aged over 65 years, slightly more than 13 per cent of older men (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012a).

Overall, the 2011 census revealed that three million people aged over 65 years were resident in Australia. Of these, 1.4 million were men and 1.6 million were women. More than half of older people were married (57 per cent) and a quarter were widowed (26 per cent). However, significantly more older men (71 per cent) were married compared with 46 per cent of women (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012a). In New Zealand, 51.6 per cent of the 65–74 years age bracket were female and this percentage increased to 64.3 per cent in the over-85 years group. Of the 65–74 years age group, 71.4 per cent were partnered with this decreasing to 29.4 per cent in the over-85 group (Statistics New Zealand, 2013).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples made up only 0.7 per cent of the total older population in Australia, reflecting the shorter **life expectancy** in these populations. Since conditions associated with ageing often affect Indigenous people at a younger age than non-Indigenous people, consideration of the Indigenous population from the age of 50 years is taken into account during planning processes for aged care (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with complex care needs who wish to remain at home are able to do so with assistance. In 2013 there were 2,035 Indigenous people receiving some type of government care package to assist them to remain at home.

Life expectancy » the average number of years a person is expected to live using statistical analyses of factors such as health, nutrition, occupation and heredity

For the 0.8 per cent of Indigenous people who were living in residential care, over one-quarter were aged less than 65 years (27 per cent compared with 3.4 per cent of non-Indigenous) and 21 per cent were aged over 85 (compared with 58 per cent non-Indigenous). The incidence of early dementia is more prevalent among Indigenous populations with 26 per cent of Indigenous residents aged under 55 years diagnosed with dementia, increasing to 61 per cent of those aged 75 and over (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015).

The largest **ethnic group** in New Zealand, according to the Census of 2013, was people from Europe. Those over 65 years comprised 17.1 per cent of people who identified as European.

Ethnic group » a community or population made up of people who share a common cultural background or descent

In other major ethnic groups in New Zealand, those in the 65 and over age group are much less ethnically diverse than younger age groups:

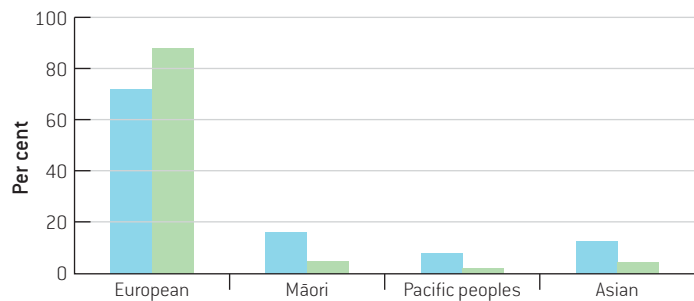
- the Māori ethnic group makes up 5.6 per cent (32,181 people) of the 65+ population, compared with 16.5 per cent of the under-65
- the Asian ethnic group makes up 4.7 per cent (27,312 people) of the 65+ population, compared with 12.9 per cent of the under-65
- the Pacific peoples ethnic group makes up 2.4 per cent (13,944 people) of the 65+ population, compared with 8.2 per cent of the under-65—less than half the size of the population in the Māori ethnic group.

(Statistics New Zealand, 2013, p. 14)

Figure 1.2 demonstrates the wide variance in the ethnic groups in New Zealand for both younger and older cohorts. Note the larger percentage of older people with European backgrounds and the relatively smaller proportion of older people in the other cultural groups.

In 2011, 36 per cent of older Australians and 25 per cent of New Zealanders were born in other countries. Cultural background and the language spoken in childhood can become significant factors in accessing support services and care in ageing populations, as issues surrounding communication can arise. Small percentages of older people either speak English poorly or do not speak English at all. This language barrier can create difficulties in social interaction, with inability to gain assistance with personal needs, follow instructions about medications and remain safe and comfortable.

FIGURE 1.2
BROAD AGE GROUP AND
SELECTED ETHNIC GROUP
(PEOPLE REPORTING MORE
THAN ONE ETHNIC GROUP
WERE COUNTED IN EACH
STATED CATEGORY)



(Statistics New Zealand, 2013)

LIFE EXPECTANCY

Current older Australians live longer and are generally in better health than older people in previous generations. However, limited activity and various long-term health conditions can accompany the ageing process, causing a substantial proportion of older people living in Australia to have conditions that increase and complicate their care needs, affecting their quality of life (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2013). The Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011–12 *Australian Health Survey* showed that, although older people were more likely to report having poor health, most considered themselves to be in good health. Of older people living in households, three-quarters (76 per cent) of those aged 65–74 and two-thirds (67 per cent) of those aged 75 and over rated their health as good, very good or excellent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012b).

Australia boasts one of the longest life expectancies of the world (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). Male life expectancy ranked first, equal with Iceland, and fifth for females behind Japan, Spain, France and Italy. As a greater percentage of the population lives longer, it is important that provisions be made for supporting the needs of this increasing sector of the population.

The Commonwealth of Australia's *Intergenerational Report* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015) provides an analysis of what might happen to Australia in the next 40 years based on data from recent trends (Figure 1.3).

The report predicts that in Australia by 2054–55:

- Average life expectancy for men will be 95.1 years.
- Average life expectancy for women will be 96.6 years.
- 4.9 per cent of the population will be aged over 85 years.
- The number of people aged over 65 years will have doubled from 2015.
- The percentage of people in the workforce aged 65 years and over is projected to be 17.3 per cent (up from 12.9 per cent today).

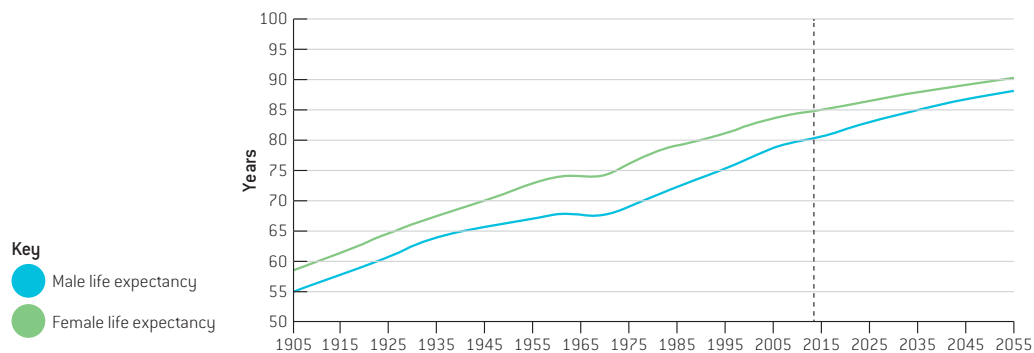


FIGURE 1.3
AUSTRALIAN MALE AND
FEMALE LIFE EXPECTANCY,
1905–2055

(Commonwealth of Australia, 2015, p. 6)

For children born in New Zealand, a female born between the years 2012–14 can expect to live to 83.2 years and a male 79.5 years—a difference of 3.7 years. This is an increase compared with the statistics of the 1980–82 period, where a female could expect to live to 76.4 years and males 70.4 years (Statistics New Zealand, 2013).

About one in seven people in Australia is aged 65 years or older but some variation in numbers exists between states, with South Australia and Tasmania having the highest percentages of older people. Overall, the proportion of older people who live in major urban areas (i.e. population over 100,000 people) is greater than in smaller cities and towns—69 per cent versus 23 per cent. As the population ages, there is a shift away from rural areas to major urban areas due to a range of complex factors, but illness and availability of health and aged-care services are particularly relevant for oldest age groups (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012c).

Future ageing—‘baby boomers’

The end of World War II heralded the phenomenon of the ‘baby boomer’ generation. In 1945, Australia’s service men and women returned home and family life resumed after an interruption of almost six years of wartime conflict. Nine months later saw the start of a population explosion as childbirth rates soared; more than four million Australians were born between the years 1946 and 1961. New Zealand’s population increased by nearly 400,000 by the end of the 1950s, attributable to the ‘baby boomers’ and the migration from northern Europe (Labrum, 2009).

Combined with an increase in European migration to Australia, the baby boomers changed Australia, New Zealand and the world in the second half of the 20th century. This group has had a substantial impact upon Australian and New Zealand society, and the impact of large numbers of baby boomers retiring from the workforce will have considerable impact upon resources and future planning. Governments need to cope with the increase in demand for age pensions. As a generation, baby boomers are reportedly healthier, more active, better educated and have higher expectations than previous generations (Hunter, 2012).

Population geographers can accurately predict the the numbers and characteristics of the older population of the 2020s and 2030s due to the number of ‘baby boomers’ currently aged in their 50s and 60s. Four demographic aspects of the ageing of Australia’s population need to be considered when planning for efficient and equitable provision of residential care and home care in the future (Hugo, 2014):

- The numbers of older people will increase rapidly as the ‘shockwave’ of baby boomers will all move past age 65. The number of people aged 65+ in Australia will increase by 84.8 per cent, from 3.1 million older people in 2011 to 5.7 million in 2031.
- The proportion of older people (65+) will increase from 13.8 per cent of the total population in 2011 to 18.7 per cent in 2031.
- Baby boomers differ greatly from previous generations economically, socially, and in their values, attitudes, expectations and, most importantly, their health, all of which will have an impact upon their care needs.
- The locations where older people live will be different as more than a third of aged Australians live outside the capital cities. There is a move to coastal retirement areas and many country towns have an above average concentration of older people.

Active ageing—what do older people do?

Rather than the traditional concept of ageing as a time of burden, fearfulness, passivity and dependency, there has been a paradigm shift so that ageing is embraced as a time of opportunity. Several **theoretical frameworks** are proposed to explain this paradigm shift. All these theories emphasise ‘the importance of maintaining and fostering the physical and mental well-being of people as they age’ (Buys & Miller, 2006). The **contemporary frameworks** are outlined in

Population geographers » people who scientifically examine the increase and decrease in population, people’s movements over time, general settlement patterns and other aspects such as occupation and how people form the geographic character of a place

Theoretical framework » a theory or theories that provide structure for understanding a concept and perceiving phenomena in a particular way

Contemporary framework » the most current theories that try to explain a phenomenon such as ageing