

The Downageing Generation:

From Bob Katter to Mal Washer, why 68 is the new 59. And why the older generation is not giving up leadership any time soon.

Australians are living longer than ever before and this remarkable growth in longevity is the primary cause of our ageing population. With Australians living longer, they are also working later and retaining leadership longer. In the spheres of politics, business, and the arts, today's leaders are remaining active in public life well into their 70's.

While Peter Beatie is reigniting a political career at age 60, he is young compared to Bob Katter who has launched his party and another term in parliament at age 68. John Howard was Australia's Prime Minister while aged 68. And today there are many Australians, born in 1945 who are still working, and making a contribution as they approach their 7th decade of life. Other Australians in public life and aged 68 include Fred Hilmer, Solomon Lew, Maggie Beer, Bob Katter, Mal Washer, Bob Brown, Kerry O'Brien, Anne Summers, Michael Leunig, and Peter Weir.

Social Demographer Mark McCrindle summaries the situation by stating "Many older Australians are in a lifestage significantly younger than their age. We can't take 20th Century expectations of age and apply that in the 21st Century. Traditional demographics don't match the new psychographics. From technology uptake to working later, older Australians are not just "retired and wired" but working and leading and influencing later in life than has ever been seen."

Here's a demographic snapshot of the downageing situation:

An Analysis of Australia's 68 year olds:

| | 1945 | 2013 |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| National population: | 7 million | 23 million |
| Total population has increased 3 fold | | |
| 68 year olds: | 30,000 | 200,000 |
| 68 year olds have increased almost 7 fold | | |
| Life expectancy at birth: | 66 | 81 |
| We can expect to live 15 years longer than in 1939 | | |
| Life expectancy at 68: | 9 | 18 |
| 68's of today are like 59's of a generation ago in terms of longevity. | | |

Source: McCrindle Research, ABS.

"Australians aged 68 are part of the Builders Generation- those born before the end of World War 2 and preceding the post-war Baby Boom generation. Since then the Boomers (born 1946-1964), generation X (born 1965-1979), Gen Y (born 1980-1994) and this year Generation Z (born since 1995) have all entered adulthood yet many of the Builders generation are still building, leading and shaping Australia" states Social Demographer Mark McCrindle.

“They are a generation of “downagers”- younger than their parents were at the same age, younger than their age would suggest, and based on the life expectancy rates, the equivalent of a 59 year old a generation ago”, continued Mark McCrindle.

Statistical summary:

- 1 in 4 males aged 68 are employed full time.
- 1 in 10 females aged 68 are employed full time.
- Those aged 68 can expect to live to at least 86 years.
- Today’s 68 year olds are therefore like the 59 year olds of a generation ago.
- Demographic mid life for an Australian has been pushed back to 50 years for a male, and 52 for a female in terms of adult years lived (since turning 18) and adult years to go (32 years lived since turning 18 and 32 years life expectancy for a male aged 50, and 34 adult years lived and 34 to go on average for a female).
- The median age of employed persons in industries such as Education and Health is now 45 years- so while there are many workers in their 20’s- there are many in their 60’s to give a median age of 45.
- Keep in mind that many of today’s 60-something leaders have been in leadership since their 20’s and 30’s- they were needed during the boom years of the 50’s and 60’s. But why wouldn’t they keep leading: they have the experience and they still have a lot of life left.