

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AND ETHNICITY OF AUSTRALIA'S OLDER POPULATION*

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This article describes the living arrangements and ethnicity of Australia's older population (persons aged 65 years or older) up to the 2020s. The impact of trends in living arrangements, as projected from trends that occurred during 1986–96, on numbers in particular living arrangement categories is likely to be relatively minor compared to the impact Baby Boomers will have as they age. Of particular concern, given the support provided to older people by spouses, are projected large increases in persons living alone and in non-private dwellings. With respect to ethnicity, the effects of the ageing of post-Second World War immigration intakes are explored.

As demonstrated in Kippen's paper in this volume, the ageing of Baby Boomers will result in a large increase in the number of older Australians in the years ahead. This paper focuses on two accompanying dimensions of this development: the living arrangements of the older population, and their ethnicity. Ageing will greatly increase the demand for services sought by older people, but with the extensive support for older people provided by spouses, a major consideration in assessing that demand is the future living arrangements of those aged 65 or older. In particular, how are the numbers living alone and in nonprivate dwellings, and therefore generally without access to the day-to-day support of a spouse or partner, likely to change? An associated consideration, not addressed in this paper, is the support provided by other family members. Low fertility, higher voluntary childlessness and high levels of population mobility are likely to mean that a higher proportion of older people will either have no children or siblings, or else none living sufficiently close by to give regular assistance. This will be especially problematic where spousal support is also absent.

Substantial immigration to Australia from a changing mix of countries of origin as Baby Boomers passed through their childhood, adolescent and younger adult years has also ensured a changing ethnic mix to Australia's older population in the future. As people born overseas may face special difficulties and have special needs in old age, it is important to appreciate how the sizes of different groups of the ethnic older population are likely to change. This will aid assessment of the likely need for specialized services to buttress self-support.

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Living arrangements of the older population

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has produced three projections of households and families from 1996 to 2021 based on assumptions about changing living arrangements (ABS 1999a). Trends in propensities to be in different living arrangement categories by age as at the 1986, 1991 and 1996 Censuses of Population and Housing were projected forward and applied to projected total populations by age as represented by Series K of the ABS's 1997–2051 population projections (ABS 1998).

For the purpose of trend analysis, the 1986 and 1991 living arrangements counts were as far as possible recoded to achieve consistency with definitions for the 1996 Census. Data indicated that the likelihood of living in a nonprivate dwelling (such as a nursing home or hostel) was decreasing. However, this was primarily a product of changes in classification; specifically the transfer of dwellings in manufactured home estates and self-care units in accommodation for the retired or aged to 'private dwellings' between the 1991 and 1996 Censuses (ABS 1999a). Accordingly, no trend in propensities was explicitly assumed for nonprivate dwellings, and 1996 age-specific propensities to live in a nonprivate dwelling were initially projected to remain constant in future years in all three projections. Propensities to live in private dwelling arrangements were projected on the basis of 1986–96 trends. All annual sets of projected propensities were then forced to total 100 per cent prior to their application to projected populations, introducing an implicit element of adjustment for the effect on private dwelling propensities of the nonprivate dwelling reclassification. This process involved a proportional redistribution across all living arrangements.

If the 1996 dwelling classification had applied at the 1986 and 1991 Censuses, there would have been smaller proportions of people in nonprivate dwellings and, as a corollary of this, higher proportions in other living arrangement categories. Consequently, the 1986–96 trend analysis on which the projections are based will have resulted in steeper increases, and more moderate decreases, in propensities to live in private dwelling arrangements than actually occurred. However, any exaggeration of trends will have been dampened by the adjustment process just referred to, and in any event, for the older population, the impact of changes in propensities on projected numbers in living arrangement categories will have been minor compared to the impact of the ageing of Baby Boomers into that population.

Series K of the population projections assumes annual net immigration of 90,000 people, a total fertility rate declining to 1.6 children per woman by 2005–06 and remaining constant thereafter, and mortality decline sufficient to raise life expectancy at birth to 82.0 years for males and 86.1 years for females in 2051.

Past patterns

As Table 1 shows, the most common living arrangements for persons aged 65 and older in 1986 and 1996 were living as a spouse or partner in a couple family without children (45 per cent and 47 per cent, respectively), living alone (25 per cent and 28 per cent), living as a spouse or partner in a couple family with children (7 per cent and 7 per cent) and residing in a nonprivate dwelling (9 per cent and 7 per cent). While for older people in general, living as a spouse or partner in a couple family without children was the most common experience, this was not the case for

Table 1 Living arrangement propensities (%) of older persons, Australia, 1986, 1991 and 1996

Living arrangement	Aged 65 and over			Aged 85 and over		
	1986	1991	1996	1986	1991	1996
Family households						
Couple family with children						
Husband, wife or partner	6.8	7.4	7.1	1.8	1.4	1.4
Child	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other related individual	2.8	2.7	1.9	4.1	3.6	2.9
Couple family without children						
Husband, wife or partner	44.7	44.6	46.7	11.6	13.0	15.5
Other related individual	1.3	1.2	0.9	4.7	3.9	3.3
One-parent family						
Male lone parent	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.2	0.9	1.0
Female lone parent	3.5	3.1	3.6	5.9	3.9	4.9
Child	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0
Other related individual	0.7	0.7	0.7	1.1	0.9	0.9
Other families						
Related individual	2.8	2.4	1.5	3.3	3.7	1.6
Group households	1.9	1.7	1.5	1.4	1.1	0.9
Lone person households						
Male lone person	6.2	6.7	7.4	5.6	6.4	7.3
Female lone person	19.0	19.6	20.3	19.4	21.6	25.5
Resident of nonprivate dwelling	9.0	8.6	7.1	39.6	39.0	34.6
Total^a	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

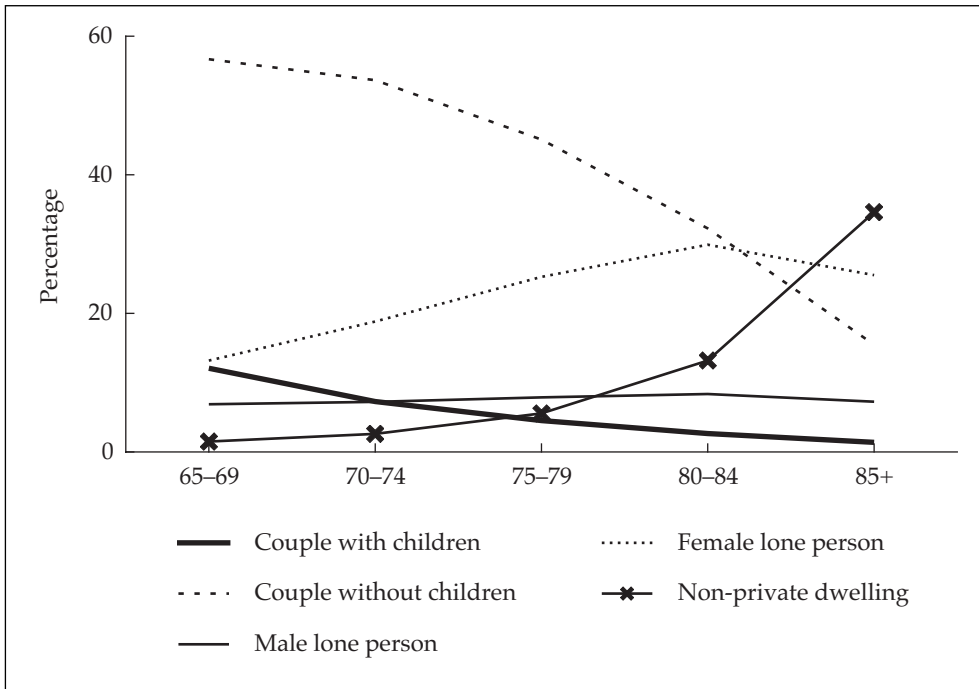
a Includes unrelated individuals living in family households.

Source: ABS (1999a).

the 'old old', those aged 85 and older. Among this group less than 16 per cent had such a living arrangement in 1996.

The declining prevalence of living as a spouse or partner in a couple family without children with increasing age is traced in more detail in Figure 1. Persons aged 65–69 in 1996 had a 57 per cent propensity to have such a living arrangement, falling slightly to 54 per cent for persons aged 70–74. Prevalence then dropped more rapidly to 45 per cent for persons aged 75–79 and 32 per cent for those aged 80–84, before halving to 16 per cent for the 'old old'. This pattern reflects the normal ageing process. Most of the fall is compensated by rises in the propensities to live alone

Figure 1 Percentages of older people in main living arrangement categories by age, 1996



Source: ABS (1999a).

or in a nonprivate dwelling, which are associated with the increasing levels of widowhood, illness and disability that occur with advancing age. From age group 80–84 to age group 85+ the proportion living alone in 1996 did, however, fall slightly, while the proportion living in nonprivate dwellings more than doubled. There was a steady decline in the proportion living as spouses or partners in couple families with children as age increased. This was distinctly a minority living arrangement at all older ages, although a more common arrangement than living in a nonprivate dwelling until age group 75–79.

The likelihood of persons aged 85 and over living as spouses or partners in couple families without children increased from 12 per cent to almost 16 per cent in the period 1986 to 1996. The major reason for this change appears to have been increased support for people to live at home. The mid-1980s saw a shift in government policy under which a number of strategies were initiated to keep older people in independent accommodation for as long as possible, the aim being to delay their entry into aged care accommodation (Hugo 1999). One outcome of this shift has been the Home and Community Care Program, which provides home nursing services, delivered meals, home help and maintenance services, transport and shopping assistance, paramedical services, and respite care (AIHW 2000). A second reason for the change is likely to have been a narrowing of the gap in life expectancies between older men and women coupled with increases in life expectancy that

have delayed widowhood (ABS 2001a). A third would have been reclassification in 1996, as outlined above, of living arrangements previously regarded as 'nonprivate'. Offsetting these changes tending to increase the likelihood of living in a couple family without children was a minor increase in the divorce rate for older Australians (ABS 2001a).

The increase in the likelihood of older Australians living alone between 1986 and 1996, a trend repeated for the 'old old' population (Table 1), can also be attributed, at least in part, to more support for people to live at home, although the true extent of the increase is not clear given the reclassification in 1996 of some living arrangements previously regarded as 'nonprivate'. For persons aged 85 and older, 33 per cent lived alone in 1996, compared to 25 per cent (plus an adjustment for reclassification) in 1986. Among both older people in general and the 'old old', the ratio of females to males living alone was around three to one, although it dropped from 3.1 to 2.7 between 1986 and 1996 for the former group while remaining steady at 3.5 for the latter. This sharp gender difference is a reflection of the greater likelihood of women being widowed, which in turn is a product of their greater longevity coupled with a tendency for husbands to be older than their wives. As is apparent in Figure 1, the peak age for living alone for both sexes was 80–84 years.

While the likelihood of an older Australian residing in a nonprivate dwelling was only 7 per cent in 1996, this increased to 35 per cent for persons aged 85 years or older. About half of these people – 47.5 per cent of those aged 65 years or older and 50.2 per cent of those aged 85 years or older – were living in nursing homes (ABS 1999b).

Projected living arrangements

The three projections of living arrangements produced by the ABS assume that 1996 living arrangement propensities will remain constant (Series A); that there will be a low rate of future change in propensities (other than those for residence in nonprivate dwellings – Series B); and that 1986–96 rates of change will continue (Series C). For Series B, linear trends in propensities from 1986 to 1996 are continued to 2001, then rates of change are reduced by half to 2006 and three-quarters to 2011, after which they remain constant to 2021.

By applying projected propensities to projected populations, the impact of the Baby Boomers ageing becomes apparent (Table 2). The older population is projected to increase from 2.2 million in 1996 to almost 4.1 million in 2021, by which time the first group of Baby Boomers (those born in the period 1946–56) will have turned 65 years old. Older people living as spouses or partners in couple families without children are projected to contribute about half of this increase, approximately doubling from 1.0 million in 1996 to 1.9–2.0 million in 2021. Major increases are also projected for older people living alone (0.6 million to 1.1–1.2 million), as spouses or partners in couple families with children (157,000 to 286,000–318,000) and in nonprivate dwellings (157,000 to 253,000–307,000). Males living alone are projected to increase from 163,000 to 299,000–395,000 and females from 448,000 to 824,000–837,000.

The number of people aged 85 years or older is projected to rise from 202,000 in 1996 to 443,000 in 2021. The relative importance of major living arrangements at the later date varies, depending on the projection. Under Series A 153,000 'old old' people will live in nonprivate dwellings, 145,000 will live alone, and 69,000 will live as

Table 2 Number of older persons (thousand) by living arrangement, Australia, 1996 and 2021

Living arrangement	Aged 65 and over				Aged 85 and over			
	1996	2021			1996	2021		
		A	B	C		A	B	C
Family households								
Couple family with children								
Husband, wife or partner	156.9	286.3	298.7	317.7	2.8	6.1	4.4	2.2
Child	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other related individual	42.2	78.0	47.9	19.1	5.8	12.7	8.1	3.2
Couple family without children								
Husband, wife or partner	1,029.0	1,874.9	1,939.6	2,004.3	31.3	68.5	79.8	97.3
Other related individual	20.5	39.2	23.2	8.3	6.6	14.4	8.7	3.1
One-parent family								
Male lone parent	18.1	33.4	33.1	32.0	2.1	4.5	3.7	2.4
Female lone parent	78.3	144.8	141.0	132.9	10.0	21.8	17.0	9.9
Child	3.0	5.5	5.5	5.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other related individual	14.6	26.9	22.9	16.4	1.8	3.9	3.1	1.9
Other families								
Related individual	33.4	61.4	23.8	4.0	3.3	7.3	2.9	0.5
Subtotal^a	1,401.8	2,561.1	2,541.6	2,542.2	64.0	140.2	128.0	120.5
Group households	33.6	61.5	47.2	29.2	1.9	4.1	2.1	0.6
Lone person households								
Male lone person	162.9	299.2	333.6	394.7	14.7	32.1	36.9	43.8
Female lone person	447.9	823.8	837.2	833.8	51.5	113.0	130.6	157.3
Resident of nonprivate dwelling								
	156.9	307.1	293.0	252.7	69.9	153.1	144.8	120.3
Total^a	2,203.1	4,052.6	4,052.6	4,052.6	201.9	442.5	442.5	442.5

a Includes unrelated individuals living in family households.

Source: ABS (1999a).

spouses or partners in couple families without children. Under Series C these figures respectively fall to 120,000, leap to 201,000 and rise to 97,000. Figures for Series B lie between those for Series A and C. The combined increments from Series A to Series C in numbers living alone and as spouses or partners in couple families without children considerably exceed the reduction in numbers living in nonprivate dwellings. This reflects universal reductions between these series in numbers in other living arrangement categories (Table 2).

But in many ways the differences between the detailed numbers produced by the three projections are of minor concern. What is more important is the comparison between the results of any one projection and figures for 1996 (Table 2). The message is that increases in numbers of older people, and of 'old old' people, in all main living arrangement categories by 2021 will be substantial. This will not primarily be a product of the assumptions made about trends in living arrangements. It will mainly be a product of sheer increases in the sizes of the older and 'old old' populations brought about by ageing, and it should be kept in mind that by 2021 the 'old old' population will not yet include any Baby Boomers.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a complex notion. The 1986 Population Census Ethnicity Committee found that views on the meaning of ethnicity varied widely. A United Kingdom Law Lords' statement given weight by this committee refers to a group regarding itself, and being regarded by others, as a distinct community (ABS 1984). While various indicators exist, including language, ancestry and ethnic strength (Price 2000), the one used here is country of birth.

As the ABS (1999b:19–20) observes, since colonization by Britain in 1788, the composition of Australia's population has been influenced by government immigration policies and economic conditions in both Australia and other parts of the world. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the only immigrants consistently encouraged to settle in Australia were from the United Kingdom and Ireland. After the Second World War, this policy was broadened to include settlers from other European countries. Then, from the 1970s, substantial numbers of immigrants from Asian countries began to be accepted. These patterns of immigration have had a direct bearing on the ethnicity of older people now living in Australia, and are reflected in the age structures of different overseas birthplace groups.

Thus, countries from which immigration to Australia peaked in the 1950s and 1960s now coincide with birthplace groups with high proportions of people aged 65 and over. For example, immigration from Italy peaked in the period 1952–60, and Italy remained an important migration source throughout the 1960s. As Table 3 shows, older people comprised 39.8 per cent of the Italy-born population in 2000. Other birthplace groups that also now include relatively high proportions of older people include Hungary, Poland, former USSR, Greece, the Netherlands and Germany. Each of them also experienced peaks in immigration in the decades immediately following the Second World War.

As Australia's population ages, there will be changes in the ethnicity of the component aged 65 years and older. In projections undertaken by the ABS for the Department of Health and Aged Care, assuming no further overseas migration, Australia's older population doubles from 2.2 million in 1996 to 4.4 million in 2026.

Table 3 Percentages of overseas birthplace groups aged 65+ and 85+, 30 June 2000

Country of birth	Aged 65 and over	Aged 85 and over
United Kingdom	22.9	2.9
Italy	39.8	3.0
Greece	27.8	1.7
Former Yugoslav Republics ^a	16.7	0.9
Netherlands	29.9	2.4
Germany	25.8	1.7
China	15.2	1.5
Poland	38.2	3.6
New Zealand	6.3	0.7
Former USSR & the Baltic states	44.8	5.8
Malta	22.4	1.2
India	12.6	1.1
Hungary	40.4	4.5
Ireland	19.0	1.5
Vietnam	6.1	0.4
Egypt	24.5	1.7
Lebanon	8.6	0.5
Sri Lanka	11.2	1.0
South Africa	8.0	1.0
United States of America	5.8	0.6
Total overseas-born	17.0	1.6

a Includes Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Slovenia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Serbia and Montenegro.

Source: ABS (2001b).

The overseas-born population aged 65 years and older is projected to increase from 682,000 in 1996 (31 per cent of the resident population aged 65 years and older) to 1.5 million in 2026 (33 per cent of the resident older population) (Table 4). Growth over the 30-year period is projected to vary between birthplace groups. High rates of growth are projected for birthplace groups with younger age structures in the base year, such as the Vietnam-born and Lebanon-born, projected to be respectively seven and five times larger in 2026 than in 1996. Slower rates of growth are projected for the Netherlands-born (increasing 52 per cent from 25,300 to 38,500) and Italy-born (increasing 21 per cent from 81,000 to 98,000), reflecting the older age structures of these birthplace groups in the base year. As these projections were prepared only for birthplace groups with non-English-speaking backgrounds, figures for some of Australia's largest birthplace groups, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, are not included (ABS 2000a).

An assessment of the policy implications of these projected changes in the numbers and composition of the ethnic aged needs to go well beyond the bald figures presented in Table 4. It needs to take into account, for example, durations of resi-

Table 4 Projected resident population aged 65 or older in 2026 by country of birth

Country of birth	1996 population	Projected 2026 population ^a
China	18,006	50,564
Germany	27,637	45,565
Greece	26,817	66,276
India	10,897	31,091
Italy	81,014	97,965
Lebanon	5,557	28,395
Netherlands	25,273	38,501
Vietnam	8,031	57,703
Other overseas-born	478,344	1,059,501
All overseas-born	681,576	1,475,561
Total population	2,203,056	4,433,861

a Projections constrained to Series H projection in ABS (1998).

Source: ABS (2000a).

dence in Australia. By 2026 larger proportions of older people in many of these birthplace groups than in 1996 will have arrived in Australia as children, and consequently will be better adjusted to mainstream Australia and perhaps barely distinguishable from it. Poor English language skills, for instance, may be less prevalent among ethnic old. There are also considerations of differing broad levels of adaptation to mainstream culture (the Dutch, for example, are widely held to have adapted more fully than some other groups), and of possible different levels of culturally sensitive support for the aged in different ethnic communities. Attention also needs to be paid to the second generations (the Australia-born children) of overseas birthplace groups, and their capacity for supporting the ethnic elderly. Ethnic age structures can be substantially modified if redefined to include second generations.

Conclusion

Projections to the 2020s for people aged 65 years and over indicate that, although most are likely to live in family situations, large increases in persons living alone and in nonprivate dwellings are likely. Among those aged 85 years and over, 'living in nonprivate dwellings' followed by 'living alone' are projected to be the most common living arrangements in 2021, as indeed they are now. Associated with the increased numbers in these categories will be the ageing of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds, with whom special needs may be associated.

The future social and economic effects of these trends depend upon a variety of

factors. Resources required for social expenditure, income support, aged care, health services and housing provision will be influenced by the living arrangements and other circumstances of the older population. Labour force participation among the older population, levels of private income and financial assets, health and disability status, and availability of support networks will all affect the public resources required. At the same time, competing demands, social trends and government policy in other sectors, such as education, unemployment and family support, will affect the resources available.

In addition to economic imperatives, social attitudes and government policy will affect the mechanisms through which an ageing population is supported, and the roles of government, the private sector, community groups, families and individuals in providing this support. With about 18 per cent of the population projected to be aged 65 and over by 2021 (ABS 2000b), it is worth noting that the voice of older Australians will be influential in shaping these directions through the ballot box.

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