



5.0 Introduction

Australia's population profile is changing: we are living longer than ever before. As a result, older Australians now make up a greater proportion of the total population. In 2017, an estimated 3.8 million Australians (15% of the population) are aged 65 and over compared with 2.2 million (13%) in 2007.

This chapter looks at two of the key issues facing older Australians: aged care and dementia. Many older people are choosing to stay in their home for longer. The clear majority can live independently in households, with or without support. In 2015, only 5.2% of older people lived in cared accommodation, such as nursing homes and aged care hostels.

One in 4 older people aged 65 and over lives alone. Living alone is generally seen as a risk factor for social isolation—a condition that can affect health and wellbeing. Yet, there seems to be minimal differences in social participation between older people who live alone and older people who live with others.

Almost 40% of older people aged 65 and over need help with at least one activity, such as mobility, communication, health care or property maintenance. As might be expected, the older people are, the more likely they are to need help. This assistance may be given informally by family members, friends and neighbours, or formally by a service or organisation. Spouses and partners provide the most informal help for older Australians.

Dementia is a substantial challenge to Australia, particularly as the population continues to age. While it is not caused by age, dementia does primarily affect older people. It is difficult to determine the exact number of people with dementia as there are no national data on how many people are diagnosed. However, estimates suggest that in 2017, around 365,000 Australians had dementia, 99% of whom were aged 60 and over. This number of people affected by dementia is projected to rise considerably, to 900,000 people by 2050.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC), around half of people with dementia lived in cared accommodation (such as residential aged care facilities and hospitals, as well as group homes). The other half lived in households (such as private dwellings and self-care units within retirement villages).

Almost all people with dementia have a disability. The majority (95%) of people living in cared accommodation always needed help with at least one core activity (mobility, self-care or communication) compared with 56% of people living in households.

