6.1 Australians aged 85 years and over

As Australia’s population increases and the ageing of the population progresses, the number of people aged 85 years and over is rapidly increasing compared with younger age groups. This is a welcome trend, marking progress in Australia’s health and wellbeing, including a steady increase in average life expectancy. Further, this group makes a vital contribution to the nation’s knowledge, experience and wisdom, and the richness and diversity of Australia’s families. However, the growth in the number of Australians aged 85 and over also has social and economic implications for the demand for services, particularly services for older people.

Profile of Australians aged 85 and over

The number of Australians in this age group is small compared to the entire population, but it is rapidly growing (see Figure 6.1.1). It is projected that the number of Australians aged 85 years and over will more than double, from 455,400 in 2014 to 954,600 by 2034 (a 110% increase). This would result in this group growing from representing 2% of the population in 2014 to 3% in 2034 (ABS 2013b). The number of people living to the age of 100 and beyond (so-called centenarians) is expected to increase dramatically over this period, from about 4,600 in 2014 to 15,700 in 2034. Another 50 years on, in 2084, there is expected to be more than 100,000 centenarians.

![Figure 6.1.1: Projected growth in number of Australians, by age group, 30 June 2014 to 2034](source: ABS 2013a)
According to the Census, in 2011:

- women accounted for almost two-thirds (65%) of Australians aged 85 years and over (ABS 2012b)
- just over two-thirds (68%) of this group were born in Australia, similar to younger Australians aged 25 and over, but less than the nearly three-quarters for all Australians (74%) (ABS 2012c)
- there were 1,260 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 85 and over (ABS 2012a)—0.3% of this age group compared with 2.7% of Australians as a whole—which reflects the fact that Indigenous Australians have a much lower life expectancy at birth than non-Indigenous Australians
- some 55% of men aged 85 and over were married and 36% were widowed, compared with 15% of women 85 and over who were married and 77% who were widowed (ABS 2012b)
- some 7.6% of Australians aged 85 and over participated in voluntary work; men (8.9%) were more likely than women (6.9%) to do so (ABS 2012b).

Needs of Australians aged 85 and over

Because the prevalence of chronic health conditions and disability increases with age, we can expect that more assistance and care is needed for people aged 85 years and over compared with younger age groups. According to the 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (ABS 2013a):

- the need for assistance with cognitive and emotional tasks was four times greater for Australians aged 85 and over (28%) than Australians aged 65–84 (7%)
- over one-half (59%) of Australians aged 85 years and over reported a need for assistance with health-care compared with one-fifth (20%) of Australians aged 65–84
- a higher proportion of women aged 85 and over (69%) reported the need for assistance with personal activities than men in the same age group (56%); these figures compare with 38% and 41% of women and men aged 65–84 needing assistance, respectively
- in terms of personal activities, the most common type of assistance required for both men and women in this age group was mobility assistance (39% and 54% respectively) followed by self-care (33% and 44%) and communication (14% and 19%). This was a similar pattern to that for Australians aged 65–84, although this younger group had less need for assistance overall.

Services for Australians aged 85 and over

- There is a range of government-funded services designed to support older Australians. These services are more likely to be accessed by those 85 and over given increasing frailty with age. Australians aged 85 years and over receive many of the same services as other Australians, particularly those aged 65 years and over; these include homelessness services, mental health services, aged care services and support pensions.
- In terms of client numbers, the largest specifically aged care service is Home and Community Care, with 236,100 clients aged 85 and over during 2013–14 (AIHW 2014).
- At 30 June 2014, there were 102,000 permanent residents aged 85 and over in Australian Government-subsidised aged care facilities (AIHW 2014).

For more information on the services available to older Australians see Chapter 6 ‘Ageing and the welfare system’.
What is missing from the picture?
Information on the number of people receiving aged care services is available from the National Aged Care Data Clearinghouse. However, it is not yet possible to determine how many people (including those aged 85 and over) receive aged care services overall.

Where do I go for more information?
More information on the characteristics of people 85 and over, including their need for assistance, and experience of service use, is available from the ABS online publication Disability, ageing and carers, Australia: summary of findings, 2012.

References
ABS 2013b. Population projections, Australia, 2012 (base) to 2101. ABS cat. no. 3222.0. Canberra: ABS.
AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2014. AIHW analysis of the National Aged Care Data Clearinghouse data base.