

**ENERGISED,
ENGAGED,
EVERYWHERE:**

**OLDER AUSTRALIANS
AND MUSEUMS**



A JOINT PUBLICATION BY
AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM
AND THE
NATIONAL MUSEUM
OF AUSTRALIA,
CANBERRA

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1. INTRODUCTION

“I NEVER THOUGHT I’D TAKE UP SINGING.
NOW I’M IN TWO CHOIRS.”



Recent studies have shown that the proportion of the Australian population aged 65 years and over grew steadily during the twentieth century and is projected to grow further during this century. The major contributors to this have been the declining fertility rate and increased life expectancy. In 1901 there were 151,000 people aged 65 years and over living in Australia, comprising 4% of the total Australian population. By 1998 this number increased to 2.3 million, or 12% of the total population. It is projected that by 2051 this will have grown to between 6 to 6.3 million, or around 24–26% of the expected total population of Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, ¹1998b, 1999a).

1.1 The Research Project

This research project targeted older Australians aged 65 years and over, both those who currently visited and engaged with museums and those who didn’t. The study was a collaboration between the National Museum of Australia, Canberra and the Australian Museum, Sydney². These institutions were interested to find out more about the older museum audience in order to make an informed contribution to strategic planning and programming decisions, as well as to allow this information to be widely available to the Australian museums sector.

The specific aims of this research were to explore:

- leisure patterns and habits of this audience, including barriers to access;
- levels of interest in and engagement with museums and other cultural institutions;
- perceptions of museums and cultural institutions as leisure and learning venues;
- types of programs that would attract this audience to museums;
- physical access issues.

There were three phases to the research: a literature review; a quantitative study via a telephone poll; and qualitative projects consisting of depth interviews and discussion groups.

1.1.1 Literature Review

The literature review explored selected recent research into the demographics of the Australian population and some of the characteristics of the ageing population. In general, ‘older’ Australians were deemed to be those aged 65 years and over, however some of the literature accessed used different age groupings, such as over 50, over 55, or over 66 years.

¹ The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is Australia’s official statistical organisation. The ABS assists and encourages informed decision-making, research and discussion within governments and the community by providing a high quality, objective and responsive national statistical service (see <<http://www.abs.gov.au>>).

² The National Museum of Australia is located in Canberra, the capital city of Australia. The Museum opened in March 2001, with a vision of exploring the past, illuminating the present and imagining the future (see <<http://www.nma.gov.au>>). The Australian Museum, Sydney, was established in 1827 and is Australia’s oldest natural history museum. The mission of the Museum is to ‘Research, interpret, communicate and apply understanding of the environments and cultures of the Australian region to increase their long-term sustainability’ (see <<http://www.amonline.net.au>>).

The review primarily covered the current demographics of older Australians and, in less detail, those who will become older Australians over the next 50 years. This latter population grouping is often called the ‘baby boomer’ generation. Although this term is not precise, the ‘baby boomers’ are generally described as those born between 1946/47 and 1964/65³. As those who will be aged over 55 at any time in the next 50 years have already been born, the nature of this ageing population can be determined with quite a high degree of certainty (Access Economics, 2001).

1.1.2 Quantitative Research

Two-hundred people aged over 65 years were surveyed by phone between 4 and 11 March 2002. Of these, 100 were from Sydney and 100 from the Canberra/Queanbeyan region. Specific topics covered in the telephone survey were:

- demographic information: age, gender, postcode, education, professional background, country of birth;
- social characteristics: household composition, family composition, participation in community activities (for example, volunteer organisations);
- leisure participation: activities, places visited, memberships;
- awareness of leisure venues, including museums;
- orientation toward learning, topics of interest;
- internet access and usage.

1.1.3 Qualitative Research

There were a number of approaches used in the qualitative phase of the fieldwork. In-home interviews were held with small groups of museum visitors aged over 65 years in Sydney, Canberra, Wagga Wagga, Nowra (the Shoalhaven region) and Bathurst. The sample was selected to include males and females in urban and regional areas aged 65-75 years and over 75 years who were regular and occasional museum visitors. The Jewish and Chinese communities were also included, as were those who visited museums with grandchildren. A total of 80 museum visitors were interviewed during March and April 2002 following a standard topic guide covering issues such as activities/interests; family activities/situation; information sources; perceptions of museums and galleries; responses to topics; and access issues.

In addition to this, group interviews were undertaken with volunteers at the National Museum of Australia, the Australian Museum, and the Museum of the Riverina, Wagga Wagga. Telephone interviews were also conducted with representatives from organisations that provided services to seniors, such as Probus, the Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association of NSW, the Office for an Ageing Australia and the National Seniors Association⁴, as well as tourist operators. Interviews were also held with museum professionals from a range of museums in the Bathurst region.

³ This current study focused on those aged over 65 years. A follow-up study is planned to review characteristics of the ‘baby boomers’: those currently aged 50-64 years.

⁴ See Section 6 and Appendix 1 for further information about these organisations, the services they provide and opportunities for museums.

2. OVERVIEW

“MONDAYS I USUALLY GO OUT TO THE SWIMMING POOL,
THEN SOMETIMES HAVE LUNCH AT A CLUB. TUESDAY I PLAY BOWLS
AND TUESDAY NIGHT I GO TO A CRAFT GROUP [THAT HAS] BEEN
MEETING FOR 25 YEARS. EVERY FRIDAY I GO AND VISIT MY MOTHER.”



This study was undertaken within Australia’s museum sector. Museums Australia defines museum as ‘... an institution that helps people understand the world by using objects and ideas to interpret the past and present and explore the future. A museum preserves and researches collections, and makes objects and information accessible in actual and virtual environments. Museums are established in the public interest as permanent, not-for-profit organisations that contribute long-term value to communities.’ This definition also includes natural, archaeological and ethnographic monuments and sites; botanical and zoological gardens, herbaria, aquaria; science centres; and cultural centres.

2.1 Museums in Australia

For the year ending June, 2000 there were 2,049 museum establishments in Australia, including art galleries, historic properties and war memorials. These institutions ranged from large state and national museums that employed in excess of 100 people to much smaller regional museums and Aboriginal Keeping Places, covering a variety of content, including natural and social history, anthropology and archaeology, science, technology, industrial design and so on. Fifty-eight per cent of these organisations were operated on a voluntary basis (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001).

Museums in Australia make an impact in three major ways – economically, socially and politically (adapted from Persson, 2000). Economic impact is measured through revenue, expenditure and assets. In the 1999–2000 financial year Australian museums generated \$716 million in revenue through admissions, fundraising and business enterprises; they achieved over 27 million admissions, employed over 7,000 people and spent in excess of \$640 million. Museums also house valuable collections. At the end of June 2000 there were over 61 million artefacts, artworks and museum objects located in museums (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001). In addition to this, museums make a significant financial contribution to the tourism, travel and leisure industries.

Socially, museums preserve, research and communicate Australia’s cultural and natural heritage to range of audiences. In this way they are places for public learning and education in both physical and virtual contexts. They also provide an opportunity for public participation: almost 30,000 volunteers work in museums across Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001). Museums are also increasingly reaching out to a broad range of communities through research, collection management and access, as well as through public programs and exhibitions, and contribute to social change and inclusiveness (Kelly and Gordon, 2002).

In terms of political impact, new knowledge generated through scientific research and scholarship feeds into policy and decision-making by governments, industry and communities. Museums also act as a lobby group for issues of national significance, especially in the areas of cultural heritage, social justice, biodiversity and sustainability. In operating at both a local and global level through collaborations and through the use of new technologies, museums in Australia and internationally are important institutions with a capacity for impacting on and shaping future economic, social and political change (Brown, 1997; Freedman, 2000; Griffin, 1998; Kelly and Gordon, 2002; Sandell, 1998, 2002; Weil, 1999).

Museums in Australia in the past four years have been in a state of great change. For example, there have been new directors in seven major state museums and at the National Museum of Australia. Coupled with this, there was significant capital funding available in some states, with new large museum developments in Victoria and Canberra, provision of funding across the heritage sector in Queensland and a vigorous program of development of regional museums and galleries in New South Wales. Whether this trend continues, however, remains to be seen.

There are many challenges facing museums in Australia. Statistical data shows that in 1996, 28% of Australians aged over 15 had visited a museum in the previous 12 months, yet in the most recent population survey this figure had dropped to 20% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999d). In Australia, attendance was significantly higher for those born in overseas English speaking countries, compared to those born either in Australia or overseas in a non-English speaking country (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999b). The likelihood of visitation to natural history/science museums decreased as income declined (Sweeney Research, 2001). However, this study also found that those aged over 55 years were more likely to have been to a public art gallery in the previous twelve months, with females aged over forty-five being frequent attendees.

Funding restrictions and increased competition from many areas in the leisure, educational and tourism industries for a finite number of people means that museums in Australia must become more responsive to the range of audiences that use their services, both physically and via the Internet (Kelly, 2001; Scott and Burton, 2001). The demands of globalisation, access to new technologies and increasingly informed communities demanding rights to their cultural heritage are issues that museums in Australia need to deal with. Providing services to rural and regional constituents is a key policy area for governments in Australia who are increasingly inclined to fund museums outside capital cities to encourage cultural growth and economic sustainability. This has meant that the large city-based museums across Australia have had to think differently about their service provision, reaching out to the regions rather than focusing on increasing local visitation (Kelly and Gordon, 2002).

Museums have always seen themselves as having some kind of educational role. The earliest museums were founded on the premise of education for the uneducated masses, 'cabinets of curiosities' (Bennett, 1995; Weil, 1995) established to '... raise the level of public understanding, ... to elevate the spirit of its visitors, ... to refine and uplift the common taste' (Weil, 1997, p.257). People currently writing about museums see the need

for a change in the museum mindset from places of education to places for learning, responding to the needs and interests of learners who visit and use their services (Bradburne, 1998; Carr, 1999; Freedman, 2000; Griffin, 1998; Paris, 1997a, 1997b; Pitman, 1999; Weil, 1997, 1999). Weil summed this up by stating that museums need to transform themselves from ‘... *being* about something to being *for* somebody’ (1999, p.229, original emphasis), and that ‘... [the] museum must see itself not as a cause but as an instrument’ (p.254). This has resulted in a conceptual shift for museums from being primarily curator-driven to becoming more market-responsive, focusing on the needs of audiences and their learning.

2.2 Trends in Australian Society

The prominent Australian social researcher, Hugh Mackay has looked at the challenges facing Australian society over the next few years, with some of the most significant being the rise in single-person households, increase in disproportionate incomes with growing numbers of both the very-wealthy and the poor, longer working hours for a smaller number of those in full-time paid employment, and an increase in uncertainty about the future (Mackay, 1997, 2001).

In order to understand the trends and issues underlying Australian society Mackay looked at adult development from a social perspective. Three age groups were described in order to demonstrate the radical changes in Australia and to explain the differences in attitudes, values and outlook between each. The ‘*Lucky*’ *Generation* were born in the 1920s, and lived through the great depression, the Second World War and the subsequent economic boom periods of the 1950s and 1960s. He proposed five defining characteristics of adults in this group – loyalty in relationships and to social institutions, such as the church; an attitude of saving, not debt; a well-developed work ethic; a sense of mutual obligation to family, friends, employers and to the broader community; and patriotism. The post-war baby boomers, the ‘*Stress*’ *Generation*, were born in the late 1940s to the late 1950s. They grew up in a period of unprecedented economic growth and prosperity, yet have had to come to grips with instability in work, relationships and constant change, with uncertainty and time pressures combining to make theirs a stressful existence. The ‘*Options*’ *Generation*, born in the 1970s, see themselves as individuals, with the flexibility and freedom to choose from a range of options available to them, favouring short-term goals and temporary solutions rather than long-term plans and commitment (Mackay, 1997, 2001).

Mackay pointed out that these differences were not due to maturity but were ‘... signs of an emerging social reality in which the only certainty is *uncertainty*’ (1997, p.180, original emphasis). The complexities of modern life and challenges presented by this meant that Australians were taking on multiple roles and multiple identities: ‘... our sex, marital status, family relationships, work and social groups, and even our passions, each define only a part of us’ (1997, p.194), being a product of the society and time that shaped us.

Other key issues include the growing number of Australians who are taking up new technologies (Nelson, 1999), as well as larger concerns such as reconciliation and social justice (Kelly and Gordon, 2002).

It is within this context that this study was conducted in order to uncover the needs of adults aged over 65 years as a key current and future audience group. To date, there has been little targeted research undertaken on this audience in a museum context (see Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Sachatello-Sawyer and Fellenz, 2001). Changing demographic patterns in Australian society means that multi-generational group visitors will be on the increase. Coupled with this, lifelong learning is becoming a prominent issue in museology and educational discourse (Anderson, 1997; Rubenson, 2000; Watson, 1999), hence the need to understand the characteristics and motivations of older learners.

3. OLDER PEOPLE DEFINED

“MY SON GOT US INTO [COMPUTING] WHEN HE GAVE US
HIS OLD COMPUTER. I WROTE A LETTER AND PRINTED IT OUT.
I DON’T LIKE THE SCREEN AT ALL, BUT IT IS IMPERATIVE
THAT WE KEEP UP.”



Over the next 50 years the proportion of the older population is projected to increase in every state and territory in Australia. In order to understand the scope and characteristics of older audiences a range of statistics and reports were accessed and summarised. A range of issues specific to this audience, including life-stages and circumstances, health and income and assets were also studied.

3.1 Statistics

The percentage of people aged over 65 compared to those aged 15–64 will rise very gradually during the current decade, remaining under 20%. But in the decade of the 2010s, the number of people aged over 65 will increase steadily. Within 20 years, 22% of the population will be over 65, or over 4 million people, as shown on Table 1. By sheer weight of representation this will be an enormously influential group.

Table 1. Australia’s Population 1901-2051

Year	Percentage of total population aged 65+	Number of persons	Percentage of population aged 85+	Number of persons
1901	4%			
1998	12%	2.3 million		
2001	12.4%	2.4 million	1.3%	255,600
2021	17.9%	4.02 million	2%	440,500
2031	21.3%	5.05 million	2.6%	612,200
2041	23.3%	5.69 million	3.8%	920,400
2051	24-26%	6-6.3 million	4.5%	1.1 million

(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999a, 1999b)

This shows that the internal structure of the older population will also change. Those aged over 85 will increase from 11% of the over 65 population in 2001, to 17–18% in 2051 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 1999).

The future milestones of the ‘baby boomer’ population have implications for financial and health support. For example, in 2002 those born in 1947 (the peak year of the baby boomers) will reach 55 years. At that age many can access superannuation and may opt for early retirement. In 2012 those born in 1947 will celebrate their 65th birthday, and in this single year the population aged over 65 will grow by 4%. During the years 2012–2028 the population of those aged over 65 will grow by an average of 2.9% a year, at least four times faster than the total population. In the year 2022 the baby boomers will start to reach 75, and their use of health services and residential care will start to increase considerably (Access Economics, 2001).

Over the next 50 years the proportion of the older population is projected to increase in every state and territory. Tasmania is projected to overtake South Australia as the state with the largest population of older people (30%–39% compared with 28%–32% in South Australia). The proportion of older people in the Australian Capital Territory is projected to approach that of the other states. The Northern Territory, however, is projected to have a noticeably younger population, with only 9–11% of its population aged over 65. While the majority of Australians live within 50 kilometres of the coastline, older people were more likely to live closer to the coast. In 1996, 32% of people aged over 65 lived within five kilometres of the coast, compared to 25% of the rest of the population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999a, 1999c).

In 1995 Australia’s population age-structure followed a similar pattern to that found throughout the developed world, with Australia having a lower level of ageing than many European countries (as did Canada, New Zealand and the United States). Other countries, especially many in the Asia/Pacific region, have lower proportions of older people compared to the total population, such as China with 7%. Sweden had the highest proportion, with 22% of the population being aged over 65 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999c).

3.1.1 Gender

Among older Australians the population is skewed toward women as, on average, women live longer than men. For example in 1998 there were more older women than men in the population, with this imbalance increasing with age. For people aged 65–69, 51% were women, and for those aged over 95 years the proportion was 77% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999a, 1999c). However, improving health among older men is lessening this disparity. The proportion of women in the over 65 age group decreased from 58% in 1976 to 56% in 1996, and is expected to decrease further to 54% in 2016 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 1999).

3.1.2 Country of Birth

Older Australians are not an homogenous group and much of their individual interests and outlook is influenced by their country of birth and their command of English. In 2001 about 25% of older people in Australia were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Within the overseas-born older population the proportion of persons from non-English speaking countries varied significantly with age.

The changing pattern of immigration over time is reflected in birthplace. In 1998, for example, 32% of those aged over 65 had been born overseas, specifically the United Kingdom. Among overseas-born persons aged over 80, 46% were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, with this proportion increasing to nearly 60% of overseas-born persons in the 65-79 age group. Within this older group the propensity of older people to speak English generally increased with the length of time since their arrival, with long-term residents more likely than more recent immigrants to speak English at home (22% compared with 10%). However, the overall likelihood of speaking English at home varied markedly between different birthplace groups. For example, less than 10% of older people who were born in Vietnam, Greece or Italy spoke English at home, compared with over 30% of older people from Germany, the Netherlands or India. In 1996, 89% of Vietnamese-born and 76% of Chinese-born immigrants were unable to speak English well, compared with 56% of Greek-born and 44% of Italian-born immigrants (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999a, 1999c; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 1999).

3.2 The over 65 cohort

The over 65s are the nameless generation preceding the baby-boomers who won't enter this demographic for another 10 years or so. As a group, the over 65s have been shaped by their own particular historical experiences which differ from those of the next generation. For example, all of them have personal memories of World War 2 either as a child, a teenager or as a young adult establishing career and family choices. The world they step into as 70-year-olds is radically different from the world they entered as 20-year-olds. When asked about the most remarkable change in their lifetime, some older members of the current over-65 cohort have replied 'electricity'. Many of them remember living without sewerage. Participants in the qualitative research recalled when Sydney had only one museum that 'covered everything'. The over-65 cohort spans a wide timeframe and encompasses considerable differences in life experiences. While participants in this research expressed views similar to 'you are only as old as you feel', there were marked differences overall between people aged 65 and those who were over 80 years. The following sub-groups⁵ are helpful when discussing some of the differences within the over-65 cohort:

- Young-old, aged 65–74 years, born in the Depression years of the 1930s
- Old-old, aged 75–84 years, born in the growth years of the 1920s
- Oldest-old, aged over 85 years, born before and during World War 1.

The Young-old are characterised as having time and energy for active engagement in personal, family and community activities. In general, they are able to pursue their own interests and contribute their energies to family and community. As a group, the Old-old contrast with the Young-old in their substantially reduced energy, due either to health

⁵ The terms 'young-old' and 'old-old' were originated by Bernice Neugarten in 1971, and have since been expanded to three categories in response to the increasing health and longevity in the over 65 age group.

problems, to increased frailty or the added responsibilities of caring for others. Many of them have begun the process of simplifying their lives. Oldest-old have much more limited energy and tend to live quite constrained lives close to home. They are quite likely to need the support of family, friends or organisations in carrying out the ordinary activities of life. Two-thirds of these are women.

Table 2 summarises the major historical events experienced by the over-65 cohort across the three sub-groups. The table also includes the ‘Near-old’ group that is on the threshold of joining this cohort.

Table 2. Cohort Lifecycle Events

Events	Oldest-old 85+ years	Old-old 75–84 years	Young-old 65–74 years	Near-old 55–64 years
1900-20 WW1	Born before 1917 Childhood	-	-	-
1920-30 Prosperity Cars	Child/teen	Born 1917-26	-	-
1930-40 Depression Radio	Teen/young adult	Childhood	Born 1928-37	-
1940-50 WW2	Adult/family	Child/teen	Childhood	Born 1937-46
1950-60 Economic growth TV, sewerage	Family	Teen/young adult	Child/teen	Childhood
1960-70 Prosperity Social change	Maturity	Adult/family	Teen/young adult	Child/teen
1970-80 Social change Cultural pride	Maturity	Family	Adult/family	Teen/young adult
1980-90 Technology Computers		Maturity	Family	Adult/family

With long personal histories the over 65s can draw on experiences that may be 20, 30 or 50 years old when making sense of the world. For younger generations, including many museum professionals, visitors in the over 65 age group can be regarded as walking time machines, because they carry in their memories experiences that younger people can access only second-hand through historical records.

3.3 Self-perception and social interests

A number of studies have been undertaken of how older Australians perceive themselves. It has been found that older Australians were often depicted in stereotypical ways that bore

little relationship to the diversity of their experiences and lifestyles (Office for an Ageing Australia, 2000b).

In two studies conducted in 1998 and repeated in 2000 (di Marzio, 2000) it was found that the concerns of older Australians in the latter survey were similar to those in the former as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Concerns of Older Australians

Concern	% 1998	% 2000
Health	41	46
Financial security	43	38
Personal safety	24	26
Being a burden on others	12	16
Being placed in a nursing home	6	10

(Source: di Marzio, 2000)

The positive things about growing older identified by participants in the 1998 survey were linked to freedom of choice: to be able to do what one wanted and when one wanted, notwithstanding any financial or health restrictions. The main positive associations in relation to ageing were having more time for activities of their choice (36%); spending more time with family (24%); and travelling (15%). From the 2000 survey the main positive associations they had in relation to ageing had changed to: having more time for activities of their choice (29%); having grand/great grandchildren (22%); and not having to work (16%).

In terms of overall life satisfaction, findings from International Social Science Surveys suggested that older people reported a slightly more positive life satisfaction than younger people (Office for an Ageing Australia, 2000a, 2000b). However, while older Australians felt that they had a role in society and a contribution to make, there was widespread agreement that any such role was under threat and that future generations of older Australians may become even more marginalised. Sixty-five per cent of the 1998 survey respondents believed that society generally viewed older people with less respect than they deserved, and by 2000 this perception had increased to 68% (di Marzio, 2000).

In the face of major changes, continuity is an important protective factor. Most participants in this study continued, as far as they could, to participate in community life including visits to cultural institutions like museums. It was clear that the ability to continue to do things that have been important was reassuring and enriching for older people. Family members and, more particularly, peers were especially supportive in helping individuals to maintain this continuity.

In advanced old age, family ties buffer against what can be described as ‘the pain of survivorship’. All participants in this research reported high levels of integration with social networks, especially family and peer friendship groups. Many participants also had connections with formal networks such as church groups, pensioner/retiree associations, professional associations and hobby or social clubs. The high degree of social engagement of people in this study may not be typical of all people over 65 years because the focus on museum visitors could have excluded those who are more isolated or ‘stay at home’ people. The *LeisureScope*⁶ survey showed that people who visit museums regularly or occasionally were likely to be more socially active across a range of venues than non-visitors. It is likely that the over 65s in general may not be as active as this sample had been. Social isolation can make it harder for over 65s to meet the challenges they face. The greatest cause of social isolation in this age group was the inevitable death of significant others. However, other factors such as negative stereotypes, retirement and physical decline also diminished social interaction for the aged.

As the Young-old were recently retired, many of them found new activities and interests that minimised the personal disruption and loss of prestige that occurred with retirement. Historically speaking, retirement is a recent phenomenon occurring over the last century along with technological advances. Today, by age 65, 83% of men and 91% of women were not in the paid labour force. While the early years of retirement can open new horizons, many of the Old-old and Oldest-old in this study indicated that their horizons were shrinking. The personal circle of home, hobbies and interests, family and friends, and health issues were paramount for many of the oldest participants as they maintained the boundaries of their lives rather than expanded them. Simplification was a key aspect of this maintenance process, with most of the Old-old and Oldest-old reporting examples of culling their material possessions, or moving to houses that were smaller and closer to family members or service amenities.

3.4 Health

Australians today are generally fitter and healthier than their predecessors and can expect to enjoy relatively good health and a good quality of life well into old age. Australians also perceive themselves to be healthy: in a recent survey the majority of older Australians rated their health as good, very good or excellent (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 1999). However, research suggests that there is a relationship between socio-economic status of older people and their health, with those having higher incomes and more education reporting better health than those with lower incomes (Office of Senior Interests, 1997). Most older people are able to live independently and require no assistance with their daily tasks. It was not until people were relatively elderly that they moved into any form of nursing home or cared accommodation. Very few of those up to the age of 74 lived in care, however this increased to 31% of those aged 85–94 and to 58% of those over 96 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999c).

⁶ *LeisureScope*[®] is a twice-yearly survey of 1,000 Sydney households focusing on patterns and trends in leisure participation (see <<http://www.envirometrics.com/>>). In 2001, Sydneysiders who had visited museums made 62 visits to major venues compared with only 30 visits made by those who had not been to museums.

Australians are improving on all measures of life expectancy. Life expectancy from birth rose continuously during the twentieth century, with the exception of the period during the 1960s when death from cardiovascular disease increased, particularly for men (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 1999). A new method has been developed of calculating longevity, which essentially records the average life span before the onset of a serious disability requiring institutional care. The longevity figure for Australia is 73.2 years, second only to Japan which has an average of 74.5 years (Lowe, 2002).

There are a range of disabilities, sensory loss, and chronic diseases that, while increasing with age, are not necessarily inevitable ageing conditions. There is also some debate as to whether disability has just been postponed (Office for an Ageing Australia, 2000b). The most common health problems among older Australians are arthritis, vision and hearing problems, high blood pressure, heart disease and varicose veins. Older men are more likely to experience deafness and heart disease, with older women more likely to have arthritis, hypertension and varicose veins (Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, 1999). It has been estimated that about 10% of all Australians experience difficulty hearing (Office of Senior Interests, 1997).

Although the presence of a long-term condition may impact on a person's ability to perform everyday tasks, a 1998 survey revealed that 46% of people with a long-term condition or impairment did not experience such restrictions. As people aged their likelihood of having a disabling condition increased, with those restricting core activities of self-care, mobility and communication, increasing with age, from 38% of people aged 65–74 to 83% of people aged over 85 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999c). Mobility was the area in which most assistance was required (99%), followed by assistance with self-care (82%), and 47% needed assistance with communication (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 1999).

Of all the stages of life, old age presents the greatest challenges. Recognising one's own mortality and maintaining self-esteem during a period of physical decline are central to this challenge. Several participants in this research were grieving for the recent loss of a partner, child or relative. In addition, quite a number were accommodating their activities to the declining capabilities (physical and mental) of themselves or their partner. Others were moving house or assessing whether they should do so. One participant reported that she and her husband were very active before he became disabled. Whereas they had previously made interstate trips by train, organised trips for other Chinese people who didn't speak sufficient English, gone for drives with friends, the husband now needs a wheelchair and nightly dialysis and they are restricted to driving to local shops, attending church, visiting friends and special occasion meals in local restaurants.

3.5 Income and Assets

3.5.1 Employment/Unemployment

There are two opposing trends in workforce participation – earlier retirement and the increase in women in the workforce. Currently, the main reasons for early retirement and intended early retirement from full-time work were the desire for more leisure time (33%) and health reasons (29%) (Office of Senior Interests, 1997). In the future, however, if many

older Australians are to continue enjoying the standard of living they have experienced as adults in a fairly affluent period, they may have to continue working to fund their longer life span. Coupled with this, better health may also allow greater participation in paid work.

Although men were still more likely to work than women, they were likely to spend an increasing proportion of their lives in retirement, especially with increasing life expectancy. On the other hand, women were spending an increasing proportion of their lives in paid work, although from age 55 upwards participation by women dropped off markedly. Of women aged 55–59, participation in the workforce has increased by 15% over the past 20 years as the new generation of working women continue working into their mature years. It is projected that women aged 55–59 and 60–64 could attain comparable levels of participation to men of the same age groups, while the growth in the number of women aged over 65 will allow another rich source of growth in the workforce (Access Economics, 2001). In 1997 men aged over 65 who were in paid work spent 5 hours and 45 minutes per day working, and women spent 4 hours and 25 minutes in paid employment (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998a).

Currently, many older Australians live a ‘portfolio’ lifestyle, combining paid or unpaid work with education and leisure. They involved themselves in a range of daily activities, which may include time for creativity, learning new things, travelling, entertaining, hobbies and socialising (Office of Senior Interests, 1997). However the desire, or need, to remain employed needs to be balanced against the difficulties and prejudices this age group meets in the workforce. Older workers were also less likely to have post-school qualifications. In 1995 approximately 45% of the 45–64 years age group in New South Wales had less than upper secondary qualifications (Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, 1999). This means that ‘The establishment of a culture of continuous learning and re-skilling is essential to maximising the contribution of mature age workers to economic growth’ (Access Economics, 2001, p.xv), hence the growth of the lifelong learning movement (Rubenson, 2000; Watson, 1999).

3.5.2 Income

In this older age group discretionary income is traditionally small, but as the baby boomers enter retirement there should be greater access to income due to changes in superannuation programs. Ageing is a direct cause of dependency only to the extent that those not working are reliant for income on those in the workforce. In practice there is a range of means of earning income: labour; shares; savings (superannuation and other); real estate; and other productive assets. Access Economics reported that issues such as home ownership, relative wealth and personal interests and preferences impacted on the lifestyles of older people.

Figures vary on the average weekly income of older Australians. A New South Wales study reported that ‘Older people, as an age group, have the lowest incomes of all Australians, with an average of \$319 per week per person and only \$429 per couple. However, they are much more likely to own a home and other assets’ (Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, 1999, p.3). The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported

that in 1996–97 the median weekly income of singles aged over 65 living alone was \$194, compared with \$390 for those aged 16–64. For couples without dependants those aged over 65 had a median weekly income of \$348 compared with \$830 for younger couples (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999c).

Despite the *Superannuation Guarantee Act 1992* (Cwlth) Government pensions and benefits remain the main source of income for older people. In 1996–97 Government pensions were the principal source of income for 74% of people aged over 65. The remaining 16% were principally self-funded through private sources such as property investments (11%), superannuation (9%) and wages or salaries (3%). The reliance on government sources of income increased with age (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999c).

Overall, it was anticipated that, in the future, people will have better retirement incomes than they would have had on the age pension alone, but forecasts suggest that they will not necessarily move off the age pension entirely (Office for an Ageing Australia, 2000b). With superannuation now more widespread and with increasing real incomes, the proportion of the retired population needing to rely fully or even partially on the pension should theoretically decline over time (Access Economics, 2001).

3.5.3 Assets

The area in which older Australians are wealthier is in their assets, particularly in home ownership: 'The over 55s account for 21 per cent of Australia's population, but head up households that own a remarkable 39 per cent of the nation's household wealth, and account for 25 per cent of all disposable income. The over 65s head up households owning almost half of all deposits in the nation's financial institutions. Mature consumers are the wealthiest in the nation' (Access Economics, 2001, p 49).

Seventy-seven per cent of people aged over 60 owned their own homes. Those who did not were more likely to be in poverty as their living costs were much higher (Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, 1999). In 1996, the majority (77%) of older people who lived in private dwellings lived with their partners or on their own. The remainder were mostly living in family households with their children (12%), their children's family (5%), or with relatives other than their children (3%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999c). Population studies indicate that older people were much more independent than common stereotypes suggested. In the qualitative research most participants were living in the family home that they had occupied for several decades. In the Shoalhaven region some participants had moved to the area on retirement. Some had moved to Canberra on retirement to be closer to their children and grandchildren. While most participants were living independently, a few lived in retirement villages or in dwellings adjacent to their children.

4. OLDER PEOPLE AND LEISURE

“WE’RE BUSY PEOPLE. WE DON’T JUST ENJOY OURSELVES, WE DO USEFUL THINGS.”



The demographic data showed that, in the years to come, there will be a large proportion of the population aged over 65. Most of this group will be enjoying good health and an income that will allow them to make the most of their increased time and opportunity for leisure. On the other hand, an extended life expectancy may force some to remain in paid employment, while others may find they need to spend a great deal of their time caring for others. A sizeable proportion may also find that their ability to participate in leisure pursuits may be restricted by ill health or reduced income.

4.1 Leisure Participation

Data suggested that older people have more free time than younger people: ‘In 1997, older people averaged about 74 hours a week on free time activities, compared with 63 hours for those aged 15–64. Passive leisure pursuits such as talking, reading, watching television, relaxing and doing hobbies or craftwork took up most of older people’s free time’ (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999c, p 114). Ninety-nine per cent of older people had one or more televisions in their home, with most of this older group spending a great deal of their time watching television. A relatively high proportion of people aged over 60 years watched television during the afternoon (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998a; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999c).

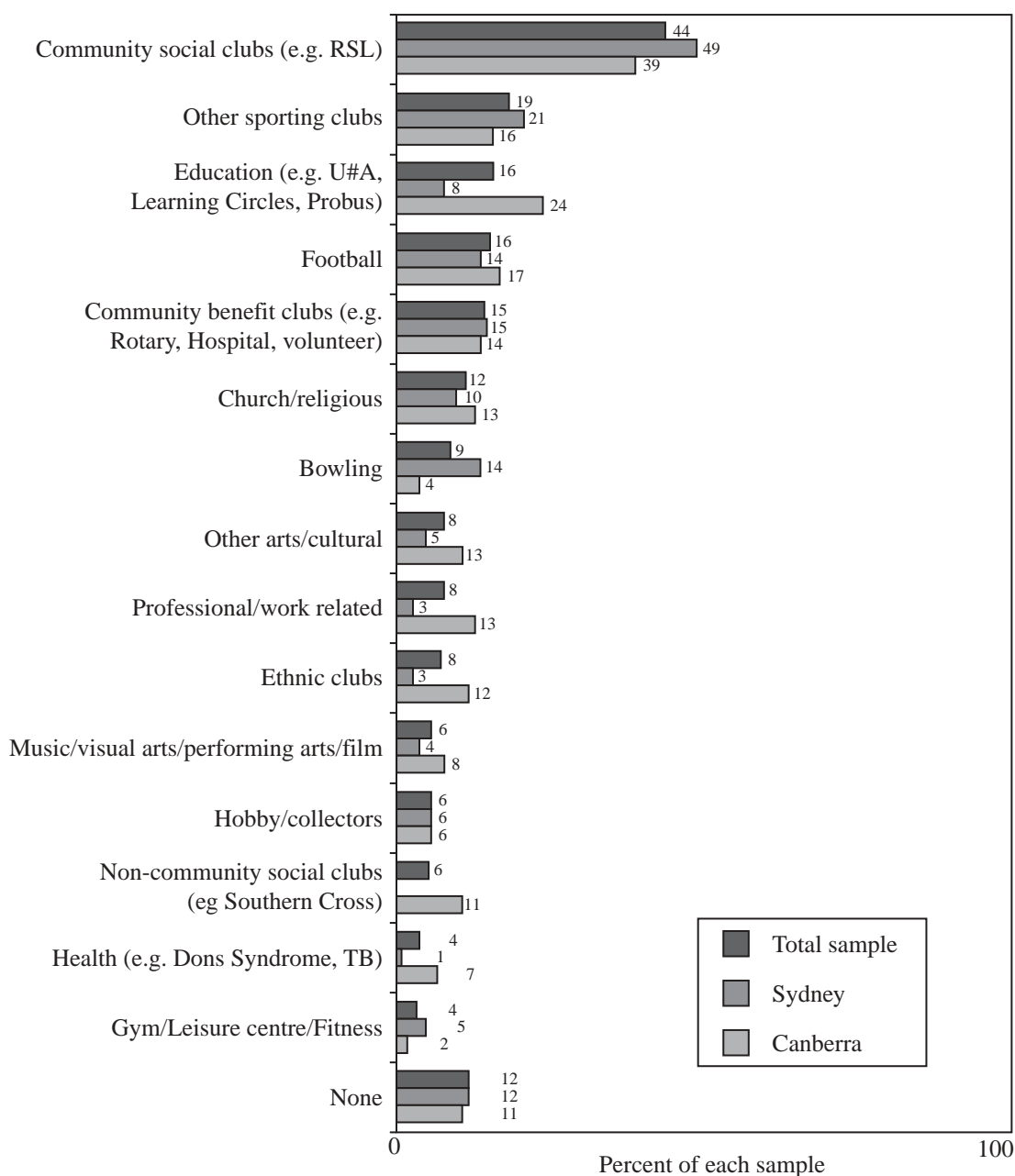
This did not mean, however, that most older people spent their lives in passive pursuits. Most retired people were socially engaged and maintained active, independent lives. A Seniors Card survey of those aged over 60 years indicated that 75% of members sampled had travelled in that year; 61% had eaten at a club an average of 4.5 times during the year; and 75% of respondents drove a motor vehicle. Seniors were also more likely to participate in activities such as gardening; cinema, theatre and concert going; and visiting art galleries and museums (Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, 1999).

Various studies have indicated that older Australians participated in a wide variety of activities. A recent analysis of Sydney adults revealed that the most popular leisure pursuits were gardening/working around the house (83%); making/fixing things around the house (72%); going to restaurants (65%); watching a video (54%); participating in hobbies (60%); and visiting a museum, gallery or other exhibition (30%) (Environmetrics, 2001).

An Australian Bureau of Statistics investigation into leisure pursuits reported that in the 12 months to June 1999, 42% of older men and 33% of older women participated in some form of sport or physical activity, with walking and lawn bowls being the most popular; 36% attended cultural venues such as cinema; 34% a library; and 27% a botanic garden (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999b).

In another study, the majority of participants surveyed were engaged in activities outside the home. One-third of the men and a quarter of the women aged 55–75 years belonged to a sporting club and slightly fewer men and slightly more women belonged to other clubs (e.g. Senior Citizen Centres, church groups), with the element of common interest being the most fundamental reason for the existence of community groups and an individual's participation in community activities (Office for an Ageing Australia, 2000a, 2000b). The quantitative survey found that club activities were an important aspect of leisure for the elderly, with only 12% of this group not being a member of any club or organisation. Figure 1 shows the range of club membership for those surveyed.

Figure 1. Membership of Organisations and Clubs



It has been found that social isolation reduces the quality of life for older people and is associated with poorer health, depression and increased risk of institutionalisation. 'For many older people quality of life after retirement is determined by the strength of their family relationships, the links that they have with the broader community, and the extent to which they feel that they are valued and respected members of society' (Office for an Ageing Australia, 1999a, p 24⁷). Participation in any activity often brings people into contact with others, which reduces social isolation and builds meaning into their lives as part of a community. The need to meet, socialise and express oneself is common to people of all ages. The period after paid employment was a time when many people were less involved in financial responsibilities and raising children and was often seen by older Australians as a stage in life where there was the opportunity to take up activities that they had not previously had time for, including travel, hobbies and recreation (Office for an Ageing Australia, 1999a, 2000a, 2000b).

For many older people the distinction between leisure and non-leisure was blurred. Participants in the qualitative research discussed a wide variety of activities that ranged beyond those that might, strictly speaking, be regarded as leisure activities. For example, regular activities like cooking or gardening were seen by some as dull necessities and by others as pleasant interests or major hobbies.

4.2 Committed/Uncommitted Time

As the work versus leisure distinction was limited for the over 65s, a more useful concept proposed is 'committed time' versus 'uncommitted time'. Committed time was taken up by responsibilities, obligations and routine expectations including such things as regular sport (tennis on Tuesdays), classes, family commitments (pick up the grandchildren from school), church activities, voluntary work, and so on. Uncommitted time was the time available for spontaneous choice activities. It was often used for undertaking more of the committed time activities, or could be used for entirely different things.

A common pattern noted in this research was the tendency to maintain a status quo of uncommitted time. When large amounts of time suddenly become uncommitted, on retirement for example, many people took up new interests and committed their time to regular obligations of various kinds. As they got older, most found that their available energy declined due to their own physical capability or the need to care for their partner. In effect, new commitments arose. A common response noted in this research was to drop some of the adopted 'committed time' activities, thus allowing more time for the new necessities and maintaining a proportion of 'uncommitted time'. Many free-choice activities could be treated as either committed time activities or uncommitted time activities by participants in this research.

Visiting museums and exhibitions was nearly always treated as an activity for time that was not committed elsewhere. It was only those who participated as volunteers that engagement with museums became a 'committed time' leisure activity. One example where museum visits happened during committed time was where a group that met regularly, such as a

⁷ This office falls under the Australian Department of Health and Ageing (Commonwealth). It was previously called Office for Older Australians. Reports have been referenced under the new name.

Thursday morning church-based seniors group, chose to visit a museum during that period of committed time.

Quite a high proportion of people in this study reported that they had very little free time. Many of them took on a wide range of commitments that gave structure to their day and week, describing a weekly program which left few free days. Older people liked to have a pattern to their life, so much so that structured commitments sometimes left little time for spontaneous activities.

Regardless of their actual activity level, many older people liked to feel busy. While it is likely that this was partly perceptual, it did 'lock up' time and reduce the scope for spontaneous action. This generation was very serious about the commitments they made and they took pride in meeting their responsibilities.

4.3 Major Leisure Activities

Hobbies and interests included studies such as history (e.g. local, family or maritime), science (e.g. bird watching), literature, art and languages, general knowledge and current affairs. Also mentioned were craft activities such as handicraft, cooking, embroidery, gardening, woodworking and home renovation. Singing in choirs and collecting activities (stamps, Folio Society books) were also noted. Casual activities such as crosswords, Scrabble, and Bridge were popular. For some, reading the newspaper or books were important interests.

Both men and women mentioned home-care activities such as cleaning and gardening as part of their lifestyle. While not all of the activities discussed were recreational, in many cases the essentials were carried out in a relaxed manner giving them a semi-recreational character. Many participants in these in-home interviews demonstrated considerable pleasure in the comfort of their home. It was clear that they had created a home environment that they enjoyed and which supported many of their interests.

While many participants in this research dismissed computers as irrelevant to their lives or out of their reach, a high proportion were taking steps to learn how to use one. Quite a number said that they had acquired a computer when their children upgraded. Many were interested and committed to learning how to use their computer. They said that it was essential that they learn, regardless of their intrinsic interest, because it was important to keep in touch with contemporary society. In the quantitative survey it was found that 35% had access to the Internet at home, decreasing significantly with age. For example, 51% of those aged 65–69 had Internet access, while only 7% of those aged over 80 did. Males were also more likely to have access to the Internet. Twenty per cent of those surveyed had accessed the Internet in the previous 12 months.

Community and charity work absorbed a considerable amount of time for many people, mostly women in this study. While some were involved in just one or two small-scale activities, such as occasional fundraising activities, others were heavily involved in a wide range of community activities. These people tended to rattle off lists of organisations they contributed to, either as organisers or as 'foot soldiers'. These organisations⁹ included Rotary,

⁹ See Section 6 and Appendix 1 for further information about these organisations, the services they provide and opportunities for museums.

Probus, National Trust, Seniors Community Centres, Meals on Wheels, St Vincent de Paul, Bush Fire Brigade and activities such as counselling, palliative care and church charity work. Sixty-three per cent of respondents in the quantitative study reported being involved in club activities in the previous 12 months.

This research supported the axiom ‘if you want something done, ask a busy person’, as it was evident that those who were most active in community service were also most active in other fields. There were indications that smaller communities had clear social leaders among the elderly. These people appeared to be pivotal in that they had a very wide range of contacts and were up to date with who was doing what. When new projects emerged, they were likely to know about them and play a part in bringing them to fruition.

Related to the amount of time spent in free-choice activities was the depth of engagement with them. In the research a notable proportion of people were intensely involved in a particular activity, to the point where they could be regarded to be ‘professionalised’. In some cases the activity was directly related to their working life; in others it was linked to a personal interest; or it tapped into organisational ability and energy. Some examples of this kind of deep engagement were the ex-historian who was researching the history of the Riverina; the energetic secretary of a branch of the Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association; and the ex-maritime worker who worked at the Australian National Maritime Museum in a voluntary capacity. Inevitably, those who were most deeply engaged with an activity spent most time on it. While there were many common threads, participation in some activities varied by age, gender, education and whether people lived in Sydney or Canberra, as summarised in Table 4. Overall, the Young-old were more active and more likely to engage in productive¹⁰ activities.

A notable proportion of people in this study were strongly integrated into church or synagogue communities. They participated in regular worship services and social activities. Several people mentioned mid-week seniors groups run by their church. They indicated that participation in worship and in the support structures of a church community, in both giving and receiving support, were important and meaningful in their lives.

Some retirees retained business and professional activities on a part-time basis. This kind of participation in commercial activity was more or less restricted to those who had run their own business or had professional qualifications. In some cases the involvement was quite notable, but in others it was more recreational or token. In some cases the connection with professional life was maintained in a non-commercial form through voluntary work, such as the ex-accountant who acted as Treasurer for a community group or the ex-teacher who was a volunteer guide at a museum. Some people joined Probus clubs in order to maintain business contacts.

4.4 Family and Friends

Participation in family activities was very strong for most of the people in this study. Those who had children and grandchildren nearby were often active in the regular care of grandchildren, or participated in family activities and outings. Family involvement was not

¹⁰ ‘Productive’ here is used in the sense of making something, such as, craft production, or providing a service, for example, child minding or care services such as Meals on Wheels.

limited to contact with younger generations, in some cases older relatives also received attention from participants in this study. The nature of family participation changed quite dramatically as people got older. The Young-old were able to be proactive in helping care for grandchildren or provide enrichment to their lives. However, as they grew older, they were more likely to join in family activities that were organised by the middle generation. The more frail people in this study participated in family activities as the recipients of family support.

Social activities with friends were enjoyed by all participants in the study. These activities were either purely social or centred around common interests. Some people had regular schedules for some of these contacts but most activities were on an occasional basis. In some cases, the friends groups were made up of couples doing things together, in other cases the groupings were single-sex. This was more the case among the Old-old and Oldest-old where there were more single women. It was notable that museums and gallery exhibitions were usually visited by couples or by small groups of friends. Groups of couples might go to the movies or a restaurant together, but they didn't go to exhibitions as a group. Although most visited museums with their partners, the main exceptions to this were those individuals who had become very intensely engaged with museums, as a volunteer for example. It was quite often the case that pairs or small groups of friends joined larger group tours to enjoy the companionship of friends along with the convenience and economy of the group tour. Some tours incorporated free time which catered for diverse interests in the group.

4.5 Exercise and Sport

Exercise and sport appeared to be secondary activities for many of the people in this study (selected as museum visitors). Quite a number of participants, especially those with physical disabilities or general frailty, showed little interest in physical activities. In many cases, it appeared that the interest in physical activity was generated by a wish for wellness rather than an intrinsic enjoyment of sport. However, there were some whose lives were more focused on playing sport, with golf and bowls dominating.

Tennis and golf were mentioned as sports which had been played for a long time and where part of the pleasure was the social aspect of the game. Swimming and walking tended to be related to fitness and the maintenance of good health which was an important consideration for most of the people in this research. Walking was particularly attractive to many people. Some were more serious walkers with predetermined times and places for walking while others seemed to be more opportunistic and looked for chances to add some walking to other activities with the general aim of increasing their activity level. Walkers often sought attractive natural settings for their walking.

Apart from playing sport, many enjoyed watching various sports on television. Hardly anyone mentioned attending live sport consistent with quantitative studies which found that only 15% had attended a first grade or professional sporting event in the previous six months (Environmetrics, 2001).

4.6 Travel

Most participants in this study, except the Oldest-old, said that they enjoyed travelling. Forty per cent of respondents in the quantitative study had travelled to new places or events in the previous 12 months. The Young-old who were more energetic and more affluent mentioned overseas travel, while others mentioned long-distance car travel within Australia, often linked with visits to children. Apart from these larger-scale trips, day trips and weekend trips by car or coach were very common.

Travel offered two main sources of appeal. First there was the opportunity to see and understand new places and, second, important social networks were maintained by visits to family and friends or time spent with travelling companions. Some people simply enjoyed the process of travelling by car, and bus trippers often emphasised the social pleasure of companionship. Bus trips had particular appeal for women without partners and for those people who found driving to be tiring.

For the people in this study, travel usually included visits to museums and heritage sites. Canberra was a popular destination, with those who had visited in recent years being very positive about the experience. In general, participants in the three regional centres (Wagga Wagga, Bathurst and the Shoalhaven) had very detailed knowledge of their region and had been to most of the surrounding towns and sites of interest. In contrast, quite a number of the Sydney participants had major gaps in their knowledge of both large and small museums in Sydney, including those in their local area. Some Canberra participants were extremely active and had been to ten or more exhibiting institutions, while others had been to only a few, although most Canberra participants had been to the National Museum of Australia.

5. OLDER PEOPLE AND MUSEUM VISITING

"I NEVER USED TO GO WHEN [I WAS] YOUNG. I WOULDN'T BE SEEN DEAD IN ONE, THEY WERE MUSTY AND OLD. NOW I HAVE A NEW APPRECIATION. WHEN YOU GET OLDER, YOU APPRECIATE THE FINER THINGS, THE HISTORY. YOU VALUE THINGS MORE AS YOU GET OLDER."

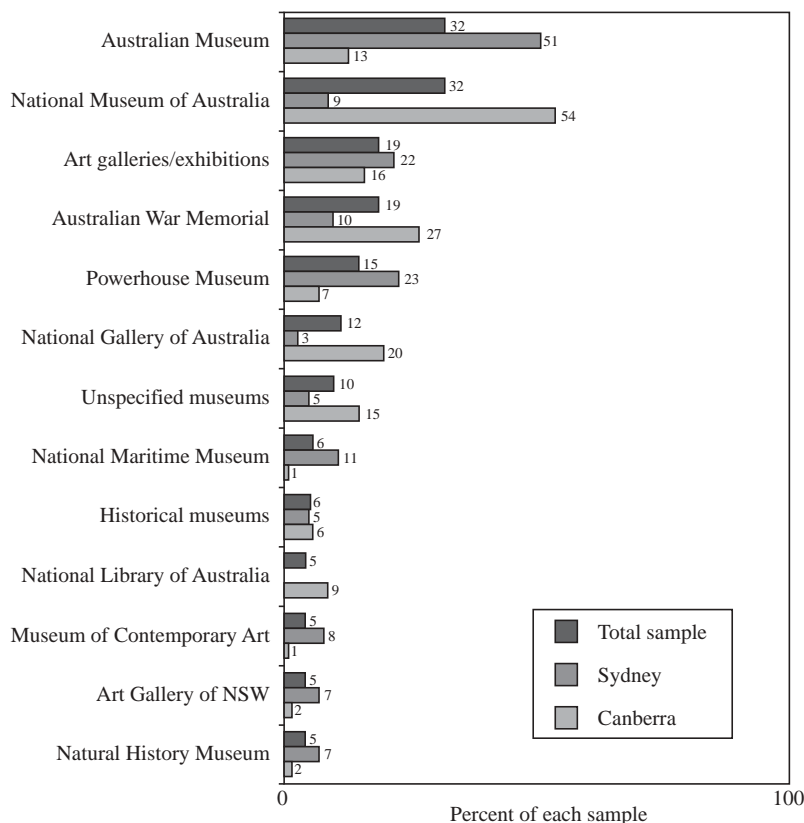


Museum visiting is not evenly spread in the population. Research has shown that the demographic characteristics of museum visitors have remained fairly stable, both over time and across studies that have been undertaken in many different countries. Museum visitors typically are more highly educated, with post-secondary education likely in humanities or arts; aged between thirty and fifty years, or are primary school aged children; visit with family or other social groups; are in a higher socio-economic class, and visited museums as children (Kelly, 2001). Adults make up the largest segment of museum visitors. In Australia almost 85% of the Australian population aged over 15 years attended or participated in at least one of the cultural venues or activities surveyed (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999b).

5.1 Awareness of Museums

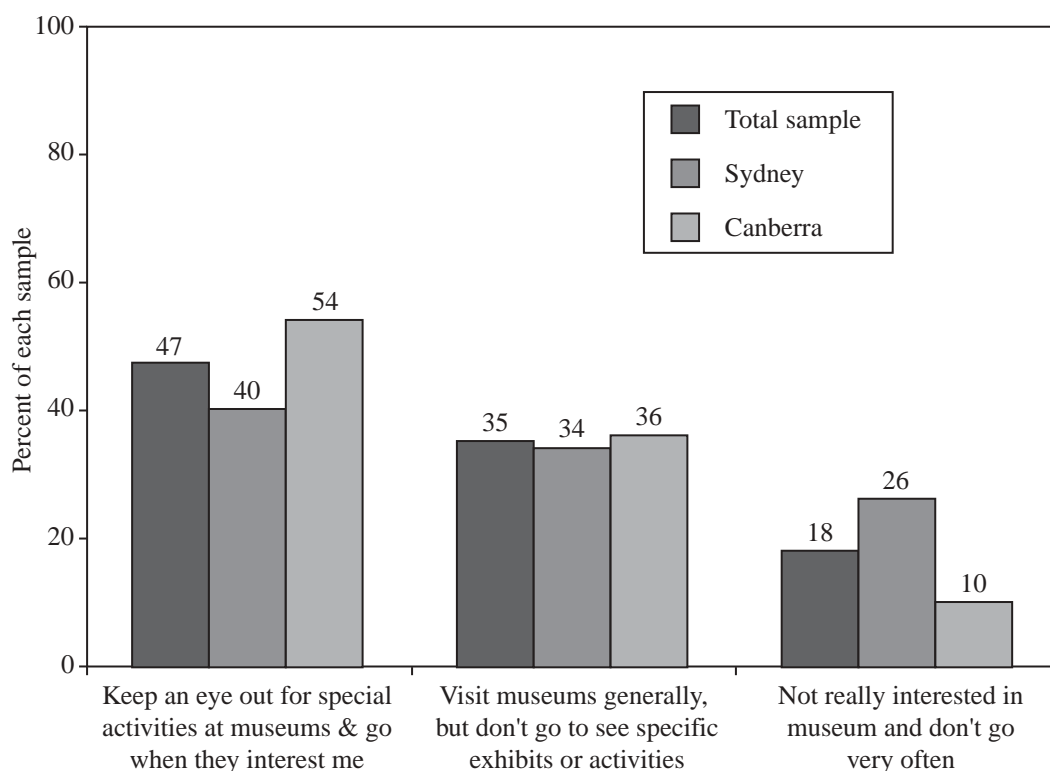
Ninety-three per cent of those surveyed could name at least one museum. The results in Figure 2 show what came to mind when asked to think of museums in Australia.

Figure 2. Museum Awareness



Respondents were also asked to choose which statement best described them in relation to museums. The results are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Museum Interest



Overall, around a third of the older population (35%) had a general interest in museums, with 47% keeping an eye out for special activities at museums. This is consistent with previous *LeisureScope*¹¹ findings that around one-third of Sydney adults generally visit museums¹¹. However, the Canberra older population appeared to be much more culturally-minded compared to the Sydney population of the same age. Fifty-four per cent of the Canberra sample had a keen interest in special activities and exhibitions at museums and made planned visits to see these, compared to 40% of the Sydney sample. Conversely, only one in ten of the older population in Canberra claimed they were not really interested in museums and were infrequent visitors, while 26% of the same group in Sydney stated that they had little interest in museums.

5.2 Perceptions of Museums

One of the defining characteristics of the over 65s is that they have long memories to draw upon. In discussing museums, some were able to think back 50 years and recall visits to the Australian Museum when they were young. These memories co-existed alongside memories

¹¹ The Summer 1994 *LeisureScope*[®] study found that 32% of Sydney adults visited museums generally; 35% actually kept an eye out for special events; and 31% were not very interested in museums.

of recent visits and everything in between. An important factor that influenced perceptions of museums and cultural institutions was the degree to which people identified them as ‘my kind of place’. The quantitative survey indicated that 47% of people kept an eye out for new activities in museums; a further 35% expressed a general interest in museums; and 18% were not very interested. In the qualitative research, those who said they kept an eye out for special activities at museums often identified themselves as museum visitors. Table 4 contrasts the perceptions of regular museum visitors with those of occasional visitors.

Table 4. Perceptions of Regular and Occasional Visitors

Regular visitor	Occasional visitor
A museum is ‘my kind of place’ and museums are part of their self-perception	They go to museums but ‘museum visitor’ is not part of their self-definition
Know a lot of museums, including large metropolitan and smaller local ones	Know a limited number of museums, in limited areas
Know museums quite well from fairly recent visits	Knowledge may be years old
Value museums strongly	Value museums more for others (e.g. children) than for selves
Will find a range of reasons to visit	Visit through a limited number of avenues
Highly likely to initiate visits to museums	More likely to join a visit organised by someone else
See large museums as dynamic and up-to-date	See museums as static and old-fashioned

For self-confessed museum visitors, museums were central to their activities, with museums of all kinds being highly valued. Regular visitors had a good knowledge of large Australian museums such as the Australian Museum, the National Museum of Australia, the Melbourne Museum, and the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, and also knew a lot of smaller and specialist ones. Some of the more enthusiastic visitors expressed a preference for specialist museums that had a particular focus, rather than more general ones, because they felt they were already very familiar with general museums. It may also be a reflection of the tendency for older people to know themselves quite well and to be clear about what they are interested in and what does not appeal to them. This preference may also be a reflection of the lower energy and mobility of older visitors because smaller, more specialist museums may be more manageable for them. While most regular museum visitors described a lifelong interest in museums, a few people had become interested only after retiring, relating this to a new appreciation for history.

Regular museum visitors had a fairly clear mental map of different kinds of museums. For example, they could distinguish between a natural history museum such as the Australian Museum and a social history museum such as the National Museum of Australia. Art galleries, science centres, local history museums and single-topic museums were distinguished. In effect, these people often had a fairly good idea of the kind of place they were visiting before they went there. Because they were regular visitors, they tended to be up-to-date with particular institutions and often had very positive perceptions of Australian museums. In general, they were quite forgiving of smaller museums, acknowledging that they generally had limited resources. However, it was noted by some that many local museums showed too many objects and failed to tell the stories associated with them.

Regular visitors saw museums as having two main functions: to collect, preserve and research valuable material; and to interpret, communicate and educate the public and specialist audiences. In discussion, some surprise was expressed at the number of museums and heritage places that have sprung up in every district over the past 20 years. In general, they saw museums as suitable for many different kinds of outings. For example, they might visit to see and learn something specific; because they haven't been for a while; to show out-of-town visitors; to take grandchildren; or to enjoy a pleasant social outing with a friend or partner. They were likely to both initiate visits and go along on visits initiated by others.

Occasional visitors were less likely to identify themselves as museum-oriented. In fact, some were quite clear that they were not. In contrast with regular visitors, occasional visitors had much more sketchy knowledge of museums in Australia. In many cases they could not comment on a museum because they had not been to it or because they had not been for decades. The Australian Museum was mentioned most often as a museum that had been visited in earlier periods of life but not in recent years or decades. Although they had similar views about the role of museums, occasional visitors were less likely than regular visitors to have formulated a typology of museums, seeing all large museums as having similar purposes.

While museums were sought out by regular visitors, for occasional visitors a visit to a museum may be opportunistic, spontaneous or an afterthought. Visits were often motivated by external factors such as the invitation of a friend, an organised bus trip, or the interests of children or grandchildren. Occasional visitors were sometimes pleasantly surprised by recent experiences at museums because they tended to have rather moderate expectations. A common expectation was that museums were static, unchanging or worthy but dull. It was also a common perception that natural history, science, and even some social history museums, were oriented toward children.

Some overseas travellers in this research liked to visit museums in other countries as they offered an authoritative overview of a different culture or the museum itself was a major icon. In contrast, local museums were not seen as major icons and most long-term residents did not feel an immediate need to explore their own culture through museum exhibitions. Some migrants in this research noted that they had visited Australian museums when they first arrived in the country.

Quite a high proportion of older people in this research saw museums as largely historical: they expected them to preserve significant and interesting things from the past and to tell

the associated stories that focused on social history relating to localities, personalities, industries or periods (e.g. colonial, World War 2). As they grew older, many people in this cohort found themselves looking at their personal histories and reviewing the changes they had seen in their lifetime. Many realised that they had witnessed events and lived lifestyles that had now passed forever. They sometimes struggled to comprehend that many of the things they took for granted were unfamiliar and even exotic to the generations that followed them. This fostered in them a sense of protectiveness toward the materials and stories of their parents' lives and their own early lives. For some, there was a renewed valuation of the role of museums in preserving this material and the associated histories. Quite a number of participants in this research expressed great pleasure in the opportunities provided by museum experiences to remember some of the circumstances of their early lives that have since passed into history.

5.3 Use of Museums

5.3.1 Motivation

Results from a study of general museum visitors showed that there were a number of factors that motivated museum and gallery visits: entertainment, learning, family interests and worthwhile leisure through to experiencing something new, as detailed on Table 5.

Table 5. Motivation for Visiting Museums/Galleries

Motivation	% of total respondents (n=413)
To experience something new	77
For entertainment (n=325)*	71
To learn	71
For the interests of my children/family	70
To do something worthwhile in leisure time	64
For special events	57
On recommendation by others	56
To use some free time	54
The costs	39
The weather	30
The advertising/promotion	29

*Note: This category was added later

(Source: Kelly, 2001)

A study of Australians' attitudes to the arts looked at participation in the arts and how people perceived themselves in relation to the arts. Older Australians, for this study defined as aged over 55, were highly represented in the groups that 'valued the arts' and saw themselves as 'art lovers', yet were disproportionately represented in the group that saw

themselves as ‘disengaged from the arts’. Interestingly 67% of those over 55 years considered themselves to be ‘very interested in the arts’ (1.16 times the population average), but 66% of this group agreed that ‘the arts were too expensive’ (1.22 times the population average) and had been ‘somewhat less involved in the arts in the past two weeks’ than the average population (Costantoura, 2000).

5.3.2 Participation

There is not a great deal of Australian data regarding the visitation of older Australians to museums, galleries and other cultural attractions. Research conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicated that participation in cultural events and activities was lower among older people in contrast to 15–64 year olds. Sixty-seven per cent of people aged over 65 had attended at least one of the venues or activities surveyed in the 12 months to April 1999 compared to 88% of 15–64 year olds. The top three cultural venues attended by older people were the cinema (36%); the library (34%); and botanic gardens (27%). Older women had higher levels of attendance than older men, particularly cinema and opera/musical venues, and men had slightly higher attendance rates at animal/marine parks and museums (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999b) as summarised in Table 6.

Table 6. Type of Cultural Venue Attended

	% of males	% of females	% of total over 65 population
Cinema	31.6	38.8	35.6
Library	32.3	34.5	33.5
Botanic Garden	26.8	27.8	27.4
Art Gallery	14.5	17.6	16.2
Museum	13.6	11.5	12.4

(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999b)

In contrast to this, a collation of data collected in Sydney of adults aged over 60 years over a four year period, found that 30% had been to a museum or gallery exhibition in the previous six months compared to 34% of the total sample. Some individual museums had been visited more often by the older audiences as shown in Table 7. The older audience were found to have visited predominantly outdoor sites such as Circular Quay and Darling Harbour. The Art Gallery of NSW was the most visited of the museums, with 15% of the older group visiting it in the last six months compared to 13% of the total group surveyed. In a 12 month period the over 60 group had visited the Opera House an average of 4.6 times (compared with 3.5 times by the total adult sample), the National Maritime Museum 3.7 times (2.2), and the Museum of Contemporary Art 3.5 times (5.2) (Environmetrics, 2001).

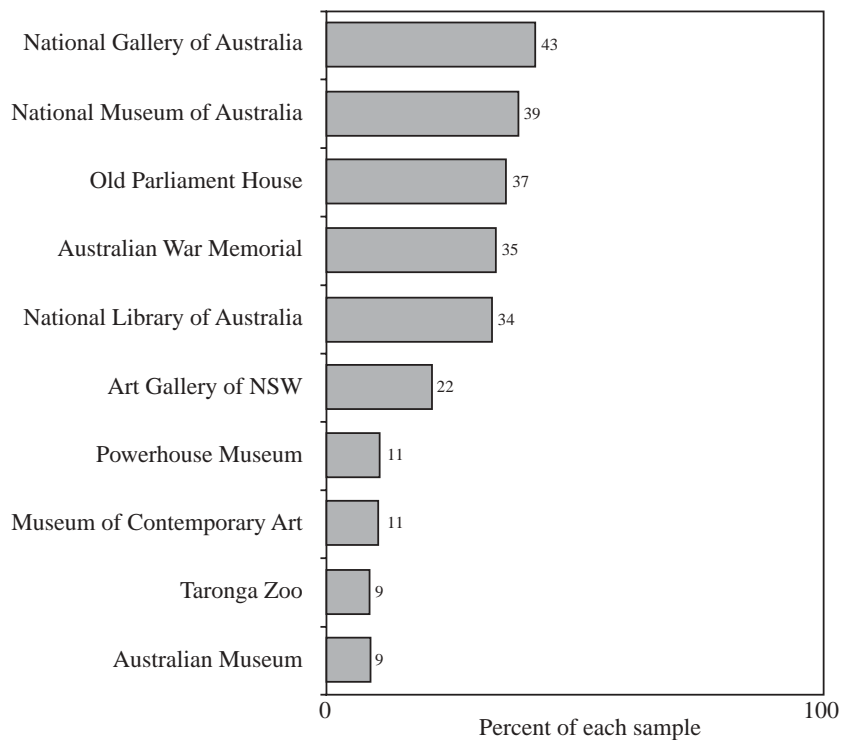
Table 7. Sydney Venue Visiting

Venue visited in last 6 months	% of aged 60+	% of total sample
The Quay	36	42
Darling Harbour	35	54
Opera House	23	25
Art Gallery of NSW	15	13
Royal Botanic Gardens	15	19
Powerhouse Museum	6	7
National Maritime Museum	6	5
Australian Museum	3	6
Museum of Contemporary Art	3	6

(Source: Environmetrics, 2001)

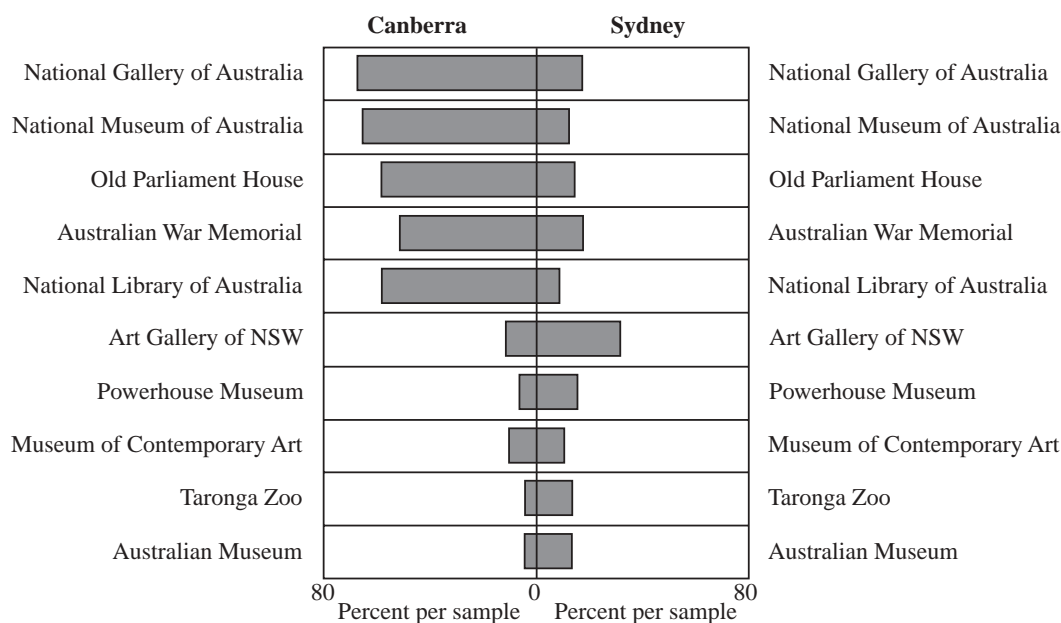
In the quantitative survey participants were asked which museums they had visited in the previous 12 months, as shown in Figure 4. Overall, this found that 82% of people aged over 65 have visited museums.

Figure 4. Museum Visitation



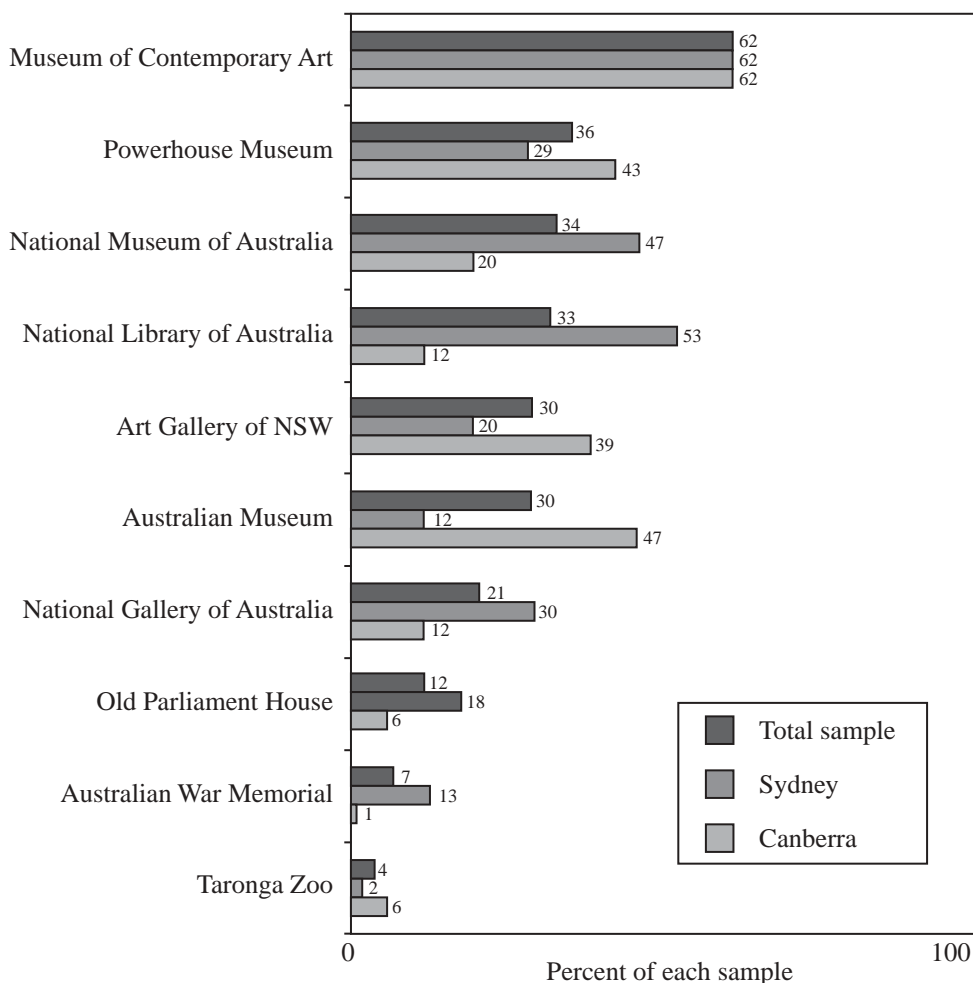
Visitation was strongly related to city of residence, with those living in Canberra more likely to have visited Canberra attractions and vice versa. The level of attendance was much higher at all Canberra venues than at Sydney ones, as shown on Figure 5, due to a combination of factors such as higher interest in museums among the Canberra sample and greater accessibility to Canberra attractions for older audiences.

Figure 5. Museum Visitation by City



Another way of looking at participation in museums by older audiences is to look at the ‘reach’ of those venues into this market. Although the Art Gallery of NSW was the most visited Sydney venue in the last 12 months, with older visitor numbers more than double that of any other Sydney venue, Taronga Zoo had the highest reach into the older audience market. Nearly every older person had visited the Zoo at some point in time, although not necessarily in the last 12 months. The Museum of Contemporary Art managed to reach around two out of every five older persons in Sydney and Canberra. The Australian War Memorial and Old Parliament House (both Canberra venues) had been visited by nine out of ten Canberra and Sydney residents over 65 years at some stage of their lifetime. Although large proportions have visited the National Museum of Australia in recent months, it is yet to reach the exposure levels of the Australian War Memorial and Old Parliament House, probably due to its newness, having opened in March 2001. Figure 6 shows the proportion of those who had never been to these museums and galleries. The bars represent the size of the ‘unreached’ older audience market of each attraction. For example, it shows that while nearly every older person has been to Taronga Zoo at some point in time, only one out of three has ever been to the Museum of Contemporary Art.

Figure 6. The ‘Unreached’ Older Market



In this survey, of those who had been to a museum in the last 12 months, most went with someone else and only 10% of visitors went alone. The majority of visitors went with same-age companions and/or their partner (51%) and 14% of visitors went with children either under or over 18 years. Six per cent visited with children under 18, some of which are presumably their grandchildren. At this point in time grandparent/grandchild visits made up a very small proportion of total visits to museums, however, this could be expected to increase due to the ageing population and more older people caring for younger children.

An Australian Museum exit survey revealed that 8% of visitors were aged over 65. Of these, it found that they were more likely to be lapsed visitors (i.e. last visited more than 12 months ago); visiting alone or with a spouse or partner; and educated to a secondary level. They spent on average one-two hours in the Museum (AMARC, 2001).

A recent study of visitors aged over 66 at the National Museum of Australia (2001), based on exit surveys between February and June 2001, found that this group spent slightly

longer at the Museum: 3.5 hours compared to 3.38 hours for the total sample. Many visited with a partner or spouse, with 41% visiting in a family group. A large proportion were not locals, 69% compared with 56% of the rest of the sample.

A year-long visitor research project at the Chicago Botanic Gardens revealed that visitors aged over 55 years comprised one-third of their visiting public, ranging from a low of 36% attendance in the summer to a high of 48% attendance in the winter. The older visitors' most-often-expressed reasons for visiting had less to do with the collections and more to do with a specific activity. These older visitors tended to be more motivated and were likely to be members of the Gardens. This study found that seniors consistently preferred a place where a prepared program for learning was available through activities such as tours and lectures. Preference for prepared programs for learning generally increased with age, with those aged over 65 being the most interested in this (Hood and Roberts, 1994).

5.3.3 Purpose of Visits

Museums were used for a wide range of purposes: to pursue topics of interest; to generally 'see the place'; for a day out; for educational reasons; and as part of volunteers and/or friends groups.

In the qualitative study it was found that many visits were motivated by strong interest in a topic. Visitors often wished to keep up-to-date with a field or to take pleasure in engagement with materials that were of interest to them. Where interest levels were very strong, the visitor may be exploring something they love or carrying out specific research. These more serious visitors often visited alone or with their partner and they were likely to organise visits of friends or network 'buddies'. Most participants in this research said that they would go back to museums to see special exhibitions if the topic was of interest. For example, Jewish people in this research were especially interested in museums that addressed aspects of Jewish culture and history, both in Australia or other countries.

Museum-oriented travellers were drawn to travel in order to 'see the place' including the museums, heritage sites and visitor attractions that provided context. These travellers often travelled at their own pace and explored smaller venues as well as more prominent ones. They usually travelled as couples or with organised groups. Because there were always new places to see they were less likely to make repeat visits unless they had family or friends in that town.

Another use of museums was for the stimulation of a day out. A high proportion of participants in this research said that they liked to keep busy. Trips and outings were part of a repertoire of free-choice activities that were fitted around the regular program of committed activities of many people. For both those initiating the outing and those tagging along these trips offered a stimulating, engaging and entertaining outing that contrasted with the private world of home.

Public spaces like museums offered a physical and psychological space for engaging with the wider culture, as well as reinforcement of previously held views and exposure to new vistas and perspectives. Part of the stimulation of the day out came from exposure to new sights and ideas or the refreshing of past memories. Along with this was the social

stimulation from companions and people encountered along the way.

When they were enjoying a day out with their children and grandchildren, older people seemed to enjoy the company of children. They also emphasised the importance of children visiting museums and learning about the things on display. Nevertheless, many older people in this research noted that they preferred to go to places where there are not a lot of children present when they wanted to pursue personal interests or enjoy a day out with peers.

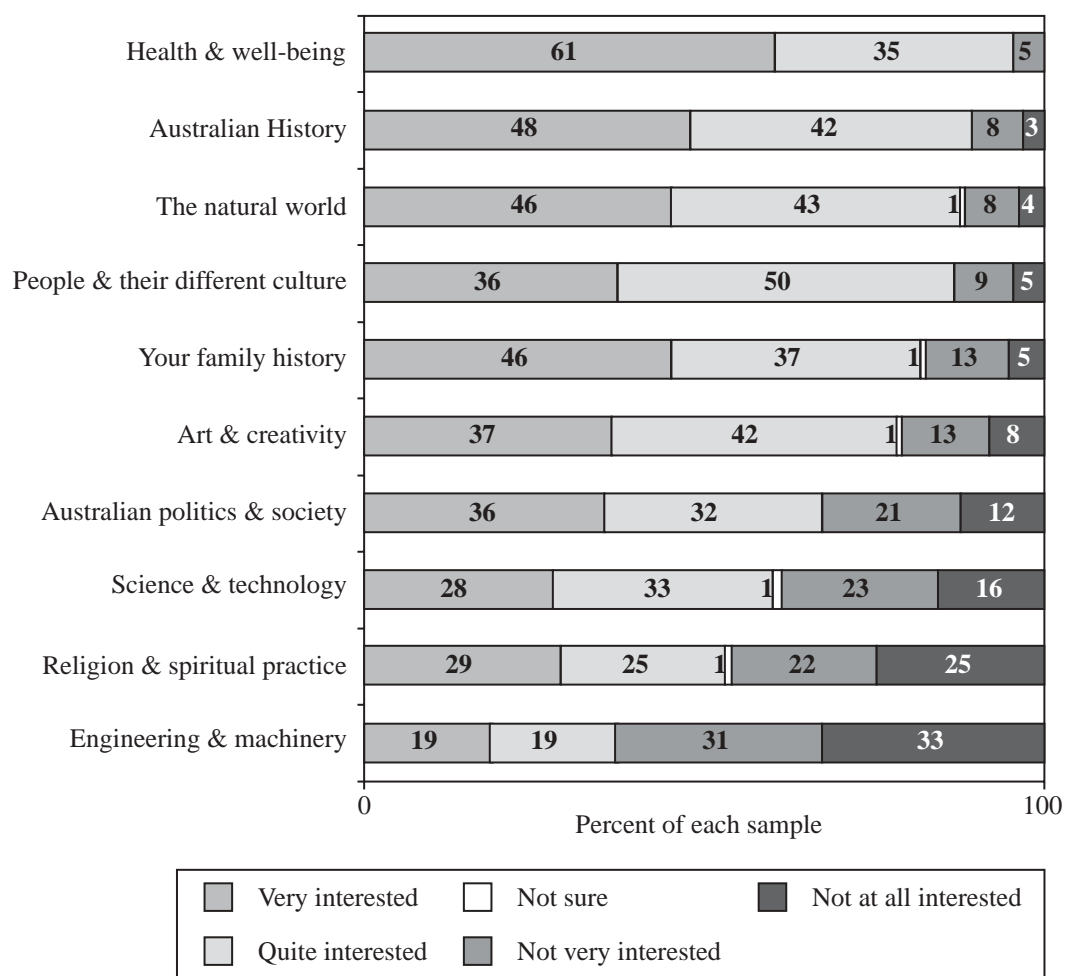
Museums were widely used in an educational sense to discover new things or extend knowledge about current interests. Visitors to museums expected to be reminded of shared histories and core values as well as encountering some new information. At this time in their life cycle this audience was receptive to education in the sense of collating, synthesising, drawing together, preserving, restoring, making sense, interpreting, transmitting, adding meaning and value. In general, they were not seeking educational experiences which were disrupting, disturbing or too challenging. By and large, people in this research did not go to museums to have their world view challenged. Instead, they went to museums to be reminded, to have their world view confirmed or gently extended. Many participants described happy encounters with familiar objects and stories.

Most did not want to be pulled too far out of their comfort zone, especially if they were in the process of dealing with difficult issues in their life. Several participants in this research were grieving for the recent loss of a partner, child or relative. In addition, quite a number were grappling with the implications of decreasing physical and mental capabilities. In discussion, many respondents indicated that they were not ready to face difficult issues in museums. Those who were deep in the midst of major personal losses did not have the inner resources to engage with any of these, while others were closed to particular issues.

5.3.4 Interest in Subject Areas

Eleven subjects that could be dealt with across a range of institutions were examined in this research to gauge topics that museums could further develop. Figure 7 illustrates the level of general interest in particular subjects among the general population sampled in the quantitative study.

Figure 7. General Population Interest in Subjects



This shows that while topics such as ‘Health and wellbeing’ and ‘Australian History’ generated very widespread interest among over 65s, topics such as ‘Engineering and machinery’ and ‘Religion and spiritual practice’ were more special interest subjects.

In the qualitative study, participants were asked to indicate their interest in museum exhibitions on these subjects, as summarised in Table 8. In this, ‘widespread interest’ indicates that a higher proportion of participants showed some interest, and ‘strong interest’ indicates that expressions of interest were stronger rather than weaker.

Table 8. Interest in Nominated Topics

Topic	Interest
Australian History	Strong interest. Widespread interest.
Family history	Strong interest. Widespread interest. Interest was highly personal.
Health and well-being	Strong interest. Widespread interest.
Art and creativity	Quite broad interest. Interest ranged from very generalist to quite specialist/expert.
People and their cultures	Moderate interest. Relevant to overseas travel, television documentaries, or migrant cultures.
Australian politics and society	Mixed interest. Seen as more appropriate for Canberra, especially Old Parliament House. Some were interested in books or TV programs more than exhibitions on this subject.
Indigenous culture	Polarised. Some strong interest, others had no interest, a few were resistant.
The natural world	Widespread interest, but rarely strong. Interest ranged from very generalist to quite specialist/expert. Related to grandchildren. Interest may be satisfied by TV documentaries.
Science and technology	Pockets of interest, more among men. Interest may be satisfied by TV documentaries.
Religion and spiritual practice	Considerable strong interest. Some indifference. Interest was segmented by personal practice (e.g. Jewish group showed strong interest in the broad topic but none had been to the Buddhism exhibition at the Art Gallery NSW).
Engineering and machinery	Pockets of interest, more among men.

5.3.5 The Grandparent Role

Three types of inter-generational family visits were identified: grandparent/grandchild visits; family group visits; and adult child/grandparent. Grandparents initiated visits to museums with grandchildren as part of the role they took on of helping to care for the family. The visit was often centred around the needs and interests of the children, however, there was a strong drive among grandparents to pass on to the next generation some sense of their family and community history. Some grandparents took their grandchildren to places they

knew the children would enjoy, such as the cinema, while others were more assertive in taking the children to places that they thought they ought to see. These visits were more usual among the Young-old group of seniors who had the energy to manage an outing with children. Museum visits were regarded as quite demanding because the grandparents took on the role of educating, interpreting and bringing alive the stories and values represented in museum exhibitions. Underlying these outings was a strong impetus to pass on knowledge and values. This knowledge was sometimes general such as ‘what things were like then’ and sometimes more personal or family-oriented, such as ‘where your grandfather worked’. Favoured destinations were exhibitions/museums that addressed natural history, science, and industrial, social or domestic history on a personal scale.

Family visits included three generations and were often initiated by the parent rather than the grandparent. They sought to balance the needs and interests of the whole group. Many mixed family visits to museums were triggered by out-of-town grandparents visiting the younger family or vice versa. These visits were more common among the Young-old and the Old-old groups. Some of the Old-old said that they preferred to go on bus trips to going with the family because the bus trip was more relaxing.

Adult child/grandparent visits were more likely to centre on the needs and interests of the older person and were more common among Old-old and Oldest-old groups. Some key features were two to three people in the group; undertaken at quiet times of the day; of a shorter duration (1–2 hours); a thematic focus in looking at one or two things of particular interest; and use of access assistance (such as disabled parking, wheelchair, hearing loop).

5.3.6 Satisfaction

Regular museum visitors in this study were very enthusiastic overall about the services provided by museums in Australia. Their perceptions were dominated by high-profile exhibitions and museums such as their first visit to the National Museum of Australia, the recent *Treasures* exhibition at the National Library (2001) or the *Rediscovering Pompeii* exhibition at the Australian Museum (1998). Exhibitions in regional areas that delivered a new standard of presentation were also memorable, with the visitor centre in Cowra and the Small Arms Museum in Lithgow favourably mentioned. Where they were critical, participants tended to attribute deficiencies, such as the staid display of old objects, to lack of resources rather than lack of vision or effort.

Occasional museum visitors, on the other hand, appeared to be more likely to have ‘flat’ experiences in museums and to think that museums could do more to provide engaging and relevant displays.

Some participants in regional areas noted that the point of view of country people was poorly represented in exhibitions in large institutions. In their view, even exhibitions that dealt with country life often failed tell the story the way country people saw it. They were critical of exhibitions that were highly designed because they thought that the presentation of the object was given precedence over the story that gave it meaning and importance.

5.3.7 Volunteers and Friends

As would be expected, only those with strong and enduring interest joined Friends Associations. Membership ensured that the individual kept up-to-date with events at the

museum/institution and it also contributed to a sense of self. However, the older age group forms an important sector in these associations, for example, a study of Australian Museum members found 16.5% were aged over 65, and when the percentage of those 50–64 was included, 49% of the total membership was aged over 50 (AMARC, 2002).

Volunteer activity was very common among over 65s in this study. Participants were very ready to lend their energy and skills to good causes especially when organised at the local community level. People were most likely to volunteer for causes that were close to their experience. A proportion of museum volunteers in this research were ex-teachers who wanted to use their teaching skills for worthwhile causes. Volunteering also provided opportunities to meet like-minded people. A national survey of voluntary work found that 17% of people over 65 years performed some form of voluntary work through formal organisations or groups and, on average, they gave 223 hours each year to voluntary activities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1995). As noted earlier, 58% of museums across Australia were operated on a voluntary basis (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001).

Museum volunteers in this research were often very strongly attracted to the subject matter. In many cases, people who were interested in contributing to cultural projects felt that they had something unique to offer. This contrasted with other voluntary activities such as fundraising or bush fire brigades where individuals offered physical assistance rather than special expertise. Volunteer programs thrived when participants felt that their contribution was meaningful and that they, themselves, were learning and expanding their horizons by taking part. The experience of volunteers in small regional museums was quite different from those in large institutions, because of the greater level of responsibility they carried. While volunteers in larger institutions were just a small part of the overall operation of the institution, those in small museums sometimes contributed as much as the paid staff. One volunteer in our study had been contributing actively since 1962 and he carried a lot of the ‘corporate memory’ of the organisation. However, there was a sense that in smaller museums the boundary between paid and unpaid worker could sometimes be blurred as volunteers were involved in consultation committees, decision making and policy formation. Volunteers valued the experience they had to offer and they thought that their expertise, opinions and detailed knowledge of local history should be recognised and used for community benefit.

5.4 Physical Access

The quantitative research looked at how easy it was for older people to get to places in general. Although the majority of the sample found it ‘easy’, ‘very easy’ or ‘quite easy’ to get to places they like to go, over a fifth (21%) found it either ‘quite difficult’ or ‘very difficult’. This difficulty seems to increase with age, with 35% of those aged 80 and over finding it difficult to get to places they like, compared with 17% of those aged 65 to 69. Of the 21% who found getting to places difficult, the major reasons related to transport:

- I don’t drive/am unable to drive/have limited access to public transport (35%).
- Getting there is too expensive, e.g. can’t afford taxi/petrol (14%).
- Public transport is inefficient/too time consuming (10%).
- I find driving difficult/lack of confidence in driving/only drive locally (10%).

- I have to rely on other people to take me out (7%).
- I feel unsafe on public transport (5%).

Other constraints concerned health problems and limited mobility of the person or their partner:

- Problems with walking/legs/need to walk with a stick (26%).
- Health problems/health restricts mobility (26%).
- Problems with eyesight (10%).
- Partner ill/immobile/needs care (10%).
- Physically unable to board public transport (5%).

Many older people suffer from multiple minor impairments which do not reach the disability statistics, but collectively can pose real challenges to living an independent and fulfilling life. In the qualitative research, a number of impairments were raised with particular relevance to the experiences that museums offer to older Australians.

While a good proportion of participants in this research were very active and energetic, quite a number, especially the Old-old and Oldest-old, reported that they tired easily, especially when on their feet. Even those who walked regularly for exercise reported that they could no longer stand for extended periods. In addition, the physical limitations of one member of a party tended to shape the activities of others.

Also relevant to the question of overall stamina was the fact that older people tended to be less robust and were increasingly frail with age. A major consequence of this was that many people in this research noted lower tolerance levels for crowds and some did not feel physically safe in crowded places. They reported that they were less able to engage with displays in popular exhibitions because they were reluctant to 'enter the fray'. Quite a number of over 65s in this research had strategies for coping with these restrictions. For example, some of them avoided blockbusters while others avoided visiting at times when there were likely to be numbers of schoolchildren.

Participants emphasised the need for plenty of seats throughout exhibition spaces. They wanted seats that were not too low-set and had backrests. Seating near videos and interactives that engage visitors for several minutes was seen as especially important.

Some visitors noted that it was tiring for older people to have to detour or backtrack in order to find essential facilities such as toilets and cafes. Trying to find these was sometimes difficult. Others noted that poor building design contributed to fatigue for older visitors. Some difficulties, such as too many stairs and complex layouts, were inevitable in older buildings and adapted buildings, yet these complaints were also made about new purpose-built museums.

Nearly every person in this research reported difficulties in reading object labels and other information text in museums, highlighting the following problems:

- labels too small and print in typefaces that are too small
- labels set well below eye level so visitors have to bend to read
- labels printed in white text on dark background which is harder to read
- labels behind glass/perspex that creates reflective glare
- labels printed on shiny material that creates reflective glare
- text positioned without adequate lighting or in shadows.

People with multi-focal spectacles had more trouble than others.

Three of these design faults were reported to exist at almost every museum: font size too small; labels set well below eye level; and light levels too low. Each of these factors individually was an impediment to communication, but when combined they became major barriers. For those who were actually interested in finding out information about the objects on display, these design faults were crippling and frustrating. Several participants reported their annoyance with the pattern of movement that was forced upon them by the prevalence of low-set small-print labels. They described how they had to take their turn with other visitors to go close to the label and bend to read it. They reported that they felt frustrated while waiting and hurried when they were actually reading because they were aware that they were blocking the view of other visitors while doing so. People who organised bus groups noted that exhibitions should be designed so that groups of 30 or so people could enjoy them without having to queue and take turns at every label.

As well as difficulties in reading text, some participants reported that spotlights used in museums could be a problem. They noted that bright overhead halogen lights can cause spots of glare off spectacles making it hard to see anything. In addition, exhibitions that were primarily dark were strongly criticised by those who found it difficult to see where they were going and unsure whether there were obstacles in their path.

Quite a number of people in this research reported some level of hearing difficulty and a few wore hearing aids. Hearing difficulties impacted on museum visits in two main ways. The first related to guided tours. Many older people liked guided tours partly because they enjoyed the kind of information conveyed by guides and partly because they had often difficulty reading interpretative text set in small print. They often found guides difficult to hear due to the voice quality of the guide, the size of the group or background noise. Voice amplification for guides was seen as essential for most busy museums. The second was to do with ambient noise. Some participants commented on displays which have conflicting sound sources that interfere with each other which made it hard for visitors to concentrate and absorb information. Some people reported this as tiring or so unpleasant that they did not want to stay.

In travelling to museums, most over 65s preferred to use their car where possible. Canberra residents acknowledged the ease of getting to most exhibition venues in Canberra by car due to the provision of adjacent parking areas. Sydney residents said that they would not drive to museums near the city centre because of traffic congestion and the cost of parking. Instead, they used public transport which they found rather tiring and onerous. For older, less robust people, this was not an option and visits were curtailed unless family or friends could act as chauffeurs and drive them to the door. Those who lived in Wagga, Bathurst and the Shoalhaven were strongly dependent on their car or on organised coach trips for visits to museums. When they were in major cities, they either used public transport or relied on local family/friends to take them to museums.

Participants who organised day trips that included visits to cultural venues outlined a range of requirements for groups of older visitors. They expected that places that advertised as 'groups welcome' should have the following characteristics:

- Toilets should be easy to find, sparkling clean, not located out of the way and there should be enough for groups of 50.
- Displays need to be set out so that large groups can spread around and engage with the material without having to queue at individual things.
- Displays should include some simple interactive elements to engage visitors.
- Interactives should be instantly useable and not require guessing or ‘trial and error’ approaches to determine how they work, and not assume familiarity with computer technology.
- There should be plenty of seating throughout the galleries.
- There should be refreshment facilities that are set up for quick service that minimises the time spent standing in queues, and should include some familiar, basic and low-cost items.
- Text labels and other reading material should use a typeface size that allows groups of people to read without having to take turns to go close to it, as well as the provision of supplementary hand-held text material.
- Voice amplification for guides was essential as guided tours were highly desirable.
- There should be a convenient drop off place near the main entrance and bus parking bays.

5.5 Adult Learning and Museums

The quantitative study found that 82% of people aged over 65 visit museums, with 47% keeping an eye out for special activities at museums. Coupled with this, the increased emphasis on lifelong learning as both a social and political movement (Anderson, 1997; Rubenson, 2000; Watson, 1999) means that it is becoming imperative that museums understand the processes of adult learning and provide programs that cater for this large audience. Lifelong learning was both a political movement and a policy response by governments and educational organisations, as well as a process that adults willingly and actively engaged in for pleasure or work purposes. Lifelong learning was important in studying adults as learners as it was being increasingly given weight in government policy initiatives with a resulting large body of literature and theoretical development. A lifelong learner has been defined as ‘... a person who takes responsibility for their own learning and who is prepared to invest “time, money and effort” in education or training on a continuous basis ... Lifelong learners must have the *motivation* and *capacity* to learn, in any type of setting, with any type of teacher, or simply by themselves’ (Watson, 1999, p.3, original emphasis). In Australia, a strong link was found between the level of formal educational qualifications and participation in lifelong learning: ‘People with university degrees are twice as likely to participate in adult education and training as people with a high school qualification’ (Watson, 1999, p.9). This has implications for museums, as those adults who attended museums were more likely to have formal post-school educational qualifications (Falk, 1998; Kelly, 2001) and, therefore, more inclined to be lifelong learners (Anderson, 1997; Sachatello-Sawyer and Fellenz, 2001). It has been found that participants in adult museum programs had ‘... a strong desire for lifelong learning and pursue that desire, through involvement with a museum’ (Sachatello-Sawyer and Fellenz, 2001, p.18).

Research into adult participation in museums and other leisure time activities looked at the types of learning programs available for adults in United States museums, and studied

in detail the experiences of adult learners across a sample of 12 institutions, including museums, a botanic garden, art museums and a historical society. This found that 94% of organisations offered some type of adult program, with participants more likely to be highly educated, affluent, female, aged 45–59 years and who were pursuing an interest in lifelong learning (Sachatello-Sawyer and Fellenz, 2001). A study of older learners reported in this research found that among a range of reasons given for learning, adults learned for ‘the love of it’, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Why Adults Learned

	Responses (N=860)	%
for the joy of learning	685	79.7
to pursue a long-standing interest or hobby	498	57.9
to meet people, socialise	461	53.6
to engage in creative activity	406	47.2
to pursue a new interest or hobby	373	43.4
to fill time productively	343	40.0
as part of search for meaning and wisdom	324	37.7
to fill blanks in previous education	214	24.9
to fulfil community service purpose	182	21.2
to help in my present job	40	4.7
to prepare for a new job or career	21	0.4

(Source: Lamdin, 1997, cited in Sachatello-Sawyer and Fellenz, 2001 p.18)

This study also found that adult museum program participants had the same needs that have been identified for general museum visitors (Kelly, 1999, 2000b): hands-on activities, access to objects and people, with new and challenging content. It was concluded that ‘... excellent museum programs change adult lives. They transform adults by motivating them to pursue new learning activities ... [and they] continue to influence decisions about learning long after the programs end’ (Sachatello-Sawyer and Fellenz, 2001, p.19).

Volunteer guides noted that most older visitors preferred to absorb information at a slower pace than younger people. They observed that older visitors did not engage readily with presentation styles that used quickly changing images or text grabs. It was noted that older visitors liked to pause and think, or exchange comments and ideas with companions as an important part of the learning process. Some visitors also commented on the need to go at their own pace. This need of older visitors may be related, in part, to the acknowledgment that they bring a wealth of experience to their museum visits. It could be suggested that the task of integrating new information is larger for them because they have more to think about than people with less prior knowledge. The importance of offering places along the way for older visitors to refresh and reflect was noted.

Six characteristics of adult learners have been identified (Gunther, 1994; Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 1998; Manning, 2002; Merriam, 2001). First, adults were highly independent and self-directed, with an **independent self-concept**, believing that they were accountable for their own decisions. This meant that adults understood that they were responsible for their own lives and valued freedom of choice in learning situations, and wanted to be seen as being capable of self-direction. Second, adults **needed to know why** they were learning as well as the expected benefits of the learning and the negative consequences of not learning something. Third, accumulated backgrounds and **life experiences** provided rich resources for learning, which was identified as the main difference between adult and child learners. Within a group of adult learners there was a great range in reasons for learning, backgrounds, learning styles, goals and motivations as well as needs and interests (Manning, 2002). A fourth characteristic was an adult's current life stage and changing **social roles** that motivated choices of learning activities (for example, different needs of young singles, new parents, retirees, etc). Fifth, adults chose learning opportunities that allowed information and skills to be used immediately, or that addressed a particular problem or a real life situation, which was described as a life-centred **orientation to learning**. Finally, the **motivations to learn** were usually internally driven, such as increasing self-esteem or identity, rather than external motivations imposed by others.

This means that adult museum learning experiences need (Kelly, in preparation):

- a good understanding of prior knowledge, experiences and interests, with an emphasis on front-end evaluation to gain this information;
- self-direction and choice in interpretive styles and levels of information;
- opportunities to satisfy intrinsic motivation through intense and deep learning experiences;
- social learning opportunities;
- objects and other real material to actively use and manipulate;
- mediation through knowledgeable others who facilitate discussion and sharing of opinions and understandings;
- layered content;
- the opportunity to engage in critical thinking and questioning;
- to be based on real-life experiences;
- to be relevant through making explicit why it is important to know something.

The particular needs of older visitors include an awareness that:

- physical needs, such as sight and sound, require special attention;
- they are more likely to travel and visit in groups;
- they are often not as technologically literate as other audiences;
- modifying the way that adults think can be difficult as they tend to be more set in their ways;
- contemporary content and ideas may be dismissed as not conforming to their world views;
- educational experiences need to provide opportunities that reinforce, refresh and extend prior knowledge;
- programs that facilitate reminiscing are of high interest.

6. SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS AND MUSEUMS



There are a large number of organisations that cater to the diverse needs and interests of older Australians. Most of those contacted in this research indicated that museums were highly relevant to the needs of over 65s in two ways. First, that museums provide opportunities for stimulating outings that support connections among family, peers and wider society and they help to counteract the tendency toward social isolation that threatens the well-being of older people. Second, museums provide opportunities for lifelong learning that contribute to the well-being of individuals and foster individuals ongoing contribution to society.

A range of opportunities for museums to offer more effective services to older Australians emerged from this research that centred around education/social benefits, travel programs and policy outcomes, as well as through local councils and tourist organisations.

6.1 Service Organisations

6.1.1 Education and Social Benefit Focus

Organisations with an educational or social benefit focus were very receptive to ideas from museums to offer a wide range of services. Most of these organisations were resourced at a low level and relied substantially on volunteers for their basic operation. Therefore, they were rarely in a position to initiate activities with museums themselves. They identified several different programs that museums could offer to these organisations: to provide speakers on specialist topics; run short courses that fit the structure/pricing of the organisation; provide resources such as objects sent out to support speakers; onsite resources such as specialist tours or behind-the-scenes tours; and venues at no cost for courses run by the organisation. It was noted that programs needed to be stimulating both educationally and socially.

Most organisations with an educational focus had newsletters or course lists that they sent to their large member bases. They were very interested in museums promoting exhibitions and programs in their magazines, especially if they were tailored to the interests and needs of older people. This promotion could take the form of paid advertising or relevant content. Local museums could establish on-going links with local branches of these organisations to explore mutual benefit. Museums could develop special programs for older visitors that can be packaged into an itinerary for a day out. These programs could be actively promoted through networks of seniors organisations, especially at the local level where much of the organisation for day trips takes place.

6.1.2 Travel Focus

Travel organisations were very amenable to working with venues that provided a satisfying experience for their clients. However, travel organisations had the general belief that older people were not very interested in museums and, accordingly, they were not inclined to suggest museums be included in itineraries. Instead, they focused on key tourist attractions, historic homes and physical landmarks. There is a clear need for the museum industry to be active in promoting positive information to service providers in the tourism industry. Two key facts from the quantitative study that need to be more widely known to travel organisations are that 82% of people over 65 years visit museums, and 47% of people over 65 years keep an eye out for special activities at museums.

The lead time for designing and promoting travel products can be up to 12 months. Therefore museums need to do forward planning if they are to be successful in promoting their services through travel companies. Products developed for older travellers in general should avoid school holiday periods; incorporate a personal guide; offer interactive display elements; and offer excellent access (mobility, vision, audio).

6.1.3 Policy Focus

There are a wide range of government and community agencies that provide services and policy for older Australians (see Appendix 1). At an industry level, museums should ensure they are abreast of government policy initiatives such as *The National Strategy for an Ageing Australia*. There may be opportunities for cooperative activities or access to funding programs linked with strategies such as these. Community organisations such as the National Seniors Association and Adult Learning Association provide networks for cooperation via conferences, online professional forums and newsletters.

6.2 Local Councils

Local councils, both urban and regional, play an increasingly important role in maintaining local heritage. In regional areas the preservation of local heritage is justified in terms of local community values and interest and also by the economic drivers of the tourism industry. In urban areas local community values appear to be the main impetus for the development of museums and other heritage facilities. Some local councils are establishing museum/gallery spaces that meet a range of needs such as preserving local history, a venue for travelling exhibitions, an activity space for community groups and educational services. In addition, local councils provide a range of essential services for their older citizens.

Because many local museums and galleries are run by local councils, there is good scope to coordinate the services offered to seniors and the facilities offered by these museums. Museum industry networks give opportunities for large and small community museums to cooperate in serving the needs of seniors. Smaller local museums could benefit from linkages with larger museums especially with regard to travelling

exhibitions/programs. Council officers with responsibility for services for the elderly are well-placed to distribute information about programs and services offered by museums and to organise outings. Two key institutions run by local councils that offer excellent avenues for communication are libraries and visitor information centres.

6.3 Tourist Organisations

The bus companies that were contacted in this research indicated that their clients usually had an itinerary in mind when they approached the bus company. Occasionally they were asked about things to see and do in particular places, however these companies rarely suggested museums because they did not know a lot about them and they thought older people were not particularly interested in them. The main exception to this was with regard to Canberra where four to five key institutions were often on tour itineraries and could be recommended with confidence.

7. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING FOR OLDER VISITORS



A number of key findings that influence the potential for museum visitation by older people have emerged from this research. In light of the growing proportion of the population that will be over 65, it is important that museums look at ways to maximise their relationship with this audience group. These key findings and recommendations have been put forward for further consideration by the museums sector.

7.1 Leisure Participation

- Most older people are well-disposed toward museums and consider them for possible outings.
- Many seniors who visit cultural institutions adopt a program of commitments that gave shape to their weeks and days. In effect, they have limited uncommitted time for making free choice outings.
- Visits to museums and cultural exhibitions are free-choice and will tend to be visited during uncommitted time.
- Museums are often regarded as places to visit once only.
- Repeat visits may be triggered by new exhibitions or events. Regular scheduled events for seniors could become part of their committed time.

7.2 Communication/Promotion

7.2.1 Messages

- The concept of a 'day off' from regular commitments is applicable to the elderly and may be effective in promoting museum visits.
- Museums could be promoted as places where grandparents can take their children.
- Museums could actively promote the range of discounts they offer for seniors.
- Even long-established museums can benefit from making clear statements about the purpose and scope of their operation because occasional or lapsed visitors may not be clear about this.
- Greater awareness of regional museums could be fostered by further self-promotion or cooperative marketing.

7.2.2 Channels

- Activities for seniors should be promoted through general channels as well as through age-specific channels such as retirement housing or service organisations, social support networks, clubs and associations, churches and other religious organisations, as well as charitable and social support organisations that attract older volunteers.

- Museums should explore ways to liaise with local community organisations in the design of programs/exhibitions and their hosting.
- Large museums should foster linkages with local communities through offering programs, talks and events in country centres and regional museums.
- Museum industry networks give opportunities for large and small museums to cooperate in serving the needs of seniors.
- Local museums and galleries in large cities can be lost in the clutter of similar small-scale places or dwarfed by the size of major museums. Some actions which could help raise awareness of these smaller museums and increase visitation are:
 - strong links with local newspapers to promote activities and events
 - direct promotion to local support groups and networks
 - joint programs with other cultural institutions and tourism venues.

7.2.3 Travel and Tourism

- Local museums and heritage sites are an important part of the appeal of a locality to day trippers and they need to provide facilities and services for travellers (group and independent). Regular museum visitors have begun to realise that they will find museums, heritage sites or interpretive displays in most regions and towns and often seek them out.
- Trips are planned to places where there is enough to see. Therefore, museums should be active in promoting themselves through regional tourism initiatives. As well as joining tourism initiatives, the museum industry could sponsor local promotions or national promotions such as AMOL's *Art Trails through Victoria's Regional Galleries*.
- Museums that offer things to see and do in an attractive setting will appeal to people looking for the stimulus of a day out.
- Emphasise to tour organisers and transport companies that older people are very interested in visiting museums and keep an eye out for special activities.

7.3 Role of Museums

- Museums offer older Australians an opportunity for contact with contemporary communal life that may contrast with the private sphere of the home. In museums seniors find a reflection of contemporary values and traditions through the selection and presentation of objects and stories. This helps contribute to a vital sense of continuity and purpose.
- A visit to a museum gives older people the opportunity to be around Australians (other visitors) who are not part of their immediate social circle. Museums with active programs aimed at older audiences can help reduce the effects of social isolation.
- Museums provide opportunities for active involvement through volunteering, especially at local, regional museums.

7.4 Exhibitions

- Those who are in the process of simplifying their lives will benefit from museum programs and events that are of short duration; topic-focused; presented simply and not physically tiring.

- Large museums should consider promoting ‘focused visits’ that present a topic in a short time frame (1–2 hours) and include some seated activities. Single activity visits could be developed and promoted to older audiences.
- The topic of an exhibition or museum is the single strongest factor in attracting visitors. A balanced program of exhibitions and events should include topics that have particular appeal to over 65s as well as topics which appeal to others.
- The cohort of people over 65 has a particular interest in stories and material of the era 1910-60. Exhibitions and programs which focus on this era will have strong appeal to many of them.
- Topics with particular appeal to sub-groups of the over 65 cohort include: study areas (science, world affairs, arts and crafts, etc.), collecting, family history, local history, topics associated with volunteer organisations, business, professional or commercial history. They are not so interested in being challenged.
- Exhibition design that encourages social exchange will make visits by small groups more rewarding. Activities in exhibitions and associated programs that foster cross-generational exchange will meet the needs of family groups.
- Museums should provide educational experiences that reinforce, refresh and extend prior knowledge.
- Museums should present material that is likely to contradict previous knowledge and beliefs of older people in a context that acknowledges these views and addresses them.

7.5. Programming

- Offer guided tours to provide extra support for occasional visitors who are in the somewhat unfamiliar environment of a major museum.
- Special tours or viewing times for people who are more frail could be scheduled on weekday mornings.
- The availability of pre-paid tickets would save people from standing in queues.
- For very popular events, museums should consider implementing ticketing and queuing systems that reduce physical demands on older people that allow for:
 - time-specific tickets so people know when they would get access
 - waiting areas with plenty of seating and catalogues to read while waiting
 - coffee cart and buskers for those who were prepared to camp on the outside steps to wait for ticket releases
- extended viewing hours
- limited numbers in gallery at any one time.
- Museums that are situated in or near natural settings can offer programs and services that encourage walkers to combine exercise with a museum visit.
- Programs aimed at seniors should be scheduled to avoid times when there are numbers of children in the galleries. Mornings are the best time to program events for seniors.
- Package events that combine a guided tour, a talk or a demonstration, etc., with morning tea or lunch would appeal to older people who are looking for a stimulating day out.

7.6 Facilities and Access

7.6.1 Building Design

- Comfort factors (transport, refreshments, seating, toilets) are particularly important in facilitating visits by those who are frail or have impairments, and for cross-generational visits.
- On-site cafés need well-priced refreshments and should be able to cater for large groups.
- Museums should attend to the infrastructure for coping with buses, such as parking, ticketing, shop discounts and special programs and events.
- Building designs which provide efficient pathways and minimise the need for stairs or backtracking will be more effective for older visitors.
- In larger museums, toilets and cafés should be available in multiple locations along main pathways. Prominent signage can help visitors find toilets and cafés without wandering off course.
- Mobile coffee carts can offer flexibility in larger museums on busy days. The special needs of older people (e.g. lower manual dexterity) indicate that service styles should be sensitive to their requirements.
- Low-cost parking, bus parking, disabled parking and excellent public transport help to facilitate visits from older people.
- A sheltered set-down area with seating nearby would be helpful for those who accompany frail elderly people to museums.
- The museum industry should draw up a set of guidelines for places that wish to promote themselves as suitable for group visits.

7.6.2 Seating

- Museums should provide plenty of seating throughout gallery spaces. As well as benches, some seats should have backs. High-set seats are easier for many older people to use than very low benches or couches.
- Videos and interactives should have associated seating.
- Portable folding stools and wheelchairs should be made available in larger museums.

7.7 Exhibition Design

- The special needs of older people (e.g. lower manual dexterity) indicate that display styles should be sensitive to their requirements.
- Technical interfaces should be clear even to those who are not familiar with typical computer programs.
- Exhibition planning should, perhaps, include a checklist that verifies whether all aspects of a proposed exhibition are ‘senior-friendly’ in operational terms.
- Gallery spaces should support reflection.

7.7.1 Interpretive Text

- Museums should be rigorous in providing object labels and text panels that are highly readable from a reasonable exhibition-viewing distance. Font size, eye-level height and lighting are the key requirements for legibility.

- Museums should explore ways of providing highly legible hand-held text information to substitute or supplement text that is fixed on walls and in display cases.
- Museums should cooperate to develop industry standards for the presentation of text that is accessible to people with minor vision impairment, as in Table 10.

Table 10. Guidelines for legibility for exhibition labels

Provide strong contrast between type and background.
 Set body copy in 24-point type or larger.
 Use line lengths of 50 to 60 characters.
 Limit labels to a maximum of 50 words (if longer, break into two or three smaller labels).
 Use both uppercase and lowercase letters in the body copy.
 Avoid glare on labels.
 Avoid using italics in body copy (unless for emphasis on a few words).
 Avoid using decorative typefaces in body copy.
 Avoid setting identification labels in smaller than 18-point typeface.

Source: Punt B. (1989). *Doing It Right: A Workbook for Improving Exhibit Labels*. New York: The Brooklyn Children's Museum.

7.7.2 Lighting

- Museums should consider the physical hazards to visitors that result from dark spaces.
- Museums should explore ways of giving visitors more control over lighting conditions.

7.7.3 Sound

- Exhibition design should provide quieter spaces that give relief from ambient noise.
 Large museums could incorporate some quieter spaces that foster reflection.
- Museums could consider offering a regular 'quiet' morning where noise levels are reduced and light levels increased to create a more peaceful, reflective environment suited to the needs of older visitors.
- Guides in exhibitions that have background noise, in outdoor areas or in busy museums should use an amplification system.

7.8 Expenditure

7.8.1 Cost of a Visit

- Many seniors were price sensitive and actively sought discounts and bargains in almost every aspect of life. Discounts on entry fees, parking, food, drinks and shop items were strongly appreciated by many retirees. Packaging the visit with other activities will enable a reasonably priced day-long outing.
- Museums should consider a range of ways to make visits by seniors less costly. Some possibilities might be free days for seniors or free entry for locals who bring others to the museum.
- Seniors discounts in museum cafés could assist with perceptions of value for money.

7.8.2 Museum Shops

- A high proportion of older people in this research were deliberate about not acquiring more goods and many were reducing/simplifying their possessions. However, gift-giving rituals still appeared to be quite important for many as they were part of the social glue that held networks together.
- Museum shops that stock a wide range of low cost (under \$10) items that suit broad tastes (e.g. edibles, stationery) are likely to appeal to older visitors who are ready to purchase small gifts.
- Museum shops with clearly defined children's areas will appeal to grandparents who are looking for gifts (birthday, educational, memento, special treat) for grandchildren.
- Retailing strategies such as special offers, discounts or bargain tables could appeal to those who are cost-conscious.

APPENDIX 1. REFERENCES AND RESOURCES



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Internet Resources

About Seniors <http://www.aboutseniors.com.au/>

Adult Learning Australia Inc., Canberra <http://www.ala.asn.au>

Aged and Community Services Australia <http://www.agedcare.org.au/>

Australia Council for the Arts <http://www.ozco.gov.au/index.htm>

Australian Bureau of Statistics <http://www.abs.gov.au/>

Australian Institute for Health & Welfare <http://www.aihw.gov.au/>

Australian Museum Audience Research Centre, Sydney <http://www.amonline.net.au/amarc/>

Australian Museums Online <http://amol.org.au/>

Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association of NSW <http://e-bility.com/cpsa/>

Council on the Ageing Australia <http://www.cota.org.au/>

Country Women's Association of Australia <http://www.cwaa.org.au/>

Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, NSW <http://www.dadhc.nsw.gov.au/>

Division of Aging and Seniors, Canada <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/>

National Archives of Australia, Canberra <http://www.naa.gov.au/>

National Institute on Aging, United States <http://nia.nih.gov/>

National Museum of Australia, Canberra <http://www.nma.gov.au/>

National Seniors Association <http://www.nationalseniors.com.au>

Office for an Ageing Australia, Canberra <http://www.olderaustralians.gov.au/>

Office of Seniors Interests, Western Australia <http://www.osi.wa.gov.au/>

Probus Centre, South Pacific Inc. <http://rotarnet.com.au/probussouthpacific/>

SeniorNet <http://www.seniornet.com.au/>

University of the Third Age <http://www.u3aonline.org.au/>

Worker's Educational Association, Sydney <https://www.weasydney.com.au/default2.htm>