

Baby boomers line up for Busselton ageing study

July 12 2016, by Tony Malkovic, Sciencenetwork Wa



The Busselton Healthy Ageing Study is keeping an eye on the long-term health of Busselton's residents. Credit: BPMRI

Some 5,000 baby boomers in Busselton are taking part in a unique health study examining how they're likely to cope with old age and how to better treat the diseases affecting them.

The good news is that, so far, they're smoking less and eating better than

their equivalents around the country.

Perhaps the not so good news is obesity is a problem; and [blood pressure levels](#) for male boomers in Busselton are high.

The volunteers—born between 1946 and 1964—are taking part in the second stage of the Busselton baby boomer study, a five-year follow-up of what's formally known as the Busselton Healthy Ageing Study.

"We've tracked down all baby boomers in the Busselton shire who are on the electoral roll," Professor Alan James of the Busselton Population Medical Research Institute (BPMRI) says.

"We've got about 5,000 (out of a total 6,000) of them to participate over a five-year period."

As part of the study, [baby boomers](#) complete a questionnaire on all aspects of their [health](#), undergo four hours of testing that includes hearing and vision, and contribute samples of blood and DNA.

Prof James says unpublished results so far show participants smoke less than the national average (10 per cent compared to 19 per cent nationally); and eat more fruit and veg (a 76 per cent rate of inadequate fruit and vegetable intake, compared to 92 per cent nationally).

Blood pressure and obesity still a concern

The study also found Busselton male boomers have a greater incidence of high [blood pressure](#) (27 per cent compared to 17 per cent nationally).

It also found 29 per cent of Busselton boomers are obese, very close to the national figure of 31 per cent, but still a concern.

In effect, over the past five decades, virtually everyone in Busselton has been part of one of the world's longest running longitudinal health studies, generally called the Busselton Health Study, which is about to celebrate its 50th anniversary.

It all started in 1966 thanks to local GP Dr Kevin Cullen.

"Kevin Cullen's hypothesis was that if people had more information about their health, they'd pay better attention to it," Prof James says.

[Numerous studies](#), involving leading WA health researchers and some 25,000 participants, have provided breakthrough research on topics such as elevated iron levels (haemochromatosis), diabetes, lung disease, sleeping disorders and asthma.

Prof James says the Busselton Population Medical Research Institute is seeking more funding to continue its work.

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