

# Sixties lifestyle sets stage for healthy ageing

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Two academics are calling for a shift in awareness on 'pretirees,' who face a fork in the road - leading to either healthy ageing or chronic disease threats.

Professor Julie Pasco and Professor Michael Berk, from Deakin University's Centre for Innovation in Mental, Physical and Clinical Treatment (IMPACT), based at Barwon Health, believe targeted health promotion interventions can help boost health outcomes for current and future pretirees as they enter their elderly years. It will improve their quality of life and reduce the financial toll on health, disability and social services budgets.

"Sixty-something-year-olds no longer withdraw from the workplace to enter into a quiet life and await muted oblivion. That notion of twilight time has given way to an emerging life stage and a rapidly growing demographic that should attract societal awareness – the pretirees," said Professor Pasco.

"What happens in the pretiree period powerfully influences the divergent paths of healthy or unhealthy ageing.

"Early intervention and prevention are important so they can cross into the 'elderly' band able to continue contributing to society in better health."

Population figures reveal that the number of Australians aged 65 years and over rose from under one million to 3.4 million in 50 years from

1964. Life expectancy has also climbed.

"We need to shine a light on this pretiree demographic, sandwiched between work and the retiree stage of life, because they're engaged with life and they're at that crucial stage where they should be focussed on maintaining their muscle mass and strength, their mobility and their cognition so they reach their elderly years in a healthy state," Professor Pasco said.

Professor Pasco and Professor Berk also believe it's time to recognise the rich life experience, economic potential and youthful mindset that people in their late 50s and 60s contribute to today's Australia.

Professor Pasco, who heads IMPACT's Epi-Centre for Healthy Ageing, said the growing pretiree demographic was largely overlooked when members of the Silent Generation filled its ranks. With Baby Boomers now taking over, today's pretirees are shaping as more active, financially secure and vocal than their predecessors.

"The early-elderly play an important societal role. They are often well educated, hold senior roles and wear a cloak of wisdom with content. Many are also caregivers and their economic contribution is substantial," Professor Pasco said.

"They're not so silent and they have a much younger attitude compared to previous generations in this age bracket. It's an exciting time of life for them."

Professor Pasco, who is researching the participation rates of older people in sporting events, also called for a societal change in attitude to pretirees embracing physical fitness.

"While 'middle aged men in Lycra' comments may be tongue in cheek,

there's no reason why retirees exercising should be unfashionable," she said.

"Steps to enhance healthy ageing should be perceived as the norm – it should be culturally acceptable, and indeed desirable, for early-elderly men and women to appear in public dressed for, engaging in, and enjoying physical activities that are widely perceived as a domain of the young.

"We need to ensure that retirees actively participate in [life](#) rather than observe it from the sidelines. Let their place in society blossom, as everyone will benefit," Professor Pasco added.

"We should be supporting and applauding these people. Let's celebrate the youthful outlook of today's retirees, because they are a vibrant sector of our community."

Provided by Deakin University

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