

# Older caregivers and entrepreneurs a focus of study

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Dr Joanne Allen, post-doctoral research fellow with the Health in Ageing Research Team (HART) at Massey's School of Psychology.

Should you launch your first business when you are over 50? How does caring for a loved one fit around paid work in later years? These are

among new topics canvassed in the latest biennial survey by Massey University psychology researchers running a longitudinal study on health and ageing in New Zealand.

The [survey](#) was recently posted out to several thousand participants aged 55 and over, as well as being available online for the first time since the study was launched in 2006. Researchers hope existing and new participants, contacted through the electoral roll, will take up the chance to be included in the latest data collection of the major study that is helping to generate positive conversations, and shape public attitudes and government policy about ageing in Aotearoa.

To make sure they continue to represent people aged 55 and over, every two years they invite new people to participate in the research for the first time. This year, the new group has the option to complete the survey online, with the benefits of reducing paper and potentially clearer data, as invalid answers are flagged to participants in the online system, says Dr. Joanne Allen, a post-doctoral researcher with the Health and Ageing Research Team (HART).

## **Housing quality among older NZers?**

"In the 2018 survey we've included items on [older people](#)'s satisfaction with their housing and neighbourhoods, as well as asking about problems about damp, mould and general household maintenance," says Dr. Allen, who is encouraging those yet to complete their surveys to take the opportunity. The study provides valuable insights into the [health](#) trajectories of older adults that are associated with living in cold and damp housing, she says.

"We're also assessing workforce engagement for [older adults](#), particularly barriers such as age discrimination, availability of flexible hours, and capacity to work in career roles, as well as availability of

training and career progression for older workers," Dr. Allen says. "This is part of a wider programme of research, which also includes interviews with people combining work with caregiving responsibilities and with people interested in starting their first business after the age of 50."

Survey participants have until the end of October to answer multiple lifestyle questions, including questions on housing, work, transport, social life, physical health, alcohol consumption and technology. Led by Professors Christine Stephens and Fiona Alpass, the team is responsible for the New Zealand Health, Work and Retirement Study, which has spawned numerous reports, journal articles and conference papers, published nationally and internationally.

Since launching the survey in August, the researchers have had over 3000 postal surveys returned by current participants in the study. "This group are really key to understanding personal and environmental factors that influence change or stability in people's circumstances over time," Dr. Allen says. "Luckily, people who have participated before are a very engaged group, with 80 to 90 per cent responding when invited to participate again."

She says her team receives a lot of positive feedback from participants, including:

- "Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity of participating."
- "I am now [over 80] years old and hope you continue with your research. I feel privileged to help."
- "I love reading in the newspaper about results from your studies, knowing that I have contributed in some small way. Keep up the good work."

The team recently published a report capturing a decade of observations

on the health and lifestyle experiences of older New Zealanders, revealing that two thirds of those surveyed enjoyed good physical, mental and social health over ten years of follow-up.

The release of that report in August coincides with projections that New Zealand's over 65 population will double over the next 30 years. Those over 65 will make up 25 per cent of the population by 2040. The number of 'oldest-old' (those aged 85 and over) will expand more than five-fold to constitute five per cent of the population.

While the report paints a positive outlook for many as they enter retirement age, it also signals areas of concern, such as access to decent housing for those on lower incomes and with poor health, and the importance of enabling and supporting engagement of older people in the workplace as more are motivated to continue working beyond retirement age, the report authors say.

Provided by Massey University

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