

AGE OF OPPORTUNITY

We should see the ageing of South Australia's population as a positive not a burden, experts say. Business will enjoy new opportunities, and longer, healthier lifespans are helping turn 70 into the new 50

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FOR Virginia Paterson, 70 is the new 50. The Adelaide artist was among the first baby boomers five years ago to step across the retirement threshold.

Now as those boomers turn 70, she remains in the vanguard of one of the biggest transformations of Australia's population in history. Already the number of retirees over 65 has hit 3.5 million and in 20 years time it will be 6m.

But she doesn't feel old. As one of those post-war babies born from 1946 until 1964, she defies the way many think of the elderly.

Virginia and her husband, Terry, have just finished studying their visual arts degrees at the Adelaide College of the Arts, they travel the world, attend exercise classes three times a week and Virginia rents space at a Goodwood art studio for her sculpture.

"I'm going to be 70 this year in October. I think 70 is the new 50," she says. "People think, 'oh gosh, they are 70, they must be so frail', but we aren't."

Hardly. Look at Helen Mirren, Rod Stewart, Carla Zampatti, Diane Keaton, Tom Sellick, Steve Martin, and, soon, Donald Trump.

The phenomenon of an older society will continue as the younger generations live longer. A girl born in 2015 is now expected to live, on average, until 93 and a boy until 91 years of age.

The change is creating great shifts in our economy. On one hand, there are projections that Australia will need an extra 70,000 to 80,000 new beds in nursing homes by the end of this decade, equating to two large facilities being built each week.

The number of workers needed to deliver aged care services is expected to triple over the next few decades meaning one in 20 will be working in aged care by 2050.

But there's also a strong focus on people continuing to live more independently than in the past. Men born in 1977 didn't expect to live past 70 – for those born today that figure has blown out two decades. There's a push for older people to continue to contribute, mentor, work – or just enjoy themselves by staying healthier as life expectancy continues to grow.

The changes will be vast, so how will our state cope? Jane Mussared thinks it should start with a serious dose of attitude adjustment. Talk



Josephine Whiteley with her mum Letissia Pitches

about "fearing" the costs, the "burden" of building new aged care services, the "crisis" of worker shortages must stop, according to the CEO of the state's peak body for the aged.

And we definitely should stop saying the growing number of older Australians is a problem. "We are desperate to live and live and live ... and yet we deride completely ageing and being old. Everything old and ageing has no value," Mussared says.

It's the last of the "isms" in her book, and, with projections showing more than a quarter of the population will be over the age of 65 by 2056, she thinks this is the "once in a generation, once is a millennium, opportunity to tackle it".

Mussared, whose organisation Council on the Ageing (COTA) has 60,000 of the 570,000 South Australians aged over 50 years as members, also believes this is our opportunity to be a world leader.

"We've always had an aged care sector more willing to try new approaches. Community care really hit its straps here," she says.

"People working in aged care have this opportunity to work differently and be part of innovation so far from the stereotype of aged care. If you want a career that's fast moving, inventive, about innovation and career opportunity I can't think of a better one at the moment."

There's already significant change in the wind. Next year, new federal legislation means homecare packages designed to keep the elderly in their homes longer will be managed by individual clients rather than providers chosen by the government.

Aged care consultant David Coluccio thinks it will lead to services being better crafted to meet individual demand – particularly with the added pressure of having a tidal wave of baby boomers starting to access services.

"They are not like their parents of that war generation," Coluccio says.

"They were not as demanding, they just accepted outcomes and they were more frugal and didn't want to be perceived as a burden.

"Baby boomers are consumers, they have very strong views about what services they require and expect when they spend their money on anything, and aged care isn't going to be any different."

In North Adelaide, Coluccio is one of a new breed seeing opportunity in the sector.

After having worked in health management, he saw a gap in the market for a business that helps families with the often complicated and emotional search for a high-care nursing home bed for a parent or spouse.

"The words we were hearing were frustrating, confronting, stressful, emotional, bureaucratic," he says.

In July, 2014, his company, Senexus Aged Care Solutions, joined about six other consultant businesses helping Adelaide families shop for high care beds in Adelaide's 120 facilities. He charges a \$1395 flat fee to take families through the process of their loved one being assessed, finding a free high care bed, exploring options of payment and how they can finance the move.

And Coluccio says he also shows clients these are not the same aged care facilities we once knew. "The residential aged care industry is very dynamic at the moment," he says. "A lot of people have a stigma about aged care and I think it's a bit outdated, it belongs in the 1970s. There's now hundreds of millions of dollars being spent on building new aged care homes and on updating and redeveloping existing ones.

There are more beds in single rooms with an ensuite rather than the old ward-style accommodation, there are more activities, new



Virginia and Terry Paterson at Henley Beach

gardens, and some that specialise in dementia patients. Coluccio, along with Mussared, believe they offer some of the best care in the world.

In Semaphore, Mark Butler, the former Minister for Ageing in the Gillard government, looks to the heritage RSL building across the road from his electorate office where he emceed the annual memorial service.

"My great-great-uncle Charlie Butler laid the memorial stone in 1924 on behalf of the RSL," he says, proud of his elders' place in history.

It was the Member for Port Adelaide who specifically asked for his ageing portfolio and, once in charge, held 80 forums for the elderly around Australia over a year. There was talk from those that no longer felt valued in the community and others petrified of entering nursing homes that may not respect their independence, sexuality or religion.

Butler helped build new policy around



homecare packages supporting people living in their homes longer and giving greater options for those accessing residential nursing homes.

“We wanted a big philosophy shift from a system built around aged care facilities to flip it into a system that supported you staying in your own home as long as possible or for the rest of your life,” he says.

Now, as Labor’s spokesperson on the environment and national ALP president, Butler is still committed to provoking discussion around how we look after our elderly. Last year, he released a book, *Advanced Australia, The Politics of Ageing*, that told how older Australians are “often shocked by the way in which the rest of society treats them as they age”. He talks of a loss of trust in the system and unhelpful debate focused on the downside of the ageing baby boomers that threatens to “betray all of the hard work done over the

course of the 20th century to enable future generations to live longer, happier lives”.

Butler doesn’t think our elderly need special privilege, but they do deserve better recognition of their value to the nation. He also thinks we could potentially help others do the same.

There are those in China who already think South Australia has much to offer.

Charles Sturt Mayor Angela Evans helped draw together a team of aged care specialists to visit the province of Shandong in China during April.

The city of Yantai specifically asked for an Australia China Aged Care Consortium to visit and discuss how South Australian experts can get involved in building six aged care projects valued at \$US2 billion. In a country where the traditional care of the elderly by families is breaking down under the one child policy, there

is now a new need for community care.

“They have been here and visited and they are the ones who have offered us the invitation to come over and speak to their businesses and government in order to establish some bilateral trade agreements,” Evans says.

It is these opportunities that underpin the State Government’s aim to position the state as a global leader in health and ageing well, in its list of economic priorities.

Six months ago, the state’s Economic Development Board established its own Ageing Well subcommittee and board chairman Raymond Spencer says it’s been exploring economic prospects. He uses the state’s food sector as an example, saying we could create new premium packaged meals for export that give global aged care providers access to healthy eating options.

Spencer also sees our growing numbers of

elderly as a resource and not a burden, explaining how the state needs to help look at “encore careers” for this growing demographic.

“We spend four years at university to get prepared for our first career but when people approach their 60s we give them no preparation for the next phase of their lives,” he says.

Sub-committee member and ECH chief executive Dr David Panter agrees, saying there is vast opportunity for older people to contribute as mentors, volunteers or by sharing experiences.

Panter was chief executive for the Central Adelaide Local Health Network and was responsible for the design and development of the new Royal Adelaide Hospital until he took up his new job early last year.

He adds “age careism” to Jane Mussared’s assertion that attitudes need to change. “It’s this notion that everybody who’s old needs lots of care and needs to be in a nursing home when in fact everything indicates that the longer we enable people to remain well and healthy then the better life they are going to have,” he says.

Two years ago, his not-for-profit organisation sold its 11 nursing homes and their 1200 beds to the Allity group, so it could focus on supporting independent living.

It now has 1700 independent living units at 98 different locations across the state, and also provides home support services with a large focus on health and wellness programs.

The group reaches 15,000 South Australians and provides therapies and fitness classes along with respite programs for those with dementia.

“We have just finished a summer holiday program with CirKidz where grandparents and their grandchildren could come together and learn circus skills,” Panter says. “It was hugely successful and will now be integrated across all our wellness centres.”

Even the older, more established facilities are embracing change. Resthaven is a not-for-profit that has been operating since 1935, has 11 residential care homes in South Australia with 1150 beds and is now building its twelfth home at Aberfoyle Park.

Its chief executive officer, Richard Hearn, has seen the industry continually evolve during his 30 years in the sector, with the focus now far more on supporting the elderly in their homes.

And in nursing homes, there’s been constant change, too; single bed rooms taking over from wards, vast dining rooms reduced to smaller, more intimate spaces.

Josephine Whiteley, 71, isn’t afraid of moving into residential care. Her Mum, Letissia Pitches, didn’t want to go into care after falling and breaking a hip during a visit from Melbourne. For eight months, she stayed with Whiteley in her unit. When Whiteley needed respite, her 91-year-old mother stayed in a home in Marion for a few nights — and the experience completely changed her mindset.

Now Pitches has an individual room in one of Resthaven’s homes in Westbourne Park, 3km from Whiteley, who is certain the move has made her happier.

“She’s been in there four months, her blood pressure has gone down and she looks 10 years younger,” Whiteley says. “I’ve told my children I would be quite happy here. When they can’t look after me this is where I’m going.”

But aged care homes are far from the mind of Virginia Paterson, feeling 50 at 70, as she plans the next stage of her burgeoning arts career with three upcoming exhibitions.

“We’ve put the travel on hold while we’ve been studying for the past five years but we want to do a round the world trip, starting in the west and travelling through the east” she says.

“We might do a postgraduate subject after that, maybe art therapy.” ●

Also this weekend in the Sunday Mail: The key issues facing SA’s maturing population