

Western Australia's Seniors

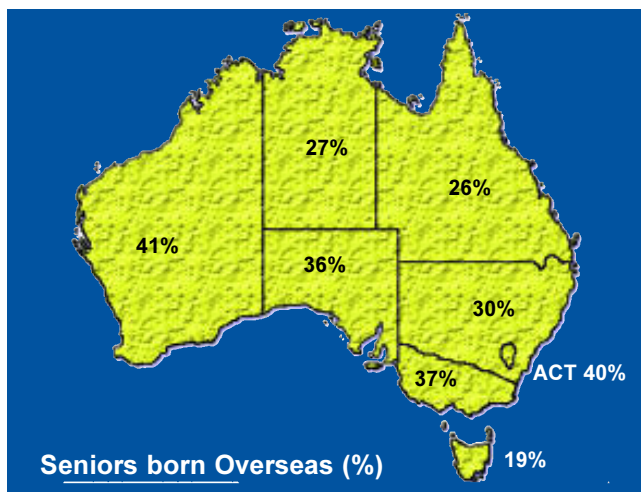
TOPIC SHEET No 2 Edition 2 - in the series 'Western Australia's Seniors'

CULTURAL DIVERSITY - UPDATE

CULTURAL DIVERSITY IS IMPORTANT IN WA

With just over two-fifths (41%) of WA seniors¹ born overseas, cultural diversity among our seniors is an important issue.

Western Australia has the highest proportion of overseas-born seniors (41%), followed by the Australian Capital Territory (40%). WA is also considerably higher than the national average of 32%. Tasmania has the lowest proportion (19%).



WA's Indigenous population also has great cultural diversity, with about 80 kinship or language groups represented.

BIRTHPLACE OF SENIORS²

Western Australia's seniors come from many different countries.

While more than half (52%) were born in Australia, 23% were born overseas in English-speaking countries, mainly the United Kingdom. A further 14% were born in non-English speaking countries, mainly Europe, including almost one-third of these from Italy³.

The following table shows the country of birth for WA's overseas-born seniors⁴.

| OVERSEAS-BORN SENIORS | | |
|-----------------------|--------|-----|
| Country of origin | Number | % |
| United Kingdom | 55,862 | 49% |
| Italy | 12,896 | 11% |
| Netherlands | 4,360 | 4% |
| India | 3,840 | 3% |
| New Zealand | 2,925 | 3% |
| Germany | 2,885 | 3% |
| Poland | 2,344 | 2% |
| Ireland | 2,160 | 2% |
| Malaysia | 2,028 | 2% |
| South Africa | 1,553 | 1% |
| Burma (Myanmar) | 1,474 | 1% |
| Yugoslavia, | | |
| Federal Republic of | 1,379 | 1% |
| China | | |
| (excl. SARs and | | |
| Taiwan Province) | 1,087 | 1% |
| Singapore | 1,047 | 1% |

Overall, seniors comprise 15% of our population. However, among WA's overseas-born population, the proportion of seniors is much higher.

- 24% of the population who were born in English-speaking countries are seniors.
- 23% of the population who were born in non-English-speaking countries are seniors.
- In contrast, only 9% of people born in Australia are seniors.

¹ People aged 60 years or more.

² From the 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

³ Another 7% did not state their birthplace and the remaining 4% indicated they were born overseas but either did not say where or inadequately described their birthplace.

⁴ The listed countries account for 84% of the total for WA's overseas born seniors.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY - UPDATE

This reflects the ageing of the population of those who came to Australia as adults or adolescents in the great wave of post-war migration, largely from Europe⁵.

BROADER CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Looking at the country of origin of the parents of today's seniors gives a better picture of their overall cultural diversity.

While two-fifths (41%) of WA seniors are known to have been born overseas, almost two-thirds (60%) of today's seniors had one or both *parents* born overseas.

The following table shows the birthplace of the *parents* of today's seniors:

| Birthplace of both parents | Number | % |
|---|----------------|-------------|
| Both born in Australia | 93,930 | 34% |
| Both born in same overseas English-speaking country | 81,558 | 29% |
| Both born in same non-English-speaking country | 51,925 | 19% |
| Mixed parental birthplaces | 32,980 | 12% |
| Born 'elsewhere overseas' or birthplace not stated | 19,107 | 7% |
| Total | 279,500 | 100% |

People whose parents, grandparents or even great-grandparents were born overseas often retain strong links to the culture of that country.

They may speak and/or write the language, mix more frequently with people from the same ethnic or

cultural background, support arts, sports etc popular in the ancestor country, and follow the religion of that country.

As with Indigenous seniors, ethnic seniors help to keep their original culture alive by teaching descendants their language and traditions.

PROFICIENCY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Most WA seniors speak English well, which is important in a country where English is the primary language and that of government-provided services.

- Approximately four-fifths (81%) of all WA seniors speak only the English language.
- Another 10% say they speak English 'very well' or 'well'.
- However, 4% of WA seniors say they speak English 'not well' or 'not at all'⁶.

More than 37,000 (or 13%) of WA seniors speak a language other than English at home.

- Over one-third (35%) of these speak Italian.
- A further 8% speak a Chinese language, including Cantonese and Mandarin.
- Over 2% of seniors speak an Australian Indigenous language at home.

Seniors unable to speak English can be disadvantaged in a country where English is the primary language and that of government-provided services.

⁵ The first 'great wave' of post-war migration occurred between 1947 and the mid-1950s, peaking in 1949. The second 'great wave' of post-war migration was between the mid-1950s to 1969.

⁶ The remaining 5% were people who did not state how proficient they were in English.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY - UPDATE

BIRTHPLACE OF TOMORROW'S SENIORS

Most of today's overseas-born seniors came from Europe. With changing migration patterns, the birthplace of tomorrow's seniors will be a little different.

WA residents who were aged between 37 and 55 in 2001 (approximately 507,100 in the 2001 Census) will all be seniors by 2024. These people are commonly known as Baby Boomers, that is, people born after World War II until the mid-1960s.

- 38% of tomorrow's seniors were born overseas.
- Almost 60% were born in an English-speaking country, including over two-fifths (43%) from the UK.
- New Zealand becomes the second highest place of birth for our future seniors, with almost 10% of future seniors being born there.
- The proportion of future seniors from non-English speaking countries is lower than for today's seniors. Italy (4%), Malaysia (3%), India (3%), Germany (2%) and Viet Nam (2%) are the top five birthplaces for our future seniors.

WA'S INDIGENOUS SENIORS

Despite having higher birth rates than the non-Indigenous population, Indigenous people represent only 3% of the WA population⁷.

Due to higher mortality rates (at all ages) than the non-Indigenous population, relatively few Indigenous people live to become seniors, and although the number of Indigenous seniors has increased almost 13% since 1996, they continue to represent less than 1% of all seniors.

The life expectancy at birth for Indigenous people is

nearly 20 years less than for non-Indigenous people - just 56 years for men and 63 years for women, compared to 77 and 83 for non-Indigenous men and women respectively.

NEEDS OF A CULTURALLY DIVERSE SENIORS POPULATION

Recognition is growing that seniors from different cultures, including Indigenous seniors, have special needs regarding the provision and delivery of aged care services.

Communication difficulties can be a serious barrier to accessing necessary services for seniors who do not speak English well. These include:

- Seniors born in non-English-speaking countries who have never become proficient English speakers.
- Seniors from Indigenous communities for whom English is a second or optional language.
- Seniors who begin to lose their memory of English with advanced age and revert to their first language. (The reasons are uncertain but the age at which one originally learns English is believed to be an important factor).

⁷ The national average is 2%



Seniors who do not speak English well, or who must seek information about services outside their cultural community, are at a disadvantage. And those who must leave their cultural communities to access services such as hospitals and residential care facilities may experience dislocation, cultural isolation and sometimes great distress.

Over the past few years, many State and Federal government departments have begun to address cultural diversity by providing more culturally specific services to seniors.

Several nursing homes (mainly in the north-west) cater for Indigenous seniors, while others (mainly in Perth) cater for Italian, Greek, Dutch and other cultural groups, creating ethno-specific clusters of care.

Another important emerging issue is the strong tradition in Indigenous and other cultural groups for families to take care of older family members at home, even where there are severe age-related disabilities such as dementia.

The time and care required can cause difficulties when the lifestyle of younger family members, particularly women (who are generally the ones to take on the caring role), differs significantly from the traditional lifestyle of their cultural group.

The range of culturally appropriate services for seniors provided and/or supported by government is anticipated to expand as population ageing increases and further specific needs are identified.

DATA SOURCES

- Tables prepared by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for the Office for Seniors Interests and Volunteering using data from the *2001 Census of Population and Housing*.
- *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 1997*, ABS Cat. no. 4704.0.
- Information supplied by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care on culturally specific nursing homes and hostels, 1999, unpublished.
- *Deaths, Australia, 2001*, ABS Cat. no. 3302.0.
- *Immigration - Federation to Century's End, 1901 to 2001*, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, October 2001.

ADDITIONAL COPIES

Additional copies of this topic sheet can be downloaded from the Office for Seniors Interests and Volunteering website <http://www.osi.wa.gov.au>



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