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Geographical variations in the characteristics of lone-person households: policy implications for ageing populations

Di Rudd

Adelaide University

Abstract

One-person households increased rapidly in number during the 1980s and 1990s and now make up almost a quarter of all households in Australia. Changing household structures are closely related to the ageing of populations and other social, economic and geographical processes occurring over time. One outcome is the very uneven distribution of lone person households within large cities and also between regions. Most importantly, the characteristics of lone person households have changed over the last decade due to an increasing trend in the prosperity of young and also more mature adults to live alone. This phenomenon has significantly altered the familiar profile of the dominance of older widowed females and given rise to greater diversity in the characteristics as well as significant variations in the spatial dimensions of one-person households.

The paper explores these changes with a focus on the changing geographical distribution and its relationship to changes in age structure, migration and other social and economic factors. A major concern is that the process driving the increases in non-family living are more fully understood so that policy can be more in tune with the demands of a more diverse range of lone-person households as they age and put increasing pressure on services.