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Longevity, social relations and positive ageing

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Abstract

DATA: Research results from studies of retired and bereaved persons conducted by the authors, together with review of relevant literature in Australia and overseas

METHOD: A mail survey of retired persons in three States yielded 800 responses, followed up by personal interviews. A subsequent study of bereaved war veterans also took the form of a mail survey, followed up in this case by a focus group discussion.

FINDINGS: The two surveys and the relevant literature indicate the importance of social networks and active social participation in maintaining health and well-being among older people.

The ageing of the population presents unprecedented challenges and opportunities in relation to the economy and living standards, health, welfare and quality of life of older people. The traditional notion of older age as a period of declining physical and mental capacity is being replaced by the alternative view that older age can be healthy, active, productive and positive, signalled by the World Health Organisation's acceptance of the concept of 'healthy ageing' in 1980.

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