

## DEATHS AND FUNERALS IN AUSTRALIA: A STATISTICAL SNAPSHOT

### Death rates declining

While tax rates might be rising death rates in Australia are actually declining. Even though Australia's population is larger than ever (23.5 million) and growing faster than ever (405,400 in the last year), Australia's death rate continues to decline (6.5 deaths per 1,000, down from 6.9 a decade ago). Australia has more than twice as many births as deaths with more than 300,000 annual births and less than 150,000 annual deaths (147,098 in 2012).

Although more men die each year than women, (74,794 men in 2012, 72,304 women), the gap is decreasing from a decade ago when 107 men died for every 100 women, to 103 men for every 100 women currently.

### Seasonal deaths: winter is Australia's 'death season'

'The death season' in Australia comprises our winter months, June July and August. Deaths in June are 11% above the monthly average, July is 26% and August 24% above the average. In summer of 2012 there were 25,617 deaths and in winter that same year Australia saw 41,926 deaths, an increase of 64%.

While Victoria hosts a deadly winter (66% increase in deaths compared to summer 2012), because of warmer weather, the Northern Territory does not have a noticeable winter and the deadliest month in the top end is January, and has been for the last 4 years.

### Age of death increasing

The highest death numbers in Australia occur in the five year age bracket 85 to 89. This age group saw 19% of all deaths occur in 2012, making up 1 in 5 deaths for that year, despite 85-89s comprising just 1.2% of the population. Of the 279,684 Australians aged 85-89 in 2012, approximately 1 in 10 of them (27,885) died that year. Of the 3,299 Australians aged 100 and over in 2012, 2 in 5 of them (1,369) died in that year.

While those in their twenties recorded one of Australia's lowest death rates, three times as many males (1,134) die in their twenties as do females (420).

### Infant deaths declining

Infant deaths continue to decline even though we are setting new birth records (310,600 last year). While in 2002 the number of infant deaths recorded 397, this figure dropped to 312 ten years later. As total numbers of infant deaths continue to decline, so does the infant mortality rate from 4.6 (deaths per 1,000 live births) in 2002 to 3.2 ten years later in 2012.

### Significant variability of state death rates

Western Australia had the lowest death rate of any state or territory (5.5 per 1,000 people), while the Northern Territory had the highest (7.9).

State	Average Death Rate
NSW	5.7
VIC	5.6
QLD	5.9
SA	5.9
WA	5.5
TAS	6.6
NT	7.9

When measured by death rates, the deadliest place to live is Katherine in the Northern Territory (death rate 13.6), and the safest place to live is North Sydney (death rate 3.8). There is still a significant life expectancy gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. For non-indigenous Australians, the median age at death for males in 2012 was 78.7 and females was 84.7, whereas for indigenous Australians the median age of death for males was 55 and for females it was 61.3. All of the Local Government Areas with the highest death rates are areas with higher indigenous populations than the national average.

### Death rates in some localities is four times that of others

State	Lowest Death Rate per State	Local Government Area	Highest Death Rate per State	Local Government Area
NSW	3.8	North Sydney	9.4	Bourke
VIC	4.3	Stonnington	7.9	Central Goldfields
QLD	5.2	Sunshine Coast	8.9	Murweh
SA	4.2	Mitcham	10.1	Ceduna
WA	4.0	Perth	11.0	Derby-West Kimberley
TAS	5.8	West Tamar	8.8	Derwent Valley
NT	6.7	Darwin	13.6	Katherine

### Country of birth

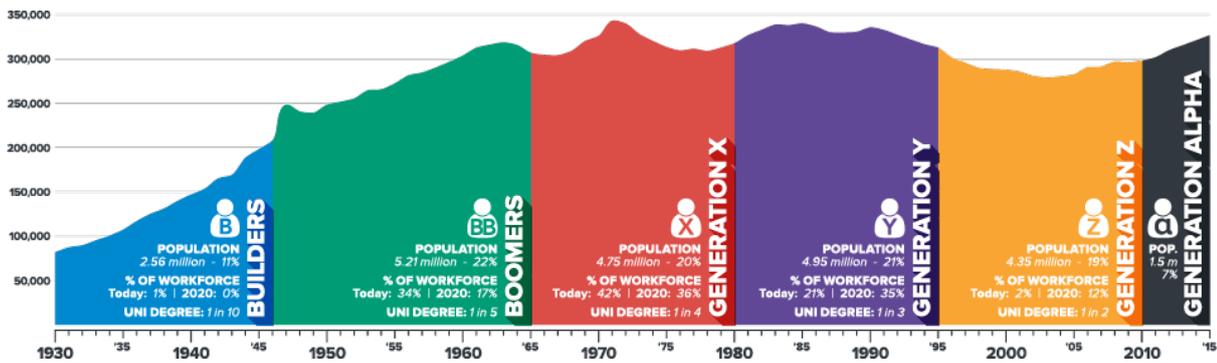
Of the 147,098 deaths in Australia in 2012, 320 people died who were visiting Australia (non-residents), 45,393 were Australians born overseas and 101,385 were Australians born locally.

Australian men born in the Ukraine have the highest male median age of death at 87.8 years of age, followed by Poland (87.3), Estonia (87.2) and Lithuania (87.2). In fact, Australian men born overseas had a greater life expectancy (79.8) than Australian born males (78.0).

Australian women born in Estonia have the highest longevity with a median age of death at 90.1, followed by those born in Latvia (88.9), Russia (88.4) and Lithuania (88.0). Australian females born overseas had a comparable median age of death (84.6) as those born in Australia (84.7).

## Australia's generational trends

Over the last four decades, the world has grown from 4 billion to 7 billion people, and Australia has grown from 13 million to a population of 23.5 million. Australia is growing at 40% by natural increase and 60% by net overseas migration, so we are not only larger as a nation but more culturally diverse than ever before. Australia is also generationally diverse, made up of six generations from the Builders Generation to Generation Alpha:

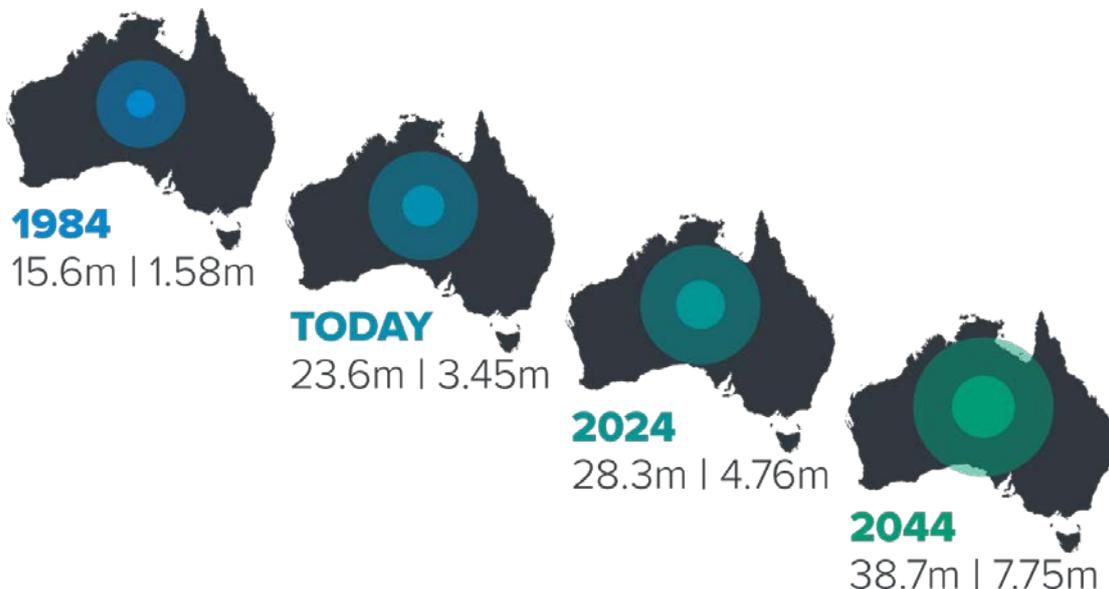


Whilst approximately 1 in 5 (22%) Australians are Baby Boomers, they own over 50% of the national private wealth. And while they currently make up over a third (34%) of the total workforce, by 2020 they will comprise of less than 1 in 5 workers. Australia's workforce is increasingly made up of Generation Y (which will grow from 21% today to 35% in 2020) and Generation Z (comprising just 2% of workers today but rising to 12% in 2020).

## Australia's ageing population

The over 65s make up 15% of our population today, and forecasts project that this cohort will make up 17% in 2024, and by 2044, 1 in 5 Australians (20%) will be aged over 65.

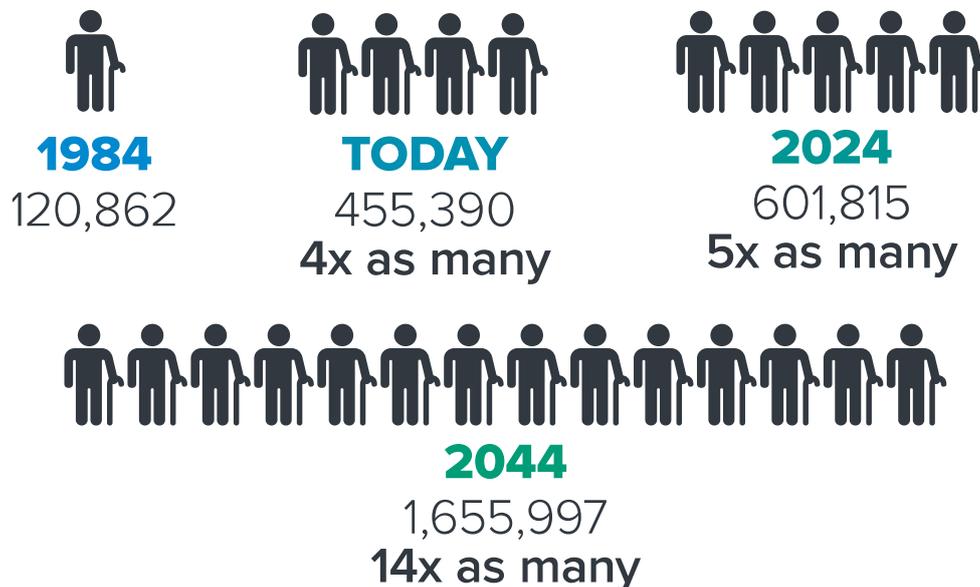
### AUSTRALIAN | 65+ POPULATION



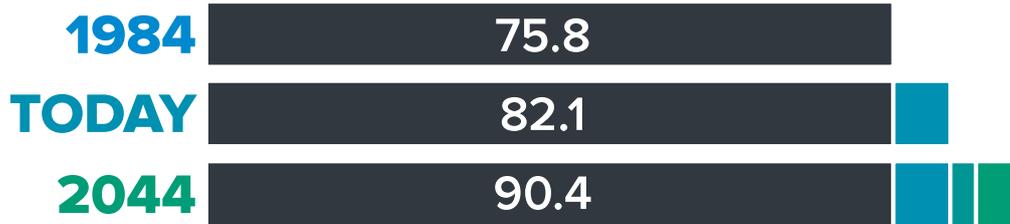
Australia’s population pyramids visually show the growth of our ageing population, and in 2044 our population pyramid will become inverted with the number of over 60s outnumbering the under 18s for the first time. Our median age is also increasing – three decades ago the median age of an Australian was 30.5, today it is 37.3 and in 2044 it is projected to be 40.



The over 85s are growing at an even faster rate than the over 65s. In 1984 there were 120,862 Australians aged over 85, today there are 4 times as many, and in 2044 there will be 14 times as many.



Not only are there more older people in our nation but Australians are living longer than ever before. Life expectancy at birth in 1984 was 75.8, whereas today it exceeds 80 for a male and 84 for a female. In 2044, it is projected to be 90.4.



## Our increasing longevity

The primary enabler of this increased and ongoing longevity gain has been the health system rather than individual behaviour. Life expectancy increases will continue because of improved medical technologies, public health infrastructure, better public health measures, new and improved medical interventions and the improved survivability rates of major illnesses and cancers.

The health system is also what will keep us living longer in the future. With Australians living longer than ever before, there will be an increasing need for procedures and medical intervention, and a growing expectation from the public that these services will continue to be provided.

A decade ago, dementia and Alzheimer’s disease were the sixth largest causes of death in Australia, accounting for 4,364 deaths in 2002. Today they are the third leading causes of death with the number of deaths having more than doubled to 9,864. Over the same period of time, deaths due to the first and second causes of deaths (heart disease and brain disease) have been decreasing. If today’s current trend continues over the next decade, by 2021 dementia and Alzheimer’s disease will be the leading cause of death in Australia.

With little change in the retirement age and an increase in longevity, the retirement years have increased and the years for which supported care is needed has also increased. Not only is our population larger, our population is also living longer.

## Trends on death rates

Looking to the future, Australia will experience an increase in deaths over the next 30 years. While there were 147,098 deaths in 2012, based on current death rates and population growth, the calendar year 2024 will record more than 187,000 deaths, an increase of 27% in the span of a decade, and by 2044 Australia will be recording more than a quarter of a million deaths per calendar year, an increase of 71% compared to today.

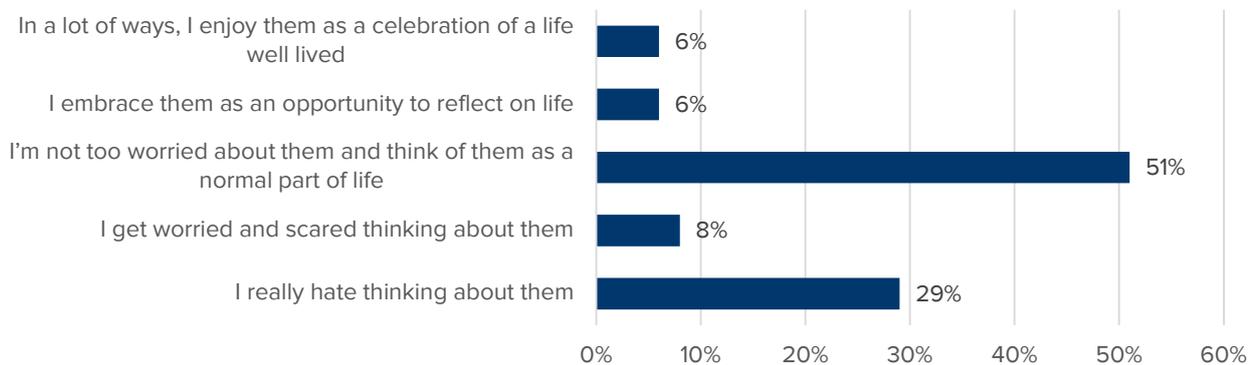
While the number of deaths is set to increase over the next 30 years, so too is the median age of death, as medicinal measures and health systems set to increase the longevity of life in Australia. While the median age at death was 81.7 in 2012, this is set to increase to 85.6 in 2024, and by 2044 reach into the 90s.

## Australians and funerals

This national survey of more than 500 Australians aged over 50 (519 completed online interviews) reveals the fascinating snapshot of the attitudes and expectations of the funerals Australia can expect over the next four decades.

### Attitudes to funerals: accepting rather than resisting

**Q. When you think about funerals – either planning them or attending them, which of the following best represents your emotion towards them?**



1 in 10 Australians (12%) enjoy and embrace funerals, and just over half (51%) view them as a normal part of life. Death and the thought of funerals scare more than a third (37%) of the population, who really hate thinking about them.

### From a reminder of death to a celebration of life

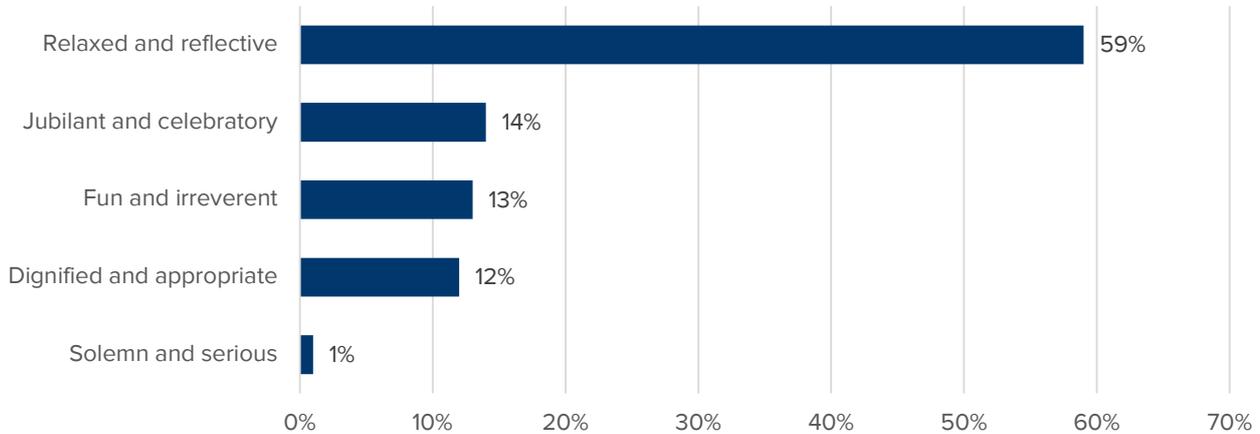
The personalisation of funerals is a growing trend in Australian society, with 61% viewing funerals as an occasion to honour the departed and recognise their life. More than half (52%) view them as a celebration of a life, while 2 in 5 (39%) a time to farewell the departed. Just 1 in 5 Australians (21%) view funerals as a reminder of our mortality and reflection on eternal things.

### Cost a key influencer

Cost is the biggest influencer when planning a funeral with 2 in 3 (66%) Australians stating it is extremely or significantly influential. Cost is considered more important than both religion or life philosophy (31%) and culture and family traditions (27%).

## Relaxed and reflective wins out over serious and solemn

### Q. Which of the following best represents the tone you would want for your funeral?



The most popular tone for a funeral today is relaxed and reflective, indicated by 3 in 5 Australians (59%). While 27% would opt for a jubilant/fun/celebratory funeral, just 1% would prefer solemn and serious.

### Defiant songs emerge in modern funerals

When Australians choose to have a song played at their funeral, the most popular theme is sentimental, comprising of songs such as, 'I'll be seeing you' 'Somewhere over the rainbow', 'Time to say goodbye', "What a wonderful world", and 'You'll never walk alone'.

The second most popular genre is religious songs, with the most common suggestion being 'Amazing Grace'.

Defiant songs over death came in at number three, with the most popular suggestion being Frank Sinatra's 'I did it my way'. ACDC's 'Highway to hell' is another notable mention in this category.

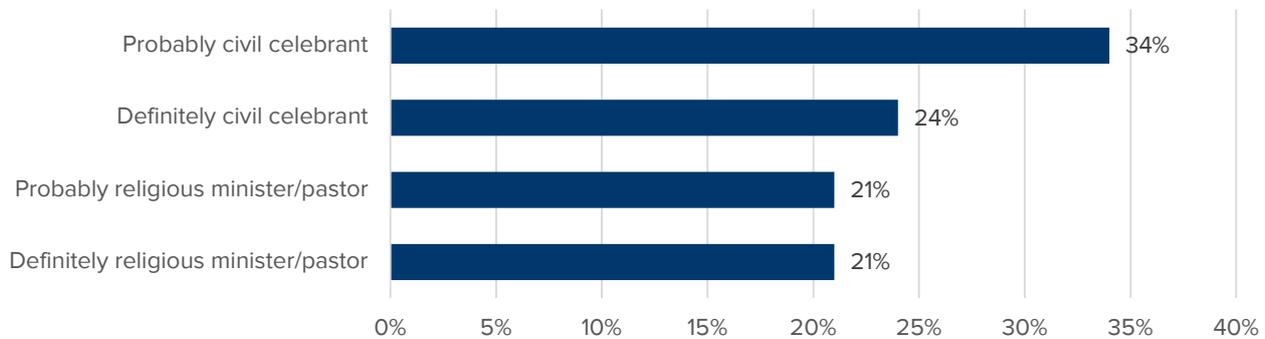
Quirky songs such as 'Most people I know' by Billie Thorpe, 'Always look on the bright side of life' from Monty Python and Football club theme songs also made the list, as did a variety of Classical songs and celebratory songs such as Pharrell William's 'Happy' and ABBA's 'Dancing Queen'.

### Cremation more popular than burial

2 in 3 Australians (66%) prefer cremation over burial when planning their own funeral. In comparison, just 1 in 5 (20%) would choose burial with 14% having no preference either way.

## Civil celebrants more popular than religious ministers

**Q. Would you more likely choose a civil celebrant or a religious minister/pastor to conduct the ceremony at your own funeral?**

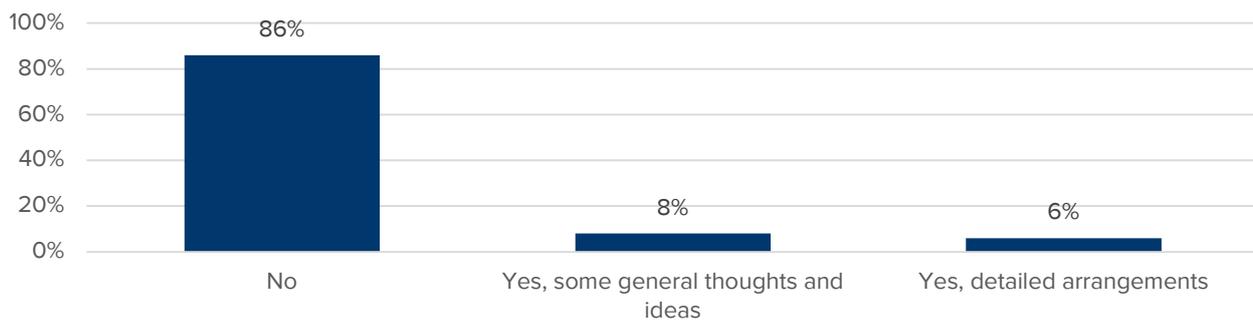


As with weddings, Australians are increasingly turning to civil celebrants rather than religious ones. Over half (58%) of the population would prefer to have a civil celebrant conduct their funeral, with 42% preferring a religious minister.

Just 1 in 5 (22%) Australians view the inclusion of a religious component to be extremely or very important to the planning of their own funeral.

## Australians not likely to pre-arrange their funeral

**Q. Have you made any pre-arrangements with a funeral director for your own funeral?**



Most Australians over 50 (86%) are not thinking about their funeral and are not making pre-arrangements with a funeral director.

Only 6% have made detailed arrangements, while 8% have some general thoughts on what they would like.

Furthermore, over half of the population (57%) will not be making pre-arrangements with a funeral home in the next 5 to 10 years.

This research revealed Australians in their 50's and 60's are in a phase of **decision passivity** (not thinking of panning anything funeral related, and Australians in their 70's and 8-'s are in a phase of **decision reluctance** (actively pushing back on a state and funeral planning) which ultimately leads to a situation of **decision urgency** (where the family make arrangements often at short notice).

### Quirky funeral elements

Australians have seen some weird and wonderful elements of funerals:

- A waving hand on the coffin as it moved away at a funeral
- People at grave site singing country music with line dancing
- An alarm going off inside the casket as it was lowered into the grave
- A video of the deceased thanking us for coming
- The family dog in attendance

### This research was commissioned by the Australian Funeral Directors Association.

Mark McCrindle will present these findings in full at the Australian Funeral Directors 2014 National Convention on Sunday June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014.

### Sources: McCrindle, Australian Bureau of Statistics

### Media Contact

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