

# Not the retiring kind It's work all the way for Gen X

GILL VOWLES, Sunday Tasmanian, 4 May 2008

GENERATION X will not only be the first generation to die younger than its parents, it will also be the first to forgo a formal retirement.

That's the message from Australia's futurists, who say Generation X (born 1964 to 1980) will never be able to stop work to indulge in a life of travel or bowls

Thanks to an ageing population, in 2050 the average Aussie will be in their mid-40s and retirement will be nothing but a historical concept for Generation X and Y (born 1980-2000).

Chairman of the Melbourne-based Futures Foundation Charles Brass said there were now five working Australians for every retiree.

By 2050 that ratio will have dropped to 2.5 workers for every retiree.

"So we will have a situation where there are half the number of people working to fund pension schemes and health services," he said.

"That means Gen X will need to stay in employment both to prop up the workforce and to earn an income."

When the aged pension was introduced in 1909 the average life expectancy was 55 for men and 58 for women.

However, people born between 2003 to 2005 look at a life expectancy of 78.5 for men and 83.3 for women.

Mr Brass said longer life expectancies were increasingly making retirement a redundant concept.

"The notion of retirement at age 60 was originally conceived in 1870 when only 2 per cent of workers actually lived to 60.

"Today people are not only living longer they are also likely to remain healthy and active for most of that time."

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare figures show the nation has one of the highest healthy life expectancy figures (number of expected years of full health) in the world.

In 2002 males could expect 70.9 years of full health and women 74.3 years.

Mr Brass said longer healthy lives meant Generations X and Y were also likely to want to keep working.

"Filling 168 hours a week is not easy without work and 60 and 70-year-old Gen Xers will be fit enough to do it."

However, he said elderly Gen Xers would not be working in traditional ways.

"They will be 'portfolio' or 'modular' workers who will have a suite of part-time jobs which could include consulting or running their own small businesses.

"Work will be part of their life but they will also travel, study at university and will most likely have more family commitments than previous generations."

Sydney-based social researcher Mark **McCrindle** said part of how Gen X folk lived their later years would be determined by families.

"Gen X will be the 'sandwich' generation," Mr **McCrindle** said.

“Their parents are going to need assistance because of the lack of care givers and their children are going to be staying at home later -- indeed well into their 20s.

“Gen Xers are also likely to have more involvement in rearing their grandchildren than previous generations did.”

Some futurists believe policy changes should include replacing the retirement concept with a mid-life sabbatical that gives people in their 50s several years off to figure out what to do with the rest of their lives.

Mr Brass agrees change is needed but said he thought most Gen Xers had already remodelled their views on retirement.

“Gen X are not prepared to wait for the good life -- they are doing the things they want to do now and are following a much more flexible life plan where they opt in and out of employment while travelling and retraining to pursue several careers in a lifetime.”

Mr Brass said in Tasmania global warming may change the predicted outcome.

“We know Tasmania is going to be a huge beneficiary of global warming with significant numbers of people moving there when it becomes too warm in northern states.

“That population influx is likely to decrease the average age and alleviate some of the pressures.”

He said immigration was another factor which could change the future.

“Birth cannot change the predicted ageing of the population because we can't do it fast enough,” he said.

“However, immigration might be able to do it -- whether that's because the Government actively recruits younger migrants or because other countries see what is happening in Australia and decide themselves to move here.”