

Moving or staying put

Deciding where to live in later life

November 2009





Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing

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FOREWORD

Where do Australians want to live as they get older? What factors do they consider when making a decision about where to live in later life? Although it is widely accepted that the majority of older adults prefer to live in the community rather than in residential aged care, our general understanding of the housing preferences and choices of Australians in later life is underdeveloped. To investigate these and other issues around housing, National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre commissioned the Centre for Research on Ageing at Curtin University of Technology to investigate the housing preferences and choices of National Seniors' members in Western Australia*1.

The results of this investigation challenge the common perception that older people will spend most of their later life in one home, revealing that two in three people move between the ages of 55 and 75. It also identifies four prominent themes that influence the decision to move or stay: house and home, lifestyle, location and access to services.

The research findings illustrate the complexity of the decision of where to live in later life. Older adults are a very diverse group, with almost as many reasons for moving house as there are people. In addition, there are clear differences between older adults of different age cohorts in terms of their moving preferences and the factors they consider when deciding whether or not to move.

The research also confirms the importance of age-friendly housing design, with many older adults indicating this affected their decisions. Others attempted to make their existing home more age-friendly by making modifications, and those who had were significantly less likely to consider moving homes.

The results of this work raise significant questions for policy makers. Are government and service providers prepared for the increasing number of older adults whose preference is to move home? What can policy makers and service providers do to help ensure older adults are able to make unfettered decisions about where to live in later life? How can we make homes more accessible for older adults? How can we encourage people to think about their future housing needs and plan ahead?

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*1 The original report can be accessed at www.productiveageing.com.au

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CONTENTS

Foreword	5
Acknowledgements	6
Introduction	8
Method	9
• Survey Sample	10
Who moved house?	10
• Why did they move?	10
• What were they looking for?	12
Who was intending to move in the next few years?	13
• Why were they intending to move?	13
• What were they looking for?	15
Who was staying put (or unsure)?	15
• Why were they intending to stay put?	15
Not moving, but modifying	16
Worrying about the future	17
Conclusions and policy implications	18
• House and Home	18
• Lifestyle	19
• Location and Community	19
• Access to Services	19
• Concluding Comments	20
References	20
Appendix 1: Ranking of Factors	21
Appendix 2: Ratings of Factors	24

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INTRODUCTION

Where do Australians want to live as they get older? Do they prefer to stay in their 'family home'? Or is a familiar location or community the main factor in choosing where to live? And how important is the proximity of support and care services?

National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre (NSPAC) wanted to investigate these and other questions around the meaning of home and location for older Australians. For the past two decades, 'ageing in place' has been a central theme of Australian ageing policy, particularly in community care (Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, 2008; Winter, 1999). Broadly, the goal of this policy has been to enable Australians in later life to remain in their own homes for as long as possible.

A distinction needs to be made between 'ageing in place' and 'staying put'. 'Ageing in place' is often used to describe ageing in the community in contrast to moving into residential aged care later in life. 'Ageing in place' is sometimes used to refer to staying in one's own familiar, existing home (Davison, Kendig et al, 1993). Although research evidence suggests that the vast majority of older

adults prefer to live in the community for as long as possible (Fujitsu, 2007), over a third of older adults do not intend to continue to live in their existing home as they age (Olsberg & Winters, 2005).

When older adults do move, it is for a variety of reasons including change in circumstances, difficulty with home maintenance, and anticipated care needs (Stimson & McGovern, 2002). It is likely that older adults are involved in a continual assessment of the suitability of the place in which they are living, just like people in early and mid-life. This assessment involves objective factors such as cost, convenience and upkeep demands, as well as subjective or emotional factors. Some older adults are deeply attached to their own house or locality and plan to stay put. Others find their existing homes burdensome or constraining and plan to move.

Given this diversity of aspiration and experience, public policy and services should enable older adults to make housing and living adjustments as they age. From this perspective, 'ageing in place' is about enabling people to live in a place that gives them a high quality of life and allows them to live their preferred lifestyle, be this in familiar surrounds (perhaps with some modifications),

in an entirely new place, or in different places at different life stages.

While many older adults undoubtedly prefer to live at home rather than in residential aged care, our understanding of the housing and care preferences of Australians in later life is underdeveloped. Knowing that older Australians prefer to live 'at home for as long as possible' provides only general guidance for the planning, development and delivery of appropriate housing and community services. A more nuanced and detailed understanding of the diversity of housing, location and service needs and preferences of people in later life is needed.

The research summarised in this publication was commissioned by NSPAC and aims to fill some of these gaps in understanding. It is important for policy makers, care providers, town planners and local governments to know more about people's housing preferences as they age, in order to ensure adequate planning and service availability. This research sheds greater light on questions around ageing and location, such as:

- Who has already moved house?
- Why did they move?
- Who intends to move house in the near future, and why?
- Who will stay put, and why?
- What do people worry about when assessing future housing needs?
- What are the policy implications?

METHOD

This research was conducted by the Centre for Research on Ageing at Curtin University of Technology. The study included both a quantitative and a qualitative component. Stage 1 (quantitative) was a large postal survey of Western Australian members of NSA (all aged 50+), with an initial mail-out of around 7000, including members in city, rural and remote areas and from different socio-economic groups. 3050 completed surveys were returned.

The study was carried out by WA based researchers and hence was limited to WA members of NSA, in order to restrict the cost of the interview component. However, the sample was stratified so as to include representatives from rural, remote and metropolitan areas. This means that the findings, particularly those presented by age group, should be broadly representative of NSA members nationally.

The survey explored factors which influenced decisions about moving and 'staying put'. Respondents were asked to rate 27 factors on a scale of 1 to 3 (not important to very important). These factors were then ranked by the percentage of participants rating a specific factor as very important. For purposes of simplicity, the top 5 rankings in each age category of movers (those who had already moved), contemplators (those who were thinking about moving), and stayers (those who intend to stay put) are reported in this publication. The full rankings for each category of movers, contemplators and stayers are available in Appendix 1. Graphs displaying how each age group rated the importance of each of the factors are available in Appendix 2.

Stage 2 (qualitative) consisted of semi-structured interviews with a sub-sample of 39 respondents from the postal survey. These interviews explored survey responses and the role and importance of 'place' (in the wider context of house and home, locality and community, and support and care).

A key focus in both stages was the exploration of 'push' and 'pull' factors (Stimson and McCrea, 2004) related to decisions around moving. A 'push' refers to a stressor that encourages people to move from their current home. A 'pull' refers to an attraction that encourages people to move to another place. 'Push' and 'pull' factors can be either place-based (related to home design and location) or people-based (related to functional independence and social interaction) (Karol, 2008).

SURVEY SAMPLE

Fifty-one percent of all survey respondents were aged 55 to 64 years, 27% were aged 65 to 74 years and 9.3% were 50 to 54 years, with the remainder being 75+. More than half (54%) of all respondents lived in metropolitan areas, 36% lived in country towns, and just under 10% lived in other rural areas. The vast majority (87%) of respondents owned their own home, with most of these having no mortgage. The majority (79%) were living in a detached house. Almost half (49%) of all respondents were working, with the largest proportion of those working full-time. Only 13% of all respondents described their health as 'poor' or 'fair', though the proportion increased with age. Less than 5% of the sample used a mobility aid. One-third of those aged 75 or over needed help with household duties, compared with only 13% of the total sample.

WHO MOVED HOUSE?

Approximately 27% of respondents had moved house within the last 4 years (Table 1). A similar proportion (29%) had not moved house for 20 or more years. The proportion of those who had moved house within the last 4 years decreased with increasing age. In contrast, the proportion of those who had not moved house in the past 20 years increased with age.

The majority of respondents who had moved house within the last 4 years moved more than 10kms (63%), with 37% staying in the same vicinity. As Table 2 shows (right), approximately 29% of those aged over 75 had moved less than 2kms, compared with less than 16% of those in the other three age categories. Only 17% of respondents in the oldest age group moved 50kms or more, compared with nearly half of those in the younger age groups.

WHY DID THEY MOVE?

Averaged across all age groups, the top 5 factors influencing the decision to move house were 1) 'Thinking about where you want to live for the rest of your life', 2) 'Wanted lifestyle change', 3) 'Employment', 4) 'To be closer to friends and family' and 5) 'Retirement'.

Across all age groups, 'Thinking about where you want to live for the rest of your life' was one of the top three factors influencing the decision to move (Table 3). Other rankings differed across age groups, with younger age groups reporting lifestyle change, employment and wanting more free time as their other key factors and older age groups reporting concerns about upkeep and maintaining house/garden as well as changes in health as the other top factors influencing their decision to move.

Table 1. Percentage of people in each age category who have moved house, years since they moved.

	50-54 years (n = 279)	55-64 years (n = 1538)	65-74 years (n = 813)	75+ years (n = 360)
Less than 1 year	12.0	8.3	4.4	6.2
1 – 4 years	26.4	21.3	17.0	13.7
5 – 9 years	17.3	19.9	19.7	18.2
10 – 14 years	14.5	12.9	14.3	15.5
15 – 19 years	12.9	9.7	12.1	12.1
20+ years	17.0	28.0	32.5	34.3

Table 2. Percentage of people in each age category who have moved house in the last 4 years, distance moved.

	50-54 years (n = 103)	55-64 years (n = 450)	65-74 years (n = 173)	75+ years (n = 73)
Less than 2kms	11.5	15.9	14.6	28.6
2-9km	19.7	19.5	20.1	32.5
10-49km	26.2	17.9	16.3	22.1
50km or more	42.7	46.7	48.9	16.8

Table 3 . Top 5 factors influencing decision to move house in last 4 years

	50-54 years	55-64 years	65-74 years	75+ years
#1	Lifestyle Change	Lifestyle Change	Where you want to live for the rest of your life	Where you want to live for the rest of your life
#2	Employment	Where you want to live for the rest of your life	Retirement	Upkeep/ Maintenance Difficulties
#3	Where you want to live for the rest of your life	Employment	Closer to Friends/ Family	Garden too big
#4	Cost/ Financial reasons	Closer to Friends/ Family	Lifestyle Change	Decline/change in own/partner's health
#5	Want more free time	Want more free time	Upkeep/ Maintenance Difficulties	Ability to look after self/house

In summary, younger respondents were more likely to have moved house recently and more likely to have moved further distances than those of older ages.

The semi-structured interviews revealed that the decision to move often involved a mix of reasons, many of which were interrelated. For example, a wish to reduce time spent on house or garden maintenance in order to have more free time to pursue other interests.

Responses varied widely to questions about specific factors that influenced moving. For example, in regard to 'thinking about where you want to live for the rest of your life' (the factor most frequently rated as very important across all age groups), one person mentioned that this had been largely influenced by witnessing the 'trauma' that her mother and other friends had experienced when "getting out of houses they had lived in for years" (Woman, 55-64 years).

Regarding employment, one couple had moved from interstate, largely because the husband had become "sick of his job in X, we were happy to move and thought we could see Western Australia" (Woman, 55-64 years)

Finding it hard to maintain the house and garden was often associated with a desire for a different lifestyle. "We wanted a smaller block so that we could get out and do things, rather than stay home and do the chores" (Woman, 55-64 years). Other reasons for moving included selling up to release cash for children's weddings, having no choice but to move out of a rental property, and shifting to a community close to church and like-minded people.

In summary, for most recent movers, deciding where to spend the rest of your life was the most important factor in deciding to move. Younger respondents wanted to move for lifestyle reasons and to have more free time while for older respondents the upkeep of their home/garden was a bigger concern.

WHAT WERE THEY LOOKING FOR?

In the interviews, 'recent movers' were also asked what they looked for when they had searched for their new home. A desire to live in a 'convenient' location, generally defined as one that afforded easy access to services and facilities (shops, banks, medical services and public transport), was often mentioned. For example, one man over the age of 75 stated that as he had become less mobile he needed to be closer to medical services (general practitioner and hospital) as well as shopping facilities.

For many, finding a home in a location that was a 'pleasant' place to live, and which afforded space, quiet and privacy was also important. "I wanted it to be quiet and not too many units or apartments on top of each other" (Man, 50-54).

Others wanted to be near family, or wanted something affordable. Space and layout were important, with some wanting a flat, level residence, or sufficient space for hobbies. Key deciding factors were the location (e.g. close to services, family, employment), affordability and the general 'look and feel' of the place.

For many people the choice of residence was influenced by several considerations, as the following quote illustrates.

"We lived for a time in a caravan park... We liked it but it was too far from work. This one [caravan park] was closer to services. We actually looked at three parks along the seaboard strip. This one is close to the bus, to everything (and I am still working). The hospital is just down the road, two brothers live nearby. The community, the environment, the support is so nice here. And there are children at the back. We hear them through the day, it normalises it, so it's not like being in a retirement village" (Woman, 55-64 years).

All but one person interviewed indicated that they had been able to find what they were looking for without much difficulty. Most said that the decision

to move had been entirely their own (or made in conjunction with their partner). Children or friends had been involved in a few instances. *“Our son sort of prompted us along a bit. He had a job and his fiancée had a job over here and he knew his father was unhappy and he said ‘why don’t you get a job in Western Australia and tour around and see things?’”* (Woman 55-64).

With the exception of two people who had been forced to relocate, no-one said they had found the decision to move a difficult one.

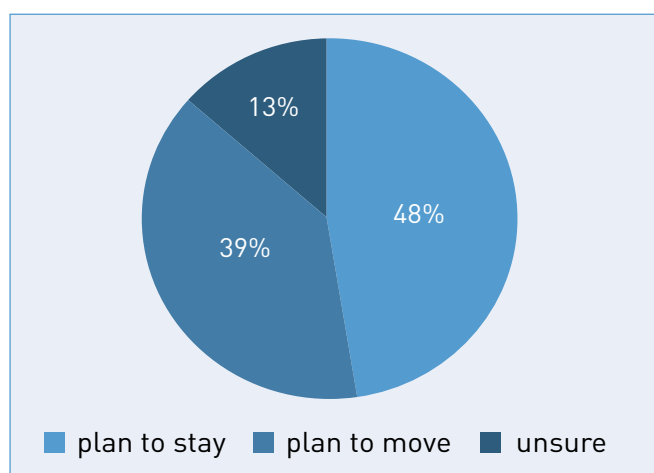
In speaking about satisfaction with their current residence, factors such as the house itself, its location, the friendliness of the neighbours, the sense of community, and the possibility of new opportunities that the move had afforded were contributing factors. Opportunities included a new job, a new area to explore and the chance for personal growth.

In summary, recent movers were looking for homes that were close to services and facilities, that were affordable and in a pleasant location.

WHO WAS INTENDING TO MOVE IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS?

Over a third (39%) of respondents indicated that they did not intend to stay in their current residence indefinitely (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Respondents’ moving intentions



Seventeen percent of respondents indicated that they were thinking of moving within the next year or so. This varied slightly by age group, being highest amongst those aged 55-64 (19%), with only 13% of the oldest age group intending to move within the next year.

Nearly three quarters (74%) of individuals who were planning to move at some point said they would move within the next 9 years. Forty-four percent would only stay for up to a further 4 years. There was no clear pattern of variation between the age groups in response to this question.

In summary, approximately 1 in 5 respondents were thinking of moving in the next year or so, with those aged 55-64 most likely to be intending to move.

WHY WERE THEY INTENDING TO MOVE?

The top 5 factors influencing the intention to move house in the next year were 1) ‘Thinking about where you want to live for the rest of your life’, 2) ‘Retirement’, 3) ‘Wanting lifestyle change’, 4) ‘To be closer to friends and family’ and 5) ‘Wanting more free time.’

There were similarities and differences in rankings across the age groups (Table 4). ‘Thinking about where you want to live for the rest of your life’ was one of the top two factors influencing the decision to move across all ages. Retirement was a top factor for all age groups 55 and over, with those less than 55 years reporting employment as a top factor. There were some differences across age groups, with younger respondents reporting ‘Lifestyle change’, ‘Wanting more free time’, ‘Don’t like the neighbourhood’ and ‘Wanting to be closer to friends/family’ as key factors and older respondents reporting concerns about maintaining house/garden and changes in health as top factors influencing their intention to move.

Table 4. Top 5 factors influencing intention to move in the next year or so

	50-54 years	55-64 years	65-74 years	75+ years
#1	Where you want to live for the rest of your life	Where you want to live for the rest of your life	Where you want to live for the rest of your life	Upkeep/ Maintenance Difficulty
#2	Lifestyle Change	Lifestyle Change	Retirement	Where you want to live for the rest of your life
#3	Employment	Retirement	Upkeep/ Maintenance Difficulty	Retirement
#4	Want more free time	To be closer to friends/family	Garden too big	Garden too big
#5	Don't like Neighbourhood	Want more free time	Lifestyle Change	Decline/change in own/partner's health

Additional analyses revealed that respondents who were experiencing poor health or had a partner in poor health were 1.3 times more likely to consider moving than those in good health.

In the semi-structured interviews, many people intending to move within the next few years could not single out any particular factor as the most influential amongst those identified as 'very important'. Instead, it was a combination of several factors such as lifestyle change and upkeep of property combined with decline in health. As with 'recent movers', specific reasons and circumstances associated with the relative importance of various factors varied widely. For example, with regard to 'lifestyle change', some people expressed a desire to move away from the city. "Perth is so huge in the last four to five years, the traffic and all that, we want to get away from it" (Woman, 55-64 years).

Others wanted to downsize in order to be able to travel. "We have a caravan, we want to go away but we don't want to leave a big house unattended, we'd prefer a lock up and leave type residence" (Man, 65-74 years).

One couple who had moved from Perth to a small rural property in the south west of Western Australia six years ago for lifestyle reasons, now felt the need for a different lifestyle and had decided to move to a larger regional town. Demands associated with the upkeep of the property, the distance from services and sporting facilities, and the additional travelling time involved when visiting friends in Perth, were also influential. "It has been a great place to live and you can't deny the beauty of place. But you come to another 'place' and we don't want to do the work, we'd prefer to put our energies into other things. I used to do a lot before we came here and I want to do some of those things again...It would be nice to be able to go to movies, have lunch, go to plays. I'm really missing that, the fun stuff" (Woman, 55-64).

Individuals who were intending to move planned to move to a home where they wanted to spend the rest of their life. Younger respondents were moving in order to have a lifestyle change while older respondents wanted a home with fewer maintenance and upkeep requirements.

WHAT WERE THEY LOOKING FOR?

In looking for a new home, space was a key consideration for several interview respondents. One person reported wanting *“Somewhere not cramped, with trees and so on. I have a horror of a lot of current housing. I cannot, cannot live in a squashed environment. I have never seen myself living in these tiny villas that you see up and down X Street, just block block block. If you’re working [and] out a lot and you come back [home] you can live just about anywhere. But if you spend a lot of time in your own space, your space is very important to you”* (Woman, 55-64 years).

For others, a smaller living environment, but one which would still enable them to have family or friends to stay, was preferred. Some people also wanted a place more suited to their lifestyle. *“We don’t need the view anymore. I would rather walk along the beach”* (Man, 65-74 years).

Others reported a desire for an ‘age friendly’ living environment. *“Because I’ve been a care aid worker I know what should be in a house and what shouldn’t. With disabled and aged, no we don’t want steps, we don’t want a big area, we want a big open bathroom, we want to plan the house for old age”* (Woman, 55-64 years).

Individuals intending to move were looking for a place with adequate space which was suited to their lifestyle.

WHO WAS STAYING PUT (OR UNSURE)?

Almost half the respondents (48%) were intending to stay in their current residence as they aged. 13% reported being unsure about staying or moving. The proportion of those who said they intended to stay steadily increased from 37% of those aged 50-54 years to 62% of those aged 75 and older.

Nearly two-thirds of people in the oldest age group planned to stay put as they aged. Younger cohorts were less likely to plan to stay put.

WHY WERE THEY INTENDING TO STAY PUT?

The top 5 factors influencing the decision to stay put were 1) ‘Comfort’, 2) ‘Financially viable to stay’, 3) ‘Good Location’, 4) ‘Feel safe and secure’ and 5) ‘Easy access to services.’

There was similarity between age groups in the top factors influencing the decision to stay (Table 5 - next page). Across all age groups ‘Comfort’ was ranked as the most important factor. ‘Good Location’ and ‘Financially viable to stay’ were included in the top five rankings for all age groups. ‘Feel safe and secure’ and ‘Live in current residence for life’ were reported as very important by many of the oldest respondents. Individuals aged 50-64 included ‘Like the neighbourhood’ as a top factor.

“Respondents who were experiencing poor health or had a partner in poor health were 1.3 times more likely to consider moving than those in good health”

Table 5. Top 5 factors influencing decision to stay

	50-54 years	55-64 years	65-74 years	75+ years
#1	Comfort	Comfort	Comfort	Comfort
#2	Financially viable to stay	Financially viable to stay	Financially viable to stay	Safety / security
#3	Good Location	Good Location	Safety / security	Stay for life
#4	Like the neighbourhood	Access to Services	Good Location	Financially viable to stay
#5	Safety / security	Like the neighbourhood	Access to Services	Good Location

In the interviews, participants reported that having a ‘comfortable’ home (including having air conditioning, having sufficient space, and simply being in a place where ‘everything has its place’) was an important factor in their decision to stay put. One person said *“It has plenty of space. I can go anywhere without the light on, I know where I am. I’m not looking for luxury. It’s comfortable in a practical sense”* (Man, 75+ years).

Living somewhere that was affordable and where they felt financially secure was clearly important for many people interviewed. A good location and neighbourhood, space, and easy access to services and public transport were all viewed favourably when deciding to stay.

Older adults who choose to stay in their homes as they age do so because they find their existing home comfortable, financially viable and they like its location.

“Respondents who had not carried out modifications were 1.38 times more likely to think about moving than those who had carried out building modifications”

NOT MOVING, BUT MODIFYING

Forty-four percent of all respondents had carried out building modifications to make it easier to live in their home. The proportion of respondents making modifications steadily increased with age, from 34% of those aged 50-54 years to 61% of those aged 75 and over.

The most common modification was the installation of air-conditioning or other temperature controls. Installation of temperature control modifications, however, was not related to the age of the respondent. The three types of modifications that were more common with older age were: the installation of rails (12% of 50-54 year olds, increasing to 42% of 75+ year olds); bathroom modifications (28% of 50-54 year olds to 40% of 75+ year olds); and non-slip steps or flooring (4% of 50-54 year olds to 15% of 75+ year olds). Other types of modifications such as purpose-built rooms, kitchen modifications and lighting changes were less common amongst older age groups compared with younger age groups.

Additional analyses revealed that respondents who had not carried out modifications, were 1.38 times more likely to think about moving than those who had carried out building modifications.

WORRYING ABOUT THE FUTURE

During the interviews respondents were asked if they had any concerns about their housing needs in the future. The vast majority said that they did not, with many being 'philosophical' about the future, saying that it was difficult to predict what might happen and there was no point worrying. The following comments, made by people in the 75 years and over age group, were typical of all the responses.

"No, I don't know what my future needs are. What is the point in getting concerned or worried about it? When it happens there's generally a way of getting around it" (Woman, 75+).

"I think you have to wait and just take things as they come. You never know these days, everything is so uncertain isn't it?" (Woman, 75+).

Being financially secure, including owning one's own home and having planned ahead financially, was important to this sense of confidence.

Some people also clearly derived a sense of security from knowing that the necessary supports were there if needed – whether from family, within a retirement complex setting or within the community generally. As one person said, *"I think everything will turn out as it should, if something bad happens to me I will be looked after"* (Woman, 75+).

Other comments were made about the changing housing needs of individuals as they age and ageing generally. Again, many reflected either a philosophical attitude towards their circumstances and needs in the future or a definite determination to 'stay put'. A prominent theme was the importance of maintaining good physical and mental health into one's older age and generally keeping busy. *"I believe in holistic health and staying healthy to allow you to live a good quality of life. I read a lot and ... go to the gym twice a week. I think it's important to stay mentally and physically*

healthy. People in retirement villages often lose that mental and physical capacity because they don't keep themselves busy enough" (Man, 75+ years).

Other prominent themes were the need to have access to appropriate transport (whether private or public), the merits of downsizing as one grew older, concern by a few people about a lack of in-home support for older adults, and frustration at the lack of consideration in housing design of the particular needs of older individuals. One person gave the example of showers: *"They are so easy to make safe and yet they don't. Rails are put in as an afterthought and they are horrible big things, they could be much nicer, they could serve as nice towel rails or something. We need house design that looks at the options of long-term living"* (Woman, 55-64).

A variety of views were expressed about the most appropriate form of housing for older adults. Some could not see that there was a particular need for special, purpose-built housing. Others were particularly critical of retirement complexes, where everyone is a similar age: *"I do not like the idea of living in retirement villages or places like that where you are all the same age. You age immediately, then one pops off and then another pops off, and you hear them say 'I wonder who is going to be next', and then you think ... why would you want to be in a place like this? I'm dead against retirement villages. I can't understand why people fall over themselves to get in"* (Woman, 65-74 years).

Others, however, felt that there was a definite need for purpose-built housing complexes. Small community-based independent living units that are within easy reach of services and supports were frequently suggested. These were also regarded as providing a sense of safety and security, and reducing the risk of social isolation. As one person said, *"Not because I think they should all be locked in together. If they want some company they can find some, or someone will be around and says 'haven't see Mrs Jones, I wonder if something has*

happened to her'. So someone notices... Often people don't want to go into care or a retirement village but I think we are isolating them terribly and they're not looking after themselves well. They wanted to stay because they couldn't imagine going anywhere else. We have got to provide more places for them to go safely, sleep in safety as well" (Woman, 55-64).

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Housing decisions throughout life are as much about accommodation preferences as they are about changes in lifestyle, occupation and health. Older Australians make decisions about where they want to live in the same way as other age groups, through reflection and questioning over time: Does their housing meet their current needs? Are those needs changing with advancing age? Does the availability of support and care become more important as they age, sufficient to outweigh the attractions of a known and comfortable locality?

Some prominent themes about housing decisions emerged from this research. It appears that four main categories of factors are of particular importance to people when considering where to live as they age, namely:

- their house and home;
- their lifestyle;
- the location and community; and
- access to services.

HOUSE AND HOME

Older adults make various adjustments to their housing arrangements as they age in order to remain as independent as possible. Nearly half of respondents (48%) reported that they plan to remain in their current home. Yet, for a number of older adults, the idea of 'home' as the long-standing place of residence described by Davison

and colleagues (1993) may not apply. Nearly one-third of respondents had moved house within the last four years (27%). As would be expected, the proportion that had lived in the same house for 20 years or more increased with age.

For those older adults who do not wish to remain in their current home, what are they looking for in their housing? To some extent this differs across age groups and moving intentions. The broad issue of 'thinking about where you want to live for the rest of your life', including location as well the house itself, was extremely important to all age groups. For both 'movers' (individuals who had moved in the past 4 years) and 'contemplators' (individuals intending to move in the next year), concerns about upkeep and maintenance of the home and garden were particularly important for individuals over the age of 65. This is not surprising given that one third of individuals in the oldest age group reported needing help with household chores. It is clear that as people age they begin to reassess their ability to maintain their home and this influences their decisions about moving and downsizing.

For individuals who plan to stay in their current home, all age groups reported that comfort was the top factor influencing their decision to stay in their current home. This is consistent with findings from a national study which reported that three quarters of individuals who remain at home reported comfort as a key factor influencing their decision to stay (Olsberg & Winters, 2005).

Almost half (44%) of all respondents chose to modify their home in order to make it easier to live in, whether it was one they had lived in for a long time or one to which they had recently moved. This high rate of modifications is of particular note, given that only 5% of respondents reported using mobility aids and only 13% of respondents reported having poor health. Respondents who had not carried out building modifications were more likely to think about moving than those who had carried out such modifications, both in the short and the long term.

LIFESTYLE

When deciding whether to move or stay put, lifestyle factors played a particularly important role for younger respondents. For individuals who had moved in the last four years or planned to move in the next year and were under the age of 75, lifestyle change was one of the top factors influencing their move or intention to move. For those under the age of 65, a desire for more free time was another main factor in moving decisions and intentions.

For individuals who moved in the last 4 years, employment and retirement also played a large role in the decision of individuals under the age of 75. The average age for retirement in Australia is 64.4 years for men and 62.2 years for women (OECD, 2006). It is likely that most individuals aged 75+ have already adjusted to retirement and so it is not surprising that employment did not factor as much into their decision making as it did for younger groups.

For the 48% of respondents who plan to 'stay put', financial viability was one of the top factors influencing this decision for all age groups. This suggests that for many older adults 'staying put' may not be purely a matter of choice, but instead is a decision influenced by financial constraints.

LOCATION AND COMMUNITY

Location also played an important role in respondents' decisions about whether to move and where to move. One potential indicator of the importance of location and community is how far away from their original home people chose to move. While nearly two-thirds of respondents who moved in the past 4 years had moved more than 10kms, i.e. out of their immediate vicinity, this was true for only 40% or so of those movers aged 75+. There are a number of potential explanations for this age difference. For example, attachment to location and community may become increasingly important as people age.

For the most part, location, neighbourhood and safety were not included in the top five factors which influenced decisions or intentions to move. In contrast, location and safety were main factors that influenced the decision to stay for most age groups. Together these findings suggest that many older adults may prefer the location of their existing home, and this influences their decision to stay put. In contrast, individuals who have decided to move do not seem to find a change in location to be a major factor influencing their decision.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

'Access to Services' refers to access to health services and in-home help as well as the availability of informal support from family and friends.

Perhaps the most obvious indicator of the importance of access to services in this study was a desire to be closer to services, including health-related services and support. In the interviews, this was frequently identified by people who had moved, or were intending to move, as a primary consideration in their search for alternative housing. Proximity to services such as doctors and hospitals was also often cited in the interviews with 'stayers' as a key reason for remaining in their current home.

Access to services was cited as one of the top factors influencing the decision to stay put for individuals 55-74. This may partially reflect knowledge of the services available near their current location, as well as concerns about access in a new location.

“For many older adults, 'staying put' is a decision influenced by financial constraints”

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Over the past few decades, Australian policymakers have become increasingly aware of the importance of enabling older adults to 'age in place'. Their focus has been to provide services to older adults in order to help them to remain in their homes for as long as possible. There has, however, been little discussion of whether or not older Australians will choose to live in their existing homes or will move to new accommodation as they age.

This research has shown that a large number of older adults are deciding to move in later life. Our findings reveal that two in three people move between the ages of 55 and 75. While reasons for moving or not moving house are varied and complex, remaining 'independent' is a key aim of people as they age and involves the assessment of a changing variety of circumstances. However, it is clear from the research that age does influence moving and staying intentions.

The older one gets, the less likely one is to move house, and if a move does occur, the oldest age group is more likely to stay in the same area. For the over-75s who did intend to move at some stage, 'push' factors were paramount. These included difficulties in maintaining the house or garden, a decline in a partner's health, and reduced ability to look after oneself. For those under 65, some of the top factors influencing the decision to move were 'Wanting a lifestyle change' and 'Wanting more free time'.

It becomes clear from this research that many older adults are pushed into decisions to either stay in their existing homes or to move due to various constraints. Many individuals who choose to 'stay' indicate that they are influenced by financial concerns. On the other hand, many older individuals are thinking of moving because of the upkeep responsibilities of their existing homes. We believe that more needs to be done to ensure older adults have a choice in where they 'age in place', whether this means moving or continuing to live in their existing home. As Australia

experiences an increase in the number of older adults in the coming decades, policy responses are needed to support older adults who choose to stay in their existing homes as well as those who decide to move in later life.

In summary, this research has shown that a large number of older adults are deciding to move in later life. We need to understand the various factors that influence these decisions and consider ways in which government policy can support older adults who choose to stay in their existing homes as well as those who decide to move in later life.

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Appendix 1: Ranking of Factors

Table A.1 Ranking of Factors Rated as 'Very Important' in Influencing Move

Factor	Age Group (ranking)				Average (Ranking)
	50-54	55-64	65-74	75+	
Thinking about where you wanted to live the rest of your life	3	2	1	1	1
Wanted lifestyle change	1	1	4	19	2
Employment related	2	3	19	27	3
To be closer to family/friends	11	4	3	10	4
Retirement	8	6	2	8	5
Upkeep/maintenance difficulties (house/garden)	7	7	5	2	6
Garden too big	9	8	6	3	7
Cost/financial reasons	4	9	10	14	8
Wanted more free time	5	5	12	18	9
To be closer to services	16	11	7	12	10
Residence too big	20	10	9	6	11
Safety/security concerns	18	13	8	7	12
Decline/changes in own or partner's health	12	14	11	4	13
Inappropriate design/layout	10	12	17	22	14
Own or partner's reduced ability to look after self/house	21	19	16	5	15
Loss of spouse/partner	27	22	15	9	17
Didn't want to be a burden on family	27	22	15	9	17
Like moving or changing	6	20	21	25	18
Neighbourhood had changed	17	18	18	24	19
Didn't like location	19	15	20	26	20
To live amongst people of similar age	26	24	14	13	21
Residence too small	14	16	22	20	22
Didn't like the neighbourhood	13	21	23	23	23
Family pressure/family wish	24	23	24	16	24
Feeling lonely and/or isolated	23	25	25	17	25
Garden too small	15	26	26	21	26
Could no longer drive	25	27	27	15	27

Table A.2 Ranking of Factors Rated as 'Very Important' in Influencing Move in Next Year

Factor	Age Group (ranking)				Average (Ranking)
	50-54	55-64	65-74	75+	
Thinking about where you want to live the rest of your life	1	1	1	2	1
Retirement	14	3	2	3	2
Want lifestyle change	2	2	5	25	3
To be closer to family/friends	16	4	8	14	4
Want more free time	4	5	7	20	5
Garden too big	11	7	4	4	6
Upkeep/maintenance difficulties (house/garden)	7	9	3	1	7
To be closer to services	12	6	6	8	8
Cost/financial reasons	8	8	11	9	9
Safety/security concerns	13	10	10	11	10
Residence too big	17	11	9	13	11
Decline/changes in own or partner's health	20	12	12	5	12
Own or partner's reduced ability to look after self/house	15	15	13	6	13
Employment related	3	13	26	17	14
Don't like the neighbourhood	5	14	19	23	15
Neighbourhood has changed	6	16	15	15	16
Inappropriate design/layout	19	17	16	22	17
To live amongst people of similar age	24	20	14	7	18
Don't like location	9	18	25	10	19
Loss of spouse/partner	18	22	18	21	20
Feeling lonely and/or isolated	25	19	24	12	21
Don't want to be a burden on family	26	21	20	16	22
Like moving or changing	10	24	23	19	23
Residence too small	23	23	17	18	24
Family pressure/family wish	27	25	21	27	25
Garden too small	21	26	22	26	26
Can no longer drive	22	27	27	24	27

Table A.3 Ranking of Factors Rated as 'Very Important' in Influencing 'Stayers'

Factor	Age Group (ranking)				Average (Ranking)
	50-54	55-64	65-74	75+	
It is comfortable	1	1	1	1	1
Financially viable to stay	2	2	2	4	2
Good location	3	3	4	5	3
Feel safe and secure	5	6	3	2	4
Location is good/easy access to services	8	4	5	6	5
Like the neighbourhood	4	5	6	8	6
Good neighbours	6	7	7	9	7
House is the right size	7	8	8	10	8
House/garden is easy to maintain	11	9	10	11	9
Live in current residence for life	15	14	9	3	10
House design/layout supports ageing	10	12	12	7	11
Garden is the right size	9	11	13	13	12
Close to family/friends	14	13	11	12	13
This is the family home	13	10	14	14	14
Employment	12	15	16	16	15
Too hard to move	16	16	15	15	16

Appendix 2: Ratings of Factors

Figure A.1 Factors which Influenced Move (Rated as 'Very Important')

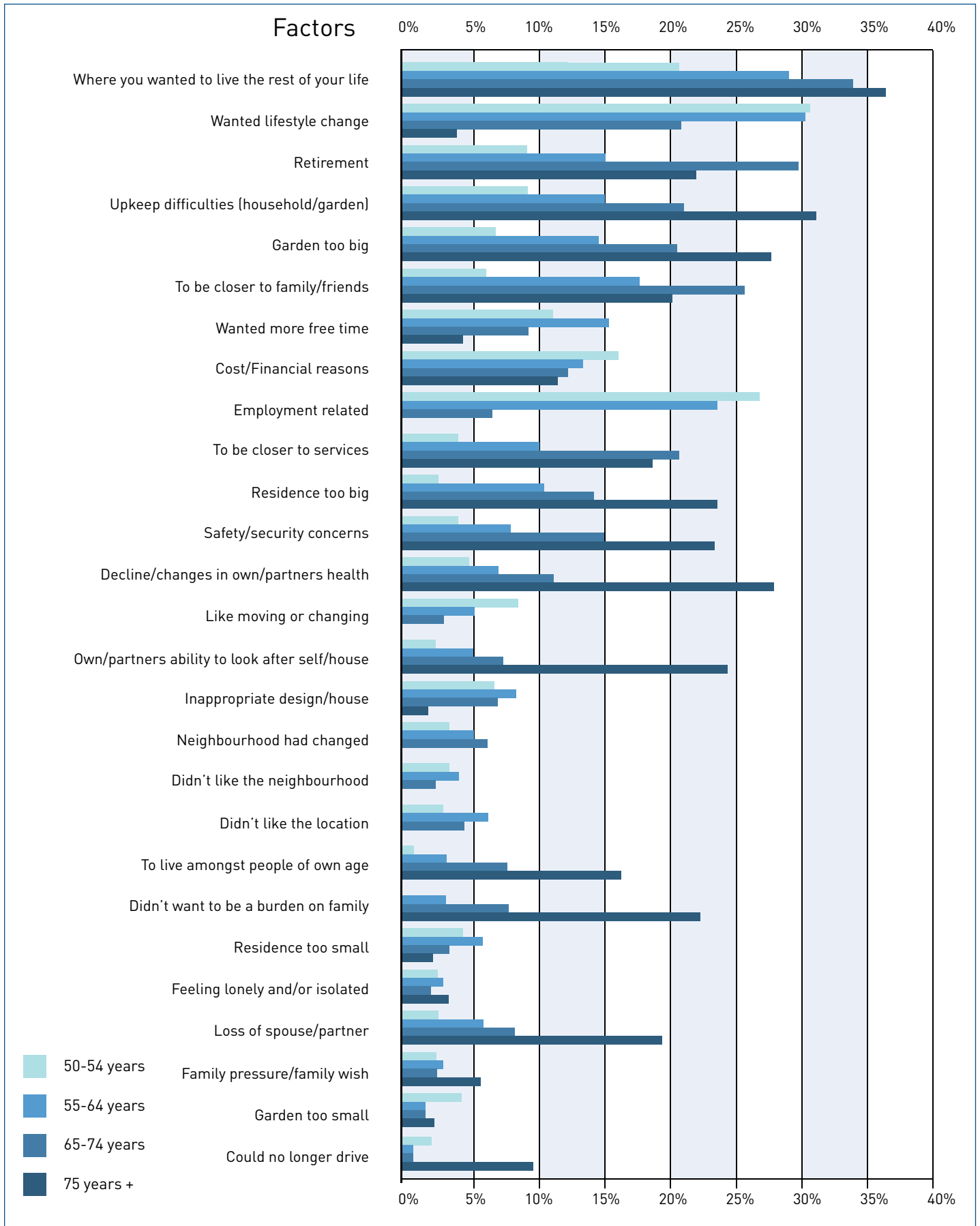


Figure A.2 Factors Influencing Move in the Next Year or So (Rated as 'Very Important')

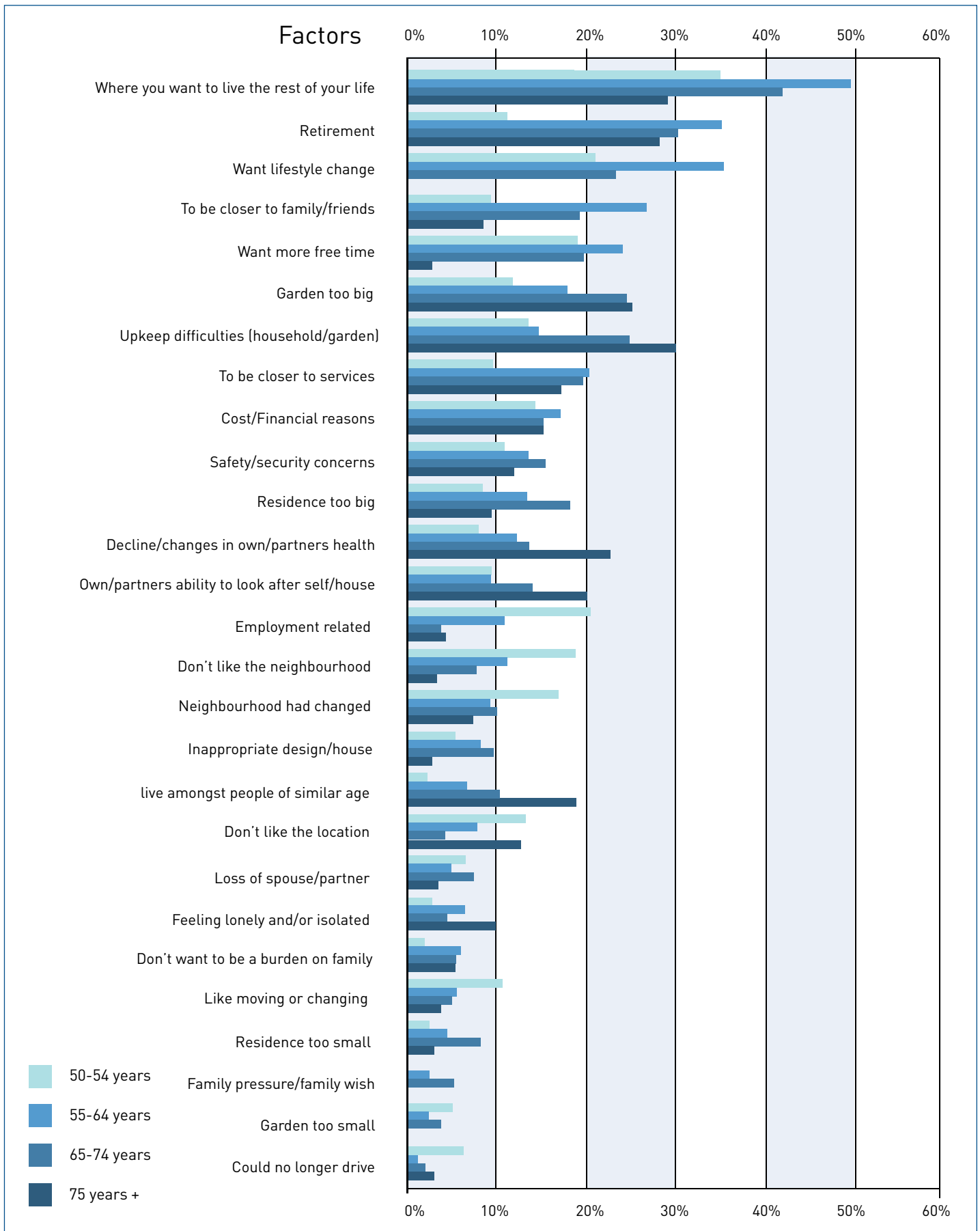
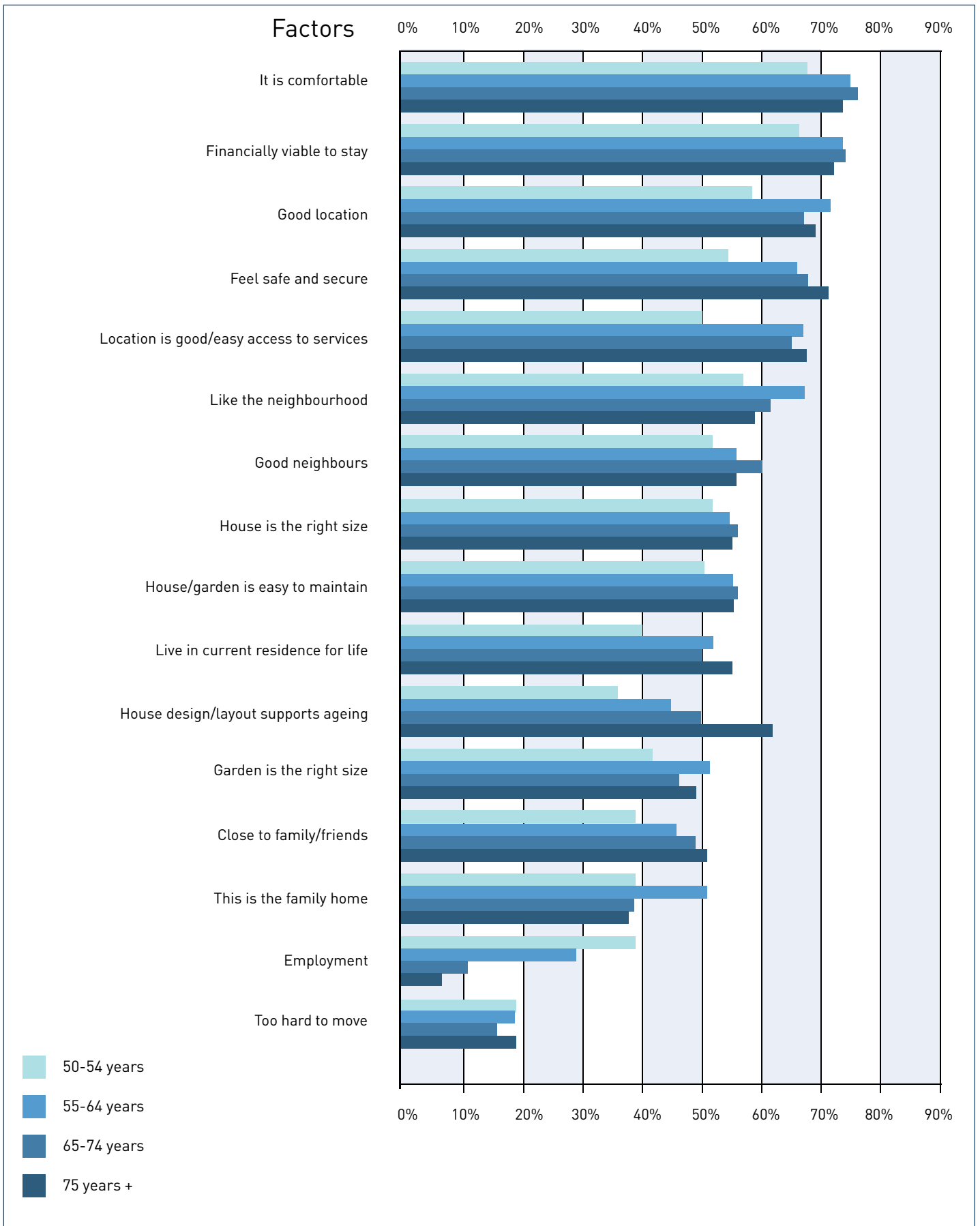


Figure A.3 Factors Influencing the Decision to Stay (Rated as 'Very Important')



ABOUT THE NATIONAL SENIORS PRODUCTIVE AGEING CENTRE

The National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre is an initiative of National Seniors Australia and the Department of Health and Ageing. The Centre's aim is to advance knowledge and understanding of all aspects of productive ageing to improve the quality of life of people aged 50 and over.

The Centre's key objectives are to:

- Support quality consumer oriented research informed by the experience of people aged 50 years and over;
- Inform Government, business and the community on productive ageing across the life-course;
- Raise awareness of research findings which are useful for older people; and
- Be a leading centre for research, education and information on productive ageing in Australia.

For more information about the Productive Ageing Centre, visit www.productiveageing.com.au or call 02 6230 4588.

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