



Older People's Responses to the Rising Cost of Living

JANUARY 2024

National Seniors
AUSTRALIA

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

In 2022-23 Australia saw large increases in the cost of living, related to repeated interest rate rises and the highest inflation rate in over 30 years.

While media reportage and public discourse often focuses on how the situation impacts younger people, older people are not immune.

The September 2023 research report by National Seniors Australia and Challenger entitled *The Cost of Living and Older Australians' Financial Wellbeing* showed that many people aged 50 or over are struggling to stay afloat right now.

Unsurprisingly, that report found wealth was the main buffer against cost-of-living impacts, with renters and pensioners most at risk. Yet many wealthier older people are feeling negative impacts too.

That report focused on the numerical side of things, offering statistical analyses of who is most affected by cost-of-living increases and the effects on longer term financial wellbeing.

This report focuses on personal experiences: the multitude of ways older individuals have responded to the cost-of-living crisis, including their observations, coping mechanisms, and sometimes drastic actions to remain financially stable.

It relays the stories shared by some of the 5806 older people surveyed in the February 2023 National Seniors Social Survey. The survey's Cost of Living module included four questions with free text boxes, and these attracted thousands of comments from across Australia.

The comments are testament to the human impact of the crisis and the courageous or harrowing responses it has demanded.

They are addressed in five sections:

1. What older people have noticed about increasing costs,
2. The impact this has had on them,
3. Their actions to save money,
4. The expenses they've cut, and
5. Trade-offs to afford essentials.

1

COSTS

ARE

GOING

UP

Older people noticed costs going up in 2023.

In February 2023, National Seniors Australia surveyed 5806 people aged 50 or over about recent cost-of-living increases and the impact they have had on their lives.

People were invited to comment on these matters, and a total of 2360 people wrote at least one comment.

One of the overarching comment themes was what people had noticed about rising costs.

Those surveyed noted a range of expenses that had increased for them in recent times, including:

- Food, especially meat and seafood, fruit and vegetables, milk
- Other groceries, including alcohol and pet food
- Insurance, including health, home and car insurance
- Fuel, including diesel, with many rural and remote comments on this
- Public transport
- Utilities especially electricity and gas
- Car expenses, car registration
- HECS/HELP debts, government charges generally
- Pet health, vet fees, pet registration and other pet costs
- Clothing, phones
- Fitness classes, yoga, pool fees
- Café coffee, home repair materials, travel in Australia
- Tradespeople and other service providers such as hairdressers
- Christmas.

People also often noted increases in housing costs and healthcare costs, which we discuss specifically in 2023 National Seniors research reports on these topics (see <https://www.nationalseniors.com.au/research/reports>).

People also commented on other trends they had noticed, including:

- Costs are increasing more than inflation
- Supermarkets are price-gouging
- Products are the same price but reduced in size.

Some of their comments are reproduced on the following pages, giving a glimpse of their personal experiences of this cost-of-living crisis.

Pay almost 40% more for food. Makes living difficult especially medications.

Living in a rural area my fuel cost has only added to the already high cost of living. It is 140km trip to go shopping

Looking after grandchildren and cost of food very high, as well fuel

I have to rely on the food truck to get my groceries as supermarket prices have soared beyond my affordability

Living on an island means transport costs affect every aspect of life, e.g. food-add 20% and fuel -add .40/litre to mainland prices.

I am medically dependent upon both gas & electricity. Government subsidy increases have been so tiny they are of little assistance.

Food, Pet food, Furniture, Goods and Fuel have increased, making it difficult to pay for exercise classes, which I need to keep mobile and healthy, mentally as well as physical. Even the free walking group I belong too, have a cupper after each walk and I might need to stop having one. I realise this is seems to be a small thing, but this where I have human contact.

Costs of tradespeople have escalated way above inflation. Food costs have risen dramatically. Costs of other services (hairdresser, vet) have also gone up well above the inflation rate

Good food is terribly expense. I live in a over 50s village which is a one way trip to poverty. Site rents are out of control and nothing can be done

Gas Bill's becoming difficult, to manage Especially when one lives in cold climate

being over 100 klms from nearest big town to shop, cost of fuel and groceries impacting on savings. No public transport out here

I've noticed that my annual budget is nearly double on last year. The majority of these costs are utilities, food, entertainment, fuel has doubled and the big one is insurances on house, investment and vehicles.

I notice the rise in everyday shopping has increased. 18 months ago my weekly shop was between \$130/140 per week whilst now it is \$190/200.

My husband passed away 4 and 1/2 years ago. My monthly groceries now cost just myself and a cat more that when my husband was living at home.

Everything has risen significantly. I compared by grocery expenses from December 2021 to December 2022, buying the same things - it had increased by 13.4%. A family member is coeliac and has to have gluten free products. I accepted that they always cost more, but this is ridiculous. And it's not as if we have the luxury to choose cheaper items, because the range is limited.

All our costs have doubled at least, some more than double.

Pet insurance for our older not-so-healthy dog has gone through the roof!

Cost of keeping fit increased eg swimming pool fees/yoga class / public transport fares

one example is that the Medical GP now costs more than the orthopedic specialist - my small home based business has ground to a screeching halt - my partner's medical tests are crazy expensive, electricity is up, insurance, is up, the list is almost endless of impacts.

The price of good, electricity and petrol Our rent was increased by \$70 a week we both my wife and I on a DSP and that is with Centrecare Evolve affordable housing who took over from housing Tasmania

Nomadic caravan life. Increased fuel costs, increased food costs, increased camp fees, increased maintenance costs for van and vehicle.

My rent has escalated, all of my necessary insurance, water, electricity, petrol, food and goods and services due to living in remote/regional town, everything has risen...

The increase in rates, insurance, food, petrol, electricity and gas, increase in costs of home maintenance. The government said that they were increasing the income and assets we were allowed to have but when I applied for Pensioners Package (Level 2 approved) I had to pay approx 56.00 a week out of my pension. I could not afford that. They calculate it on a daily payment (including Saturday and Sunday - very unfair). Other pensioners are apparently allowed to have higher income and assets, but not when you apply for a Pensioners package. I was saving up to have some renovations done to the house and these savings only put my weekly payment up - if I accepted the package. I suffer with chronic inflammation and need a bathtub to soak in with Epsom Salts to ease the pain. There is no heated pool in my town. But my savings prevent me from accepting the package.

We have an adult daughter with chronic illnesses. She lost her disability pension and hence health care card. We were already supporting her with medical/medication and sometimes food costs before this, so as costs are increasing for her, ours are too. the loss of bulk billing and increase in fuel and food costs are and will impact us.

At 62 years of age I'm on Jobseeker payment as I was declined Disability Support Pension. With rising costs I'm forced to utilise my savings/superannuation as it's difficult to live within my means on Jobseeker payment. I also still have a student debt (HECS/HELP) which, despite being unemployed since 2016, is increasing each year (I was a mature age student and graduated from university in my 40's). This is causing me great stress and anxiety. I have tried to have this debt written off but without success. In 2022 the increase in student debt was 3.9% which added more than a \$1,000 to my student loan. Although I'm under no obligation to repay student loan whilst being unemployed, I'd prefer to not having it sit there and watching it increase each year.

Currently building a home and mortgage rates are very high. In addition we have to pay constantly increased rental rates.

Car and contents Insurance (result of floods?) have increased dramatically, as well as Body corporate Building Insurance- up dramatically for each resident

Latest house insurance is more than \$5,000 a year.

Vehicle, House, Tinny Insurances getting noticeably more expensive - more juggling with excess's versus comprehensive coverage

I am reviewing my home insurance after the insurer lifted the cost by over 30%. I am able to afford it but believe it to be excessive.

Insurance for house and contents went up over \$200 per month. Along with medical insurance our outgoings comes to over \$1000 per month.

Cannot afford private health insurance and at moment our house and contents has gone up to \$8000- \$10000

My home and contents insurance is 15% higher than 2022, we have two cars both comprehensive insured and both are more than 18% higher than 2022.

Insurance costs - Medibank Private / car / home & contents Insurance now cost me more than \$10,705 a year.

All insurances have jumped up, 35%!

At our age we cannot afford to be without private health insurance. Premium increases for the last decade have exceeded CPI by a long way.

It used to cost me \$17.50 per fortnight for petrol but now it costs \$60 per fortnight but we shouldn't complain the government gave us a rise of \$10 per week lol

petrol cost up and public transport will be similarly effected

The cost of fuel to run my vehicle has more than doubled in the past several years.

Where a tank fill was around \$ 80 it is now \$120

I can only afford \$10fn to allow me to collect food from charities.

The cost of cabs which I must use to attend medical appointments is much greater, even with my 'half price card.

Fuel cost to socialise has doubled, appointments with Taxi fares have doubled

cost of wheel chair taxi becoming less affordable

I'm rural, we need to travel to make appointments, up goes fuel and you forgot parking.

We moved away from services for cheaper accommodation but now have high fuel costs to travel to services

Fuel especially in a rural area is always a significant cost.

My partner and I have recently moved closer to Perth then we were, so our transport costs have actually reduced.

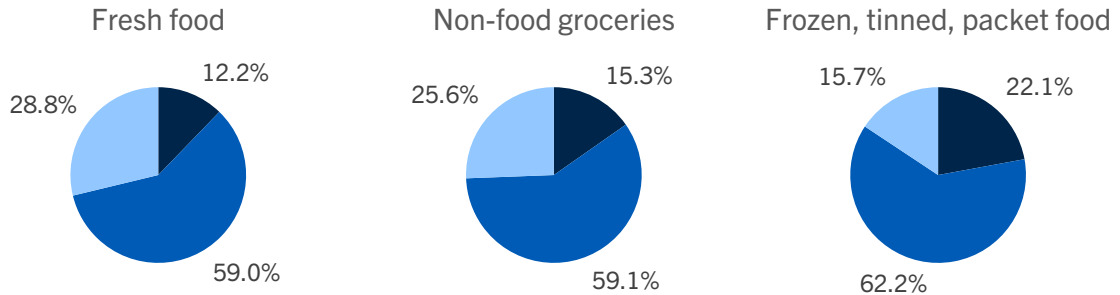
Wanted to do a driving holiday with my dog but cost of petrol and road tolls make it impossible to do.

The impact has been on some Travel costs for trips. I travel on many Australian Outback and remote tours so fuel and air costs have increased their cost.

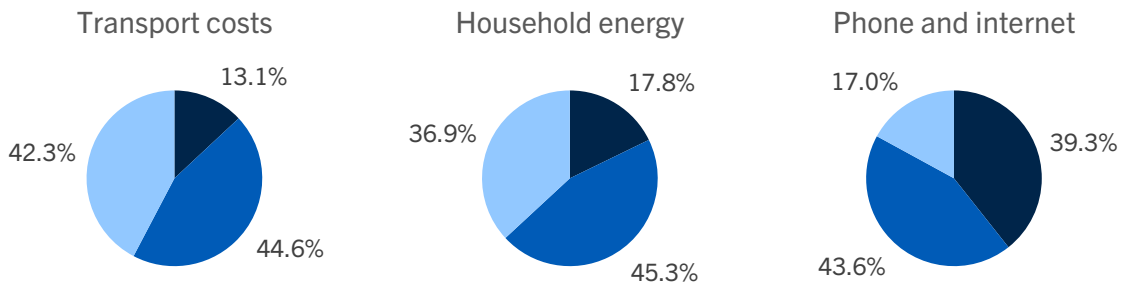
Good for the time being, but may change in the future?

Giving context to some of these comments, one of the survey questions asked about people's perceptions of the affordability of 12 items and whether this had changed recently. The responses seemed related both to observed price increases and to items that had become unaffordable for people who were tightening their belts in the crisis.

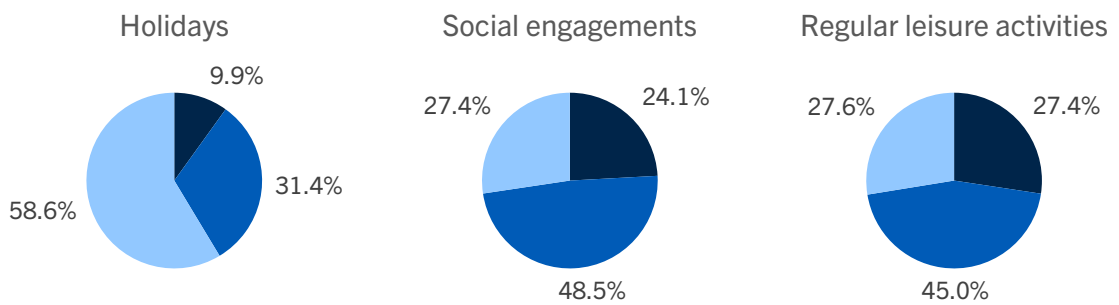
GROCERIES



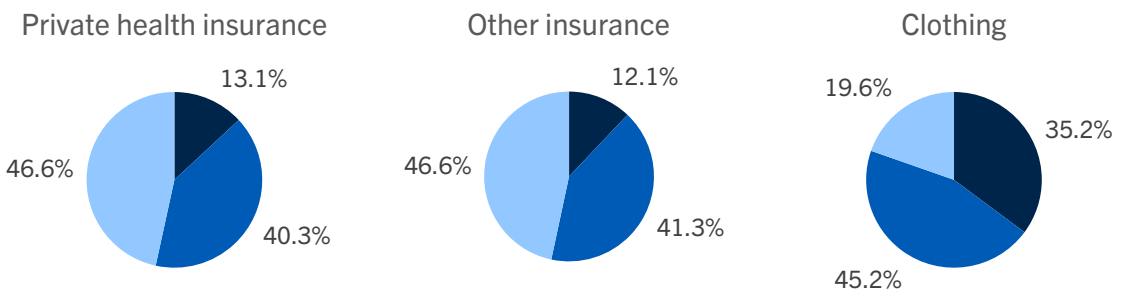
UTILITIES



LEISURE



OTHER



■ Noticed no change
 ■ A bit less affordable
 ■ A lot less affordable

Respondents' perceptions of the changing affordability of various expenses for them. Sample sizes ranged from n=4890 to n=5508. The sample size variation is mostly accounted for by varying numbers of 'not applicable' and 'prefer not to say' responses, excluded prior to any calculations.

2

THE

IMPACT

IS

STRESSFUL

Cost of living increases adversely affect older people's finances, sense of security, mental health and wellbeing.

The impacts of cost-of-living increases on older people's personal financial situations are diverse and reflect variation in their circumstances.

Impacts survey respondents shared include:

- It's harder to save
- Costs are greater than investment returns
- The value of super has dropped, savings are being depleted
- They can't afford big ticket items or replacements
- There's not much left for activities of personal choice
- They have nothing left after bills paid
- They are struggling to cover expenses
- They can't delay payments because every pay fortnight is short
- They have an increased risk of homelessness
- Their uncertainty is growing
- They fear it will get worse, becoming a global depression.

Factors compounding the effect on their personal finances at the time of the survey included:

- A new calendar year meant the Medicare Safety Net threshold had reset
- Insufficient home care service packages necessitate private expenditure
- Work is drying up
- Their loved ones need care or are dying
- Floods and fire affect their costs and income
- There has been an erosion of pensions and wages over time.

My only income is the full pension. The rises in food, fuel, other living expenses and mortgage costs is unsustainable, but I will pay mortgage first and everything else after that

I live alone with 2 cats and 1 car, private health insurance, with the age pension, not saving much
I was OK, now the visit to the supermarket is planned very carefully-after checking catalogues-driving has been curtailed only for professional appointments and there is no saving

Pension only covers bills and food. Nothing left over. I have no extra money

It's been quite difficult for me with the increase of power, gas & the cost of fresh food it's getting harder to have a balanced [diet]

I am currently renting a 1 bedroom unit for \$300 p/w. My landlady has put the property on the market, meaning I will have to move. I am very worried I will not be able to afford the high rents landlords are demanding now. I also have a cat and a small dog, making it even harder to find an affordable place where pets are allowed. The cost of moving alone is extremely daunting. Aside from that of course there is the general cost of living, which also makes life difficult

pension rise does not come close to covering increases in, food, fuel, doctors fees, rent etc

Pension barely covers essentials, monthly & quarterly bills, including rates

I can't afford to pay my rent

Not enough to get a haircut or take pet to the vet

could never be able to rent a house or flat. no health insurance. just waited 570 days for orthopaedic appointment. Minimal food. do not drink alcohol or smoke. drink water and tea. use only 1 teaspoon of tea leaves per day.

After everything is taken from my pension and I'm lucky if I have \$60 and that is my food money for 2 weeks

Cost of food and house repayments have gone up to the point that it is now difficult to pay other bills

Health, home, mortgage everything has got so expensive, food medicine. My income barely covers my monthly expenses

I can barely pay my bills and have no chance of saving or taking a holiday. My financial situation was negatively impact when I had to nurse my partner through his battle with cancer over 4 years

It's harder to save for my cataract surgery

Find now I struggle to keep on top of bills

I am an age pensioner with 3 minor children under my sole care. Trying to feed, clothe, educate and entertain them is proving extremely difficult and requiring some unpopular decisions

Owing money on my house and motor vehicle is through finance I am finding it increasingly difficult to manage

the price of food, electricity, internet, medications, has made it near impossible to live. I find myself scrounging from fortnight to fortnight. I cannot afford the internet let alone a mobile phone

food prices going up, is hard when u need a special diet rents going up means living in constant fear of ending up on the streets. electricity going up means suffering heat etc on top of effects of necessary medication

Concerned about my future financial situation from current economic trends. Every shopping trip makes me feel nervous and worried. I am unsure what the near future is going to be for me as I have no other means of support financially and family wise

Having to choose between putting food on the table, paying utility bills, paying for medications or when sick being able to pay to see a Dr. Not being able to afford to get specialist medical help or getting the necessary tests done if they can't bulk bill. Hoping you have enough funds to pay to put fuel in the car when you need to take you loved ones to their medical appointments

I can no longer exist on the pension I receive from my super because of food and electricity bills

Petrol, health and food costs have all risen, without commensurate adjustments to salaries (and, for those who use them, pensions).

I currently pay \$740.00 per fortnight rent out of a single pension and finding it hard to feed myself

My lifestyle is non existent, I live in Weetbix and Pasta instant meals in order to pay my Rent which has tripled in the last year. The aged Pension gave an extra \$11 and my Rent Increased by \$40. I have to use Afterpay to buy a Coles voucher each fortnight to pay for groceries. Not all if us Senior Women had a Husband or Property to help us through. I fell extremely insignificant and if I passed away it wouldn't matter at all.

Barely scraping by. Due to several medical conditions, finding difficult to try & negotiate "time to pay" because I don't have sufficient funds ANY Pensioner fortnight!!!!

Fear to no longer be able to afford big ticket item e.g. replace car, buy new computer, printer, repairs to home, fridge, washing machine etc. and holidays.

something I read 60 is the new 40 \$100 is the new \$20 that sums up simply the purchasing power of money continues to decline

I am on a pension and I have a mortgage. Interest rates are exploding so unable to keep up

Can't get car serviced. Paying for rates, insurance, phone, vet and petrol been really hard to juggle. Christmas was lean for my grandchildren.

I am unable to secure rental accommodation and be able to pay rent.

I have no personal income & totally dependent on husband giving me an allowance

I live in an area that is currently under a state of emergency due to flooding. Even though the local emergency response groups and the Defence Force are doing a great job of ensuring we have food, fuel and essential services, this has greatly impacted on the access, availability and cost of daily living.

The level 4 packages that my partner and I are on, is being limited by the ruling that we cannot share services with each other. For example, Mercy Care must have a separate time for each to allocate

unable to repair my home when things break. I just do without.

Current level of Aged Care Package insufficient and until the assessed higher level comes through I have to pay for much more and make cuts to my lifestyle budget elsewhere

Our joint Superannuation dropped from \$410,000 to \$350,000 in < 12 months. We had put all our savings into this. It has not recovered very much either:(

My superannuation is not returning funds, and I am gaining less than I am investing

We have a combined income of about \$27,000. Our savings have been seriously diminished.

I am on a single pension. Every time you shop prices have increased by 20-40 cents. Often there doesn't seem to be a reason for the increase.

Recent hike in interest rates is worrying. I cannot afford to leave work. (work 2 days a week.) and I would be stuffed if I have to leave work. It's over half my pension now.

super payments are not covering our expenses

My income has not only reduced by being on the pension but totally eroded because my wife earns \$50,000 gross. The cost of buying basics and services has made it very hard to make ends meet. Now my wife has had to leave her job to look after her mother. Let's hope she isn't given a head time to receive the carers pension

Cost increases across the board far greater than pension/investment returns

Prices have increased FAR more that what would be reasonable expected and FAR more than those published. Why the disparity

My wife is 67 and has a part time job, I work as a school crossing supervisor. My age pension is severely curtailed because of this. I can't afford to give up my job and if my wife stops hers [then] she loses Job Seeker, not that she gets much. It has become increasingly difficult to live and pay all the bills. The age pension should be universal and not touched once gained

3

**PEOPLE
SCRIMP
AND
SAVE**

Older people are making major lifestyle changes to minimise expenditure.

Many survey respondents commented on actions they were taking to save money, free up cash, or cut down their expenses.

Changes to older people's grocery shopping included:

- Carefully monitoring spending
- Comparing prices among supermarkets and visiting all if needed to save
- Choosing between expense items, triaging the most important and cheapest
- Buying low price items, items on special, generic brands
- Buying seasonally appropriate fruit and vegetables
- Buying cheaper cuts of meat or eating vegetarian
- Buying powdered milk and cheap frozen meals, minimising non-essential foods.

Older people also took action to reduce major household costs by:

- Looking for free or cheap activities and events, using vouchers to attend movies
- Buying furniture at op shops
- Increasing insurance excess or decreasing the insured value of items
- Growing fruit and vegetables, collecting free green waste from grocers
- Reducing power usage, including heating, cooling, television or electric appliances
- Wasting less, using what is already in the house even if it's old
- Selling their car to reduce associated expenses
- Selling their house, living with others instead of alone.

Other actions older people took to increase the money available to pay expenses included:

- Increasing their superannuation pension amount
- Drawing money from a mortgage offset to supplement the pension
- Living on a credit card
- Disposing of assets
- Going back to work or working more hours
- Relying on family and friends for help.

Actions people took to avoid or save on fuel costs included:

- Not driving much, not driving far
- Cycling, walking or getting public transport
- Bundling trips to reduce fuel usage
- Buying fuel on cheap days, using discounts to lower costs
- Buying an electric or more fuel-efficient vehicle.

I retired due to ill health when I was 65, before our mortgage was paid off. We can no longer afford to pay for our house and must now sell it

I have to sell my house to continue to exist

I gave up my car. I use public transport and / or walk to where I have to go or want to go. Not having a car restricts my movements somewhat but I manage.

Cost of food higher. Couldn't afford car repairs so sold it to a wrecker

Had to sell my car, could no longer afford the running expenses

My husband died. I now have to take on full time work at the age of 65 with no superannuation. I have to start over.

I still work part time at age 80

I can no longer afford my mortgage repayments and will have to go back to work.

My husband is disabled so I have to work part time to survive.

I have returned to work. But it has impacted my pension in that it may be stopped if I work more. I am also extremely tired at the end of the day unlike when I was younger and could still have a life and go out etc. This is an impact no-one talks about.

I had to find a job after retiring from my previous employment of 36 years

Increased household bills (food, utilities, insurances) have restricted leisure activities, considering going back to work

I hv to rely on financial help from my daughter almost every fortnight

I live with my son because I can not get any affordable accommodation. I can not live on the pension. I have 2 pets. A car. And health cover

The cost of living has gone up so much, if my kids didn't help me I would be homeless

We have taken out a Pension Loan Scheme with Centrelink to help us with day to day living expenses

As our income from working is decreasing, we are more aware of cost of living increases. I've begun buying cheaper brands, cutting back on things like good quality meat. I'm growing more vegetables and fruit to help our budget. Also helping out daughter whose mortgage has increased a lot.

living with my elderly mother as she owns her home because I cannot find affordable rental. Otherwise would be homeless living in my car

Normally live in Melbourne on my own getting the aged care pension but found it too restrictive so took another years work in the outback

I am now more conscious of making money choices and budgeting. I focus on necessities rather than luxuries. I am subsidising other family members who have challenges.

I am on the Age Pension and previously the Disability Pension. I was forced to the Age Pension in 2020 which is currently \$26,689. On this pension I am paying off a mortgage. This requires a careful management of my funds and at present I am down to two meals a day as I cannot afford "Meals on Wheels"

Food pricing particularly fresh vegetable and meat prices we buy the frozen home brand meals we cannot eat proper protein because of the rising food prices

Eat more vegetarian meals as meat costs more. Decreased butter usage and drink reconstituted powdered milk. Try to buy groceries on special and do a menu plan each week to fit in with which groceries are on special. Compare prices between the 3 locally available supermarkets and sometimes visit all 3 plus the chemist if it has cheaper prices. Try to shop once a fortnight and try to forego impulse purchases unless it is on special and something we use on a daily/weekly basis.

Don't buy stuff I would have before I use what I have even if it's old looking

Costs of yearly medical premiums and costs of fruit and vegetables are impacting my lifestyle. I think twice before switching on electrical appliances. Haven't switched on television for quite a few months now.

Following expenses related to 3 years of health issues for self & partner we have less savings but continuing issues such as optical, dental, specialists and necessary private health cover. So that increasing costs of electricity, water, council rates, food etc will mean disposal of assets.

Buying food & petrol. Seldom eat out or get takeaway. Rarely buy good cuts of meat, eat mostly Pork, Chicken or Fish. We look for special buys. Very careful that we don't waste anything. Occasional movie mostly using Gift Certificates

Check cost of ALL general groceries before purchasing; reduced usage of electricity; limited entertainment expenses.

Cost of food more restrictive so had to cut out some items

I spend very little on food so I can pay my council rates, B/C levy, telephone-broadband for internet, utilities, insurance, health insurance and the rest. It is terrifying trying to make the money stretch. I sometimes have to go to St Vincent de Paul or Caloundra Community Care for help with the telephone bill and groceries.

More and more careful about using utilities especially gas and have sought out concessions where we can get them. I go to 2 monthly food swaps to share food I grow, look for bargains and reductions in the shops, and collect green waste from a local greengrocer (for my compost heaps) but actually we can rescue and eat a fair amount as it saves us money.

Monitoring my grocery bills. I order online. Then go through the list and cull some items to keep the checkout amount at a certain level.

great concern is the cost of Electricity as we are in the middle of a heat wave with temperatures to reach 37 degrees and I am not game to turn on my Air Conditioning as cannot afford the cost.

Food cost have gone up and electricity has impacted as to how much I use my ac

I look for less expensive things or go without. My garden produce is valuable.

I now have to decide what I can go without in order to pay the increased bills. Also had to reduce the insured value of my house so that I could afford to pay the insurance.

I was already struggling but I now have to make difficult choices regarding insurance and health options. Also unable to repair my home when things break. I just do without.

Buying less groceries, questioning do I really need this item and talk myself into not purchasing it. Living on my credit card.

The current pension is only enough to keep pace with all the costs of living including bills. Often we have to delay paying a bill until our next pension payment

My expenses have increased far more than pension. Rent up \$100fn. Elect up \$25fn. I eat meals infrequently and have ceased taking some medication. I was forced to take advance from Centrelink to pay for drivers license renewal etc

Have to assess why/when I go anywhere

Do nothing that isn't absolutely important.

Luckily travel is free so I take public transport where possible

generally use my car less if I can. save up activities to do in one trip rather than multiple

working part time I've resorted to using my seniors myki to save on fuel, however it comes at the cost of not feeling safe

Have changed doctor to walk to appointments nearby. Just drop off outings from my activities and take buses if possible

In May 2020 I had to give up ownership of a vehicle. In total, uber is actually cheaper than owning a car. This change along with covid means that I RARELY go out

More phone appointments now only travel when urgent

chose to work close to home and have an economic car and a motorbike to avoid the impact of high fuel costs

I find I watch how often I drive and if I can combine anything I need to do in 1 day to save fuel. Considering [cancelling] private health cover. Looking for cheaper food.

Better off buying in bulk (20litre jerry cans) when fuel is cheapest.

We can control our fuel purchases to a large extent- filling up when fuel is cheap(er), and keeping a couple of drums.

Fuel costs can be managed by following the price cycle & seeking out service stations that sell below the price.

I have a PHEV, so most of my driving is done on battery

I have an EV which I charge at home using my solar rebate

4

THEY

SACRIFICE

PLEASURE

AND MORE

Older people are cutting out whole aspects of their lives because of cost.

In some cases, older people had to delay, cut down or eliminate particular expenses altogether to stay afloat. Examples included:

- Charitable donations, gifts for loved ones
- Holidays, caravanning
- Travelling to visit family or attend funerals or weddings
- Travelling to socialise, volunteer or care for others
- Entertainment, treats, streaming services, clothes
- Eating out, takeaway, coffee
- Home improvements, garden plants
- Car servicing and repairs
- Wellness appointments and activities
- Fresh fruit and vegetables, regular meals, heating, machine washing
- Full health cover, dental cover, all insurance.

Some people have given up their pets because they can no longer afford them.

And as discussed already in Section 3 of this report, some sold their car or their home to reduce expenses and free up cash.

High Domestic airfares prevented travel to a funeral.

Can no longer afford a car. Buy gifts for family/ grandchildren, go out for dinner. Coffee or movies

Have no money left for treats for my grandchildren

Not giving as much to charity

I feel like every week I give up buying something because it is no longer affordable. Things that seemed like normal purchases, such as fruit are now luxuries that I often can not afford. I now have to choose between rent & food. I have begun selling what few possessions I have to pay for food. I live in constant fear of [cancelling] if I can not continue to make rent. I can not pay for anything extra at all such as medical or dental. I have zero savings, zero superannuation & my credit card is maxed out.

I have had to cancel memberships, donations to charity, I buy things on special, my rent has gone up \$30 a week, and the government rent assistance went up \$1 a fortnight I think it was last time

Increased cost of fortnightly groceries, the occasional lunch at a I cut back and think twice about a coffee at the end of a shopping trip

Cost of living = lack of socialising to a degree
Chose one canine companion rather than 2

I can not have lunches out. Petrol stops me from driving to CBD. Christmas cards not sent as postage too high. I shop for "today" rather than having a pantry with staples items.

I do not travel to the city to see my family as often as I used to due to fuel costs being so high – the return trip would cost about \$100 and that is not taking into account wear and tear expenses on my car etc

I have given up all insurances, Health, M/Vehicle/Home Contents. I only use my car for emergencies and I decline social events and attending membership based events. I do not have a pet. I have a dental problem which I cannot afford to fix. My latest rent increase was more than my age pension half yearly adjustment. I am dreading winter as I will not be able to afford heating

I can't afford fresh vegetables and fruits as they don't last long enough

I no longer buy the fruit and vegetables I used to buy eg asparagus, avocados, mangoes

I now have to plan when I can purchase scripts due to insufficient funds. I very rarely go out to socialise because I can't afford to

Cannot commit to volunteering in case of future fuel cost rises.

I used to travel twice a week to Volunteer at the National Vietnam Veterans Museum, but with the cost of Diesel I can only afford to go once a week or other essentials have to be missed.

No insurance for health, contents, car, pets all now far too expensive

We only drive if we have to no more fun trips

All costs of living continue to rise but income hasn't so can afford less and less and have to neglect things like dental care and have not a cent to enjoy life such as eating out, holidays etc that many other people can enjoy.

Trying to pay a mortgage, rates, car rego, fuel, all the utilities, whilst on centrelink benefits (whilst grateful) I sometimes go without regular meals, unable to go out socially, or buy new clothes

I am now unable to afford the fees of attending aqua classes. These were so helpful in keeping me moving and keeping severe back pain under control. I also have to cut down on any journey that will cost me more for petrol for the car. As a last, but not least, blow is that I am finding it hard to attend a doctor as it costs me \$70 every time.

My grocery bill is quite high now so I have now stopped going out for meals with family and friends instead will meet in a park or somewhere I can bring my own food and drink

Less food, less medical, nil leisure, nil entertainment, less social

I can no longer afford to continue my hobby woodworking and holidays are out of the question cannot afford heating in winter etc

More restrained in food purchases. Little or no clothes purchases. Reduced dentist and doctor visits. No holidays this year

Don't own car, running a car too expensive. Don't own washing machine, saving power costs, I do hand washing, including bedding. Only eat everyday eggs, rice, and meat patties

All of the above are almost out of my reach. I have to cancel some insurances just to keep up

Cannot afford to buy new clothes, eat out, go to social engagements, holiday, travel or leisure activities

Had to restrict outings or even going for a bought cup of coffee with friends. Given up going on Council-subsidised bus trip every fortnight. Can't afford that \$9 AND food!

I am finding it very hard to keep my budget on track. My supermarket bill heads skywards. I put off going to the doctor because I can't change to bulk billing now. My prescriptions mount up so frighteningly quickly. I have always been able to keep within a budget – and that is getting increasingly hard. I no longer buy a coffee when I do my shopping.

Will probably have to sell my car as won't be able to afford rego and insurance. Internet is becoming unaffordable

Going to cancel my private health as i can no longer afford it. Going to take a punt on it

Drop private health insurance, drop house insurance, no holiday for 4/5 years, no trips away cost of fuel

Had to cancel our joint life insurance because of its rising cost

We travel a lot less than previously, and don't attend the theatre or shows anymore. I cancelled my gym membership and health insurance

Have had to drop Private Health Insurance because of the cost and some of our home and contents insurance will be next

Try to appointments by phone have not had my eyes checked for over 18 months due to cost of getting there I am diabetic so I should have eye checks every 12 months

I don't know how much longer I can afford to keep private the health insurance I have had for 34 years premiums up rebates down.

We dont go out except to the shops but the cost of insurance has made me think that we maybe dont need it - I did renew but the insurance cost increases are awful

Transport is essential. If you have a vehicle, which I don't, there are higher operating costs. For those without vehicles, such as me, private transport operators including taxis etc are raising fares. Transport costs are also rising. Reducing outings, due to costs involved, leads to loss of social engagement, appropriate medical care and loss of activities and leisure pursuits

I try to car pool but in this hot weather it's very inconvenient when you don't want to wait around in town for your driver. I've had to decline social activities due to the rise of fuel.

Wanted to do a driving holiday with my dog but cost of petrol and road tolls make it impossible to do.

Don't go out as much Never eat out anymore

I've reduced or eliminated personal travel. I've significantly reduced traveling to help my 90y/o mother who lives 5hrs from me

Don't go anywhere. When I sit at the Bus Stop the other Elderly folk say the same thing. Can't afford Food, scared they will be evicted. Living in fear all the time.

Have to cancel appointments if there is no petrol in the car, only put fuel in when it is cheap which is not often

5

MANY

CUT X

TO

PAY FOR Y

Older people are doing without one thing to afford another essential item.

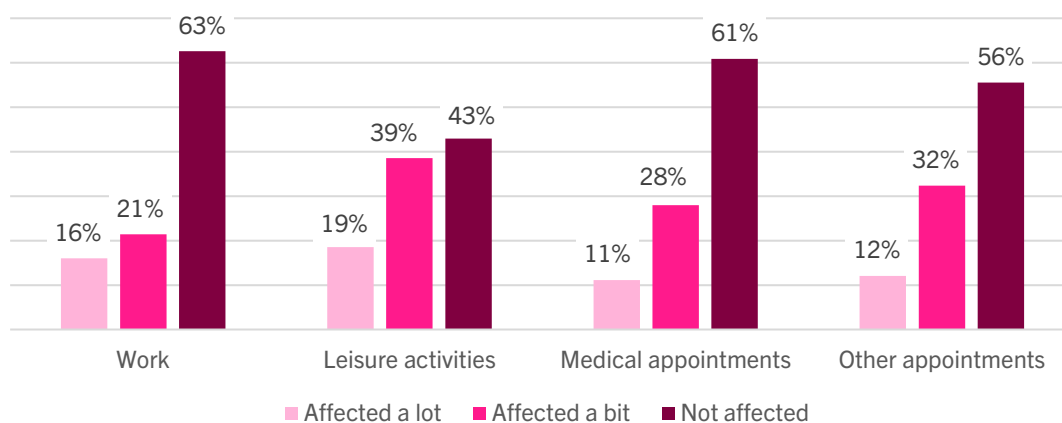
As well as simply going without some expenses, some people said the expense of essential items was forcing them to go without other items because one was simply more important than the other.

Groceries and housing costs such as rent and mortgage payments were obvious expenses people had to cover, so would forgo expenditure on something else to afford them.

However, two other expenses that many people said they would prioritise over others were fuel and insurance, especially health insurance.

The statistics show a certain percentage of those surveyed **did not miss out** on attending in-person appointments or work because of fuel costs:

Have increased fuel costs affected your capacity to attend any of these activities in person?



Impacts of fuel costs on attending appointments in person. Total n=5640, but 'not applicable' and 'prefer not to say' responses excluded before calculating percentages.

However, just because they didn't miss out does not mean they weren't concerned about the cost of fuel. Rather, the comments show that some people went without other items to ensure they could pay for the fuel required to attend these important activities.

Similarly, some respondents who indicated insurance was affordable for them (see the chart in Section 1 of this report) meant simply that they continued to purchase it because of its importance, and to afford it they went without something else instead.

The cost of living especially for pensioners is diabolical. We are doing without food, medications etc just to try to pay at least some of the bills.

I value appropriate medical care, and prefer to cut back spending on other items eg clothing, kitchenware, home decoration.

Volunteering is a non negotiable for me, so don't have leisure activities only walking, telehealth when possible, try to keep appointments in the same area and on the same day

i prioritize my visit to natural therapist in Perth and go without the other pleasures, such as a concert

Petrol is a priority. You need to use the car to get to medical appointments

Cost has affected me but I just have to cut in other areas to subsidize the fuel costs

Although fuel costs are high, it is imperative to attend the above. Reduction in other areas is necessary.

i accept certain expenses eg petrol, insurances, utilities are unavoidable so basically have to suck it up and cut back on other expenses eg new clothes, updating appliances

I don't have private health insurance. I try & keep up with insurance for home, contents & car because if anything happened & not insured it would be a real struggle. I have to cut back on other things

Insurance is more important to me than eating food. I have a beautiful home so I **MUST** have it covered by insurance as well as contents and I have a car and that is covered as well. All other expenditures come after that. One just has to change their eating habits to afford necessities.

insurance prices have risen quite a bit so have to cut back on other items to pay for them

Some of the insurances I still have to keep but I have had to sacrifice others things to keep these eg. Not buying new clothes, not buying birthday presents for family members and so forth.

dropped visits to family because of increased private health insurance, had to make a choice cuddle great grandchildren or afford medical treatment

have decided to forego "social activities" to keep our private health insurance.

Health and general insurance are both less affordable but I regard them as absolute priorities and would sacrifice a lot of discretionary spending before dropping these.

Find money for Insurance results in less for groceries.

I believe these insurances are essential, and will make other sacrifices to enable me to continue my current policies

It is a 'given' that health insurance, home & contents insurance as well as motor vehicle insurance are absolute necessities. But, can't really afford to have it, but can't afford not to. It seems sometimes, we are basically living to pay insurances, which of course is not really 'living' in the true sense of the word. To pay for these items, something has to be compromised in our lifestyle.

I tighten up in all leisure, holiday, travel, accommodation and social engagements so that I can afford my private health insurance

one prioritizes health insurance however it means cutting back on day-to-day items and outings

Holidays and or leisure activities are non-existent in our family. Private health cover is the only item on the above list we allow ourselves.

To be able to afford to keep my health insurance and pay for essential bills eg electricity car costs. I don't spend on clothing holidays or other 'luxuries' because there is little left

Are finding it hard to pay for our Health insurance and also house, contents & car insurance but do without other things to pay for these things as feel they are important.

I no longer purchase clothes/shoes unless there is no other choice. I no longer have holidays. As my health is precarious I forgo social activities to pay health insurance.

FINAL REMARKS

Cost of living impacts are often discussed in terms of numbers: interest rates, household debt rates, cost indexes and so forth. The numbers may go up or down and as a society we may breathe a collective sigh of relief or distress.

But whatever the numbers are doing, they don't adequately convey the human experience of being short on money and going without.

For that reason, media outlets will also often publish profiles of individuals who are doing it tough, to put a human face on the crisis. While incredibly important, there is a risk that such profiles can too easily be dismissed as exceptions, the outliers that are always present in our society.

This report presents a middle ground between the two. By quoting survey respondents' comments, the report can share the very human stories of people who are struggling – but by the hundreds, emphasising how common these experiences are.

This approach enables Australians to see that it isn't just one older person who has cut back gifts for grandchildren, it isn't just one who is stockpiling petrol on cheap days, it isn't just one who has cancelled all leisure activities to pay their health insurance premiums.

More than one older person has come out of retirement to pay the bills.

More than one has stopped buying the fruit and vegetables they used to take for granted.

More than one has nothing left after rent and bills are paid and a meagre food allowance has been spent.

More than one is reliant on their kids to stave off homelessness.

While some older Australians are doing well financially, many others are not. They are reorganising their lives to manage and stressing every day over each spending decision.

This is not the older age any of us want or plan for.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Research methods

The National Seniors Social Survey

National Seniors Australia is a member-based not-for-profit research and advocacy organisation representing and promoting the views, values and beliefs of Australians aged 50 and over. Every year since 2012 – except 2020 when focused on COVID research – National Seniors has conducted a survey of older Australians' behaviours and views about topics relevant to lifestyle, health and wellbeing called the National Seniors Social Survey, or NSSS. The 11th NSSS (NSSS-11) was conducted in February 2023.

Anyone aged 50 years or over and living in Australia was eligible to participate in the NSSS-11. Invitations to participate were distributed to older Australians via the National Seniors membership database and online networks, and further distribution to other older Australians was encouraged.

As for previous National Seniors Social Surveys, we asked questions on multiple topics relevant to older people's lives, plus a range of demographic questions. This report draws on responses to questions in the 'Cost of Living' module of the NSSS-11. Responses were collected online via Survey Monkey.

Analysis methods

Microsoft Excel was used for all quantitative data visualisation.

We analysed text comments using the thematic analysis framework described by Braun and Clarke, identifying themes via inductive analysis guided by a critical realist approach that aimed for accuracy and objectivity in interpreting respondents' views.* The researchers acknowledge the influence of their pre-existing knowledge and understandings on identified themes.

Quotes from survey respondents are presented in coloured speech bubbles and were selected to illustrate the variety and prevalence of ideas expressed as well as to ensure that some of respondents' most difficult or extreme experiences were communicated. When possible, we reproduced quotes verbatim, occasionally omitting or altering parts for clarity or anonymity (indicated with square brackets []). Minor typos were corrected for readability (no brackets). All other phrasing idiosyncrasies were retained.

* Braun V and Clarke V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2): 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>.

Cost of living questions

The NSSS-11 contained a module of questions on the theme 'Cost of living', two of which provided core data for this report:

Question 1

Thinking about your regular expenditure, has the affordability of the following items changed for you in recent times?

List of items:

- Fresh food
- Tinned, packet or frozen food
- Non-food household groceries
- Household energy
- Transport (vehicle costs, fuel, public transport)
- Phone and internet costs
- Clothing
- Regular leisure activities
- Holiday travel and accommodation
- Social engagements
- Private health insurance
- Other insurance

Options for answering the question, for each item:

- I've noticed no change for this
- This is a bit less affordable for me
- This is a lot less affordable for me
- Not applicable or prefer not to say

If you would like to, please describe changes to your spending patterns or financial well-being due to increased cost of living. [free text comment box]

Question 2

In recent times, have increased fuel costs affected your capacity to do any of the following activities?

List of activities:

- Attend work in person
- Attend leisure activities in person
- Attend medical appointments in person
- Attend other appointments in person

Options for answering the question, for each item:

- Not affected
- Affected a bit
- Affected a lot
- Not applicable or prefer not to say

Please tell us more about your answers if you would like to. [free text comment box]

Two other 'Cost of living' module questions provided additional comments that were analysed for this report and some of which were reproduced here.

Both these questions were primarily quantitative in nature, and their quantitative results and analysis are presented in the National Seniors Australia and Challenger 2023 report, *The Cost of Living and Older Australians' Financial Wellbeing* (download at <https://www.nationalseniors.com.au/research/reports>).

Only the free text comments were used for the present report.

Question 3

How much has your lifestyle been impacted by recent cost of living increases?

- There has been no impact on my lifestyle
- There has been some impact on my lifestyle
- There has been severe impact on my lifestyle
- Unsure
- Prefer not to say

Please tell us more about your answer if you would like to. [free text comment box]

Question 4

Please select up to three expenses from the list below that you are particularly concerned about if living costs continue increasing.

List of items:

- Clothing
- Entertainment and eating out
- Groceries
- Health
- Holiday travel costs
- Household energy
- Phone and internet
- Transport costs
- **Other (please specify) [free text comment box]**
- I am not concerned about any of these expenses

Appendix 2: Demographics

This table presents sociodemographic information about the NSSS-11 participants who responded to any of the cost-of-living questions detailed in Appendix 1.

Respondent characteristics (n=5806)	Number	Percent*
Age group		
50-64	792	13.6%
65-74	2776	47.8%
75-84	1914	33.0%
85+ (the oldest participant was 98 years)	293	5.0%
Gender		
Women	3253	56.0%
Men	2500	43.1%
Non-binary or other	7	0.1%
Education level		
Schooling to year 12	1508	26.0%
Certificate, diploma or equivalent	1878	32.3%
Bachelor degree or higher	2388	41.1%
Self-rated health		
Excellent	717	12.3%
Good	3192	55.0%
Fair	1521	26.2%
Poor	274	4.7%
Very poor	71	1.2%
Savings (including superannuation)		
<\$10k	524	9.0%
\$10k-\$50k	562	9.7%
\$50k-\$100k	441	7.6%
\$100k-\$200k	516	8.9%
\$200k-\$500k	1056	18.2%
\$500k-\$750k	605	10.4%
\$750k-\$1.5M	744	12.8%
>\$1.5M	478	8.2%
Partnered and living together		
Yes	3316	57.1%
No	2468	42.5%
Membership of one or more diversity groups*		
Yes	1340	23.1%

* Percentages do not add up to 100% because some respondents did not answer all questions.

**Diversity groups included: Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and First Nations people; people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people; people with a disability; people living in rural or remote areas; people who are veterans.

The subset of respondents who commented differed slightly from this overall sample. Commenters included higher proportions of women, partnered people and those with lower savings, most markedly those with \$100k or less. Commenters included lower proportions of people with only poor or fair health and people in a diversity group.

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