WORRY ABOUT THE YOUNGER GENERATION:

Older Australians' intergenerational solidarity

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Executive Summary

In 2019 a National Seniors survey asked older Australians if there were any issues affecting younger people that they were particularly concerned about.

In total 2794 people answered the question by writing a text comment.

We identified ten issues mentioned by a notable percentage of those surveyed.

The issue mentioned most frequently was concern about unemployment rates, job security, employment pay and conditions, and welfare benefits for people seeking work. Almost one third of respondents (31%) mentioned such topics.

Three other issues were mentioned by over one fifth of respondents: housing affordability and other costs of living (27%), drug and alcohol use (23%), and education access and standards (20%).

The six other major issues we identified were violence, crime and lack of discipline and respect (14%), personal technology and social media use (14%), mental health and resilience (counted separately but discussed together; 10% and 6% respectively), climate change (9%), bad parenting (7%) and physical health and wellbeing (3%).

Many respondents mentioned several issues, not just one.

Older Australians displayed considerable empathy towards the situation of younger people through their comments. There was a majority consensus that younger people are living in more demanding and competitive environments than that of yesteryear.

While some responses indicated disdain for younger people in a way reminiscent of intergenerational conflict discourse, this was not the tone of the majority.

A few respondents specifically declined to list issues of concern, instead asserting their desire for younger and older people to work together to address societal problems.

The results illustrate the prominent presence of intergenerational solidarity in how older Australians think about younger people.

They suggest that public discourse intended to divide old and young people and inflame intergenerational tensions are not well founded. Australian seniors generally do not expect younger people to put aside their own interests to care for older generations. Rather, older Australians want to ensure younger people are adequately taken care of themselves.

Background

"I worry about the younger generation which includes my children and grandchildren. many younger people are going to experience hardship because they have not been taught how to manage adversity"
[Survey participant]

This sentiment of intergenerational concern contrasts markedly with the idea of intergenerational conflict that has become prominent in Australian public discourse in recent years. In public debates about housing affordability for example, younger people are denigrated for supposedly wasting potential housing deposits on smashed avocado while older people are disparaged for supposedly hoarding big houses when they should be downsizing. Public opinion disparages both groups, with older people treated as a financial burden younger people should resent, and younger people as a self-absorbed and materialistic generation older people should be disappointed in.

One thing missing from the conversation is the voices of older people themselves, and what they think about younger people. This report contributes to filling that gap, by allowing older people to share their side of the story. It reports the results of a survey of nearly 3000 older Australians who were asked if they were concerned about any issues affecting younger people. While there was considerable diversity within the responses, the majority revealed that older Australians are highly empathetic towards younger Australians and worried about how they will fare in a rapidly changing world. We have used the phrase "intergenerational solidarity" in the title of the report to capture this sentiment, and to counter the prevailing discourse that seems intended to seed conflict between generations.

The twenty-first century has already transformed Australian society in many ways, but one is a shift in relative proportions of younger and older people and accompanying changes to the workforce and welfare system. Between 2019 and 2020, the Australian population aged 65 years and older increased by 3.6% across all states and territories (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020b). Additionally, declines in migration due to COVID-19 have made the age shift in the population more pronounced over the last year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020a). By 2057, it is anticipated that 25 per cent of the Australian population will be aged 65 and over, representing 12.8 million older people with unique and changing care needs (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Coupled with continuing improvements in health and longevity, these changes mean older and younger people will spend a greater proportion of their lifespans coexisting in their homes and communities (Margolis & Wright, 2017).

Some differences in political and social ideologies have always been a significant feature of intergenerational discourse, with each generation subject to cohort-specific experiences, and distinct sets of economic, sociocultural, and environmental pressures. However, divisive values and beliefs, varying vulnerabilities and ageist attitudes present risks to harmony and cohesion across the ages. On the other hand, generational differences in ways of living, thinking and being can be harnessed for shared learning, passing on wisdom, and mutual support. The concerns that older Australians hold may

elucidate potential ways to improve socioeconomic and environmental outcomes for younger people both now and as they enter older adulthood.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exemplified how inequalities between generations are amplified in the face of unprecedented crises, with both young and old being disproportionately affected in differing ways (Ali et al., 2020; National Seniors Australia, 2021). It has also demonstrated how easily intergenerational solidarity can be fractured in the presence of uncertainty, fear, misinformation, and resource constraints (Ayalon, 2020). More than ever before, attention must be given to maintaining positive relationships between younger and older Australians.

Intergenerational solidarity refers to "social cohesion between generations" (Roberts et al., 1991). Social cohesion is critical to a well-functioning society where all members feel equally valued and respected. Intergenerational trust, understanding, acceptance and support must be actively facilitated now and into the future for global priorities to be addressed proactively and productively (Zurba et al., 2020). Critical issues plaguing the twenty-first century, such as pandemics, the climate crisis, reconciliation between First Nations and non-Indigenous Australians, the health and wellbeing of the ageing population, suicide prevention and mental health, unemployment rates, and economic stability and sustainability will be experienced differently by the young and old, current and future generations. To ensure intergenerational equity is achieved, innovative new approaches catering to the varying needs and concerns of all groups are essential. Active socio-political participation by people of all ages, and targeted consultation with key groups will provide clarity on how equitable outcomes can be achieved and maintained for the generations to come (Quintelier, 2007). Critically, in-depth understanding and open dialogue about intergenerational differences, engaging with both positive and negative perspectives of them, is fundamental for the development of inclusive policies and effective governmental responses.

Until recently, much of the dialogue around intergenerational solidarity in Australia and elsewhere had focussed on the ways in which younger people will sustain the growing population of older adults (Australian Treasury, 2021; Bengtson & Oyama, 2007). Similarly, recent National Seniors research (McCallum & Rees, 2018) asked seniors over 50 if they agreed with typical intergenerational assumptions. Most (74.2%) agreed that older people deserve younger people's respect because of their age, and most (73.2%) also felt that the downward flow of support from older parents to their adult children tends to outweigh the upward flow of support from adult children to their parents. These intergenerational sentiments, however, likely encompass a wider frame of reference than chronological age alone. For example, older adults' desire to feel respected by younger people may stem from internalisation of negative age stereotypes and fear of loss of independence. Further, the ideological imperative that children should support their ageing parents may be less critical to current generations who have better access to home care support. It is thus important to understand the broader range of intergenerational attitudes that people hold.

Intergenerational research often measures attitudes of younger people towards older people, and focuses on the effects of ageism on the experience of ageing (Chang et al., 2020). Less is understood about older people's feelings and attitudes towards younger

people. To gain deeper insight into current intergenerational sentiments we investigated older Australians' thoughts about younger people via the 2019 National Seniors Social Survey (NSSS-8). Rather than tick-box responses, respondents were asked to submit an anonymous free-text comment detailing their concerns about issues affecting younger people. This allowed respondents the opportunity to voice honest and uninhibited views, and we collected rich and nuanced information from 2794 individual text comments.

Data and Methods

Every year, National Seniors conducts an online survey of members' behaviours and views across a range of topics relevant to older people's lifestyle, health, and wellbeing. The survey is open to members and non-members 50 years and over from all states and territories. A link to the survey was emailed directly to all members who had provided an email address. The survey was available on the National Seniors website and was also circulated via a member online newsletter and in the quarterly magazine. The 8th National Seniors Social Survey, undertaken in 2019, included the question:

> *We know that older people are interested in issues that affect younger people too - are there any issues affecting younger people today that you are particularly concerned about?*

Survey participants were invited to respond by making comments in an open text box. In all, 2794 people wrote text comments and characteristics of this group can be seen in Appendix 1

Survey responses were collected online via the survey tool Survey Monkey. A pre-defined data cleaning protocol was used to remove duplicate responses. Data were collated and graphed using Microsoft Excel and Stata (version 15.1). For this report, all text comments provided in response to the question about issues affecting young people were analysed using the thematic analysis framework described by Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Two National Seniors Research Officers (NE and DH) separately read and coded the text comments provided by participants. Codes were discussed and agreed upon by the researchers and sorted into potential themes arrived at by consensus. A third National Seniors Research Officer (LO) independently read and coded half the comments in a subsequent analysis stage to ensure no key themes had been overlooked in the primary analysis.

Themes were identified primarily through inductive analysis, that is, data were coded without reference to an explicit pre-existing theoretical framework. The researchers acknowledge the influence of their pre-existing theoretical knowledge and understanding on the codes and themes identified from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Because respondents sometimes phrased concerns for the same issue in quite different ways, occasionally rendering them slightly ambiguous, we take a conservative approach to approximating themes' quantitative prevalence. Where quantitative estimates are given, they are rounded to the nearest multiple of 10 as an indicator that it is an approximation, rather than giving an exact number.

Quotes from survey participants were selected to illustrate the variety of ideas expressed by the cohort as well as to highlight ideas shared by many people. Sometimes this entailed reproducing only part of a person's comment if the rest was not relevant to the theme. We endeavoured to reproduce each selected quote verbatim whenever possible. In a small number of cases we omitted or altered part of a quote for clarity and indicated this with square brackets (i.e. []). In additional cases, minor typos and obvious spelling errors were corrected for readability. Quotes were only corrected in this way if

there was no ambiguity about the participant's intended meaning in the part of the quote that was corrected. All other phrasing idiosyncrasies were retained in the quotes.

Methodological findings of note

As we discuss in the Results section, a large proportion of respondents interpreted the question as asking them to identify issues they felt were *caused by* younger people, not issues *affecting* young people as we had intended. This may be because the public discourse about intergenerational conflict and disparities led them to assume this is what the question was getting. Alternatively, people may simply interpret the concept of a group being *affected by an issue* differently, with one set generally interpreting it to mean the group is *adversely impacted by an external force or factor*, while another set interprets it to mean the group is *characterised by a trait or behaviour*. While this definitional distinction is not a topic we have space to develop in this report, it may be useful for future social researchers to note when writing questions about issues affecting people.

In the Results we also show that there was some ambiguity about what respondents meant by "younger people" when answering the question. In most cases it was clear that they meant young adults and late teenagers. In other cases, comments could be interpreted as referring to children or referring to older adults who were nonetheless still younger than the respondents. This should be borne in mind when considering the results. The question wording did not guide respondents to a particular age group, so it may be important that most respondents assumed it referred to people in their late teens or early adulthood. Again, this itself suggests the themes of intergenerational disparity and conflict between "old" and "young" were prominent in respondents' thinking. This may have prompted responses driven by stereotypes.

Results

The analysis of the qualitative comments found that respondents interpreted the survey question in two distinct ways:

- concerns about the issues affecting younger people; and
- concerns about issues caused by younger generations.

There was overlap between these two on some issues and sometimes ambiguity about who was to blame for a problem. Nonetheless, we address each in turn, identifying six major issues that primarily fall under the first interpretation and four major issues that primarily fall under the second.

After outlining these ten major issues, we discuss issues mentioned by fewer people that nonetheless help paint a picture of what seniors are concerned about with respect to younger people. We also discuss some of the practical solutions respondents offered to these issues.

Issues affecting younger people

Many respondents displayed great care and empathy in their articulation of the prevailing issues that younger people currently face, and those they will encounter in the future. This first set of themes is largely critical of structural changes to society in recent decades, especially economic changes but also others. The comments that contributed to these themes provide encouraging evidence that intergenerational solidarity remains intact amongst older Australians.

Issue #1 Unemployment and job security

Employment was the issue affecting younger people that respondents most often expressed concern about. Within this issue we grouped various sub-issues, including youth unemployment rates, insufficient employment opportunities, poor job security, poor pay and conditions, and unscrupulous employer practices. About 31% of the 2794 respondents (around 870 responses) mentioned worries about one or more of these issues. The casualisation of the workforce and technological advances were recognised as factors threatening employment opportunities, as was job occupancy by older people. Respondents also felt young Australians are not being adequately trained or supported to secure employment in the quickly evolving job market and are inadequately supported on unemployment benefits. Many expressed concern that this employment landscape would put younger people in difficult positions financially.

> *"Youth unemployment is a problem. There will be a huge change in jobs with developing technology. We need to prepare for these changes and equip our grandchildren with skills and talents to handle such change. Education is only part of the answer. More needs to be done by industry and governments around the world - not only in developed economies."*

"Equality of opportunity for all of our young people. A variety of educational opportunities that will give them a base for future work Wages so they can do what they want to do and live while they do it"

"Need for employers to look at their social justice obligations and not just maximising their profit, i.e. by employing youth on casual wages on a permanent job basis."

"Very concerned about youth unemployment. Not everyone is academic and wants to go to uni. Govt should do far more to make apprenticeships attractive to school leavers. We all need trades people!"

"stable and well-paid jobs for my granddaughter. Wages to be better as the 'gig' economy will destroy our society with its focus upon playing one individual against another"

"Current trend to employ people on a casual basis leading to insecurity and inability to budget and save"

"Forcing older Australians to stay in the work force longer is depriving young people of work."

Issue #2 Housing affordability and cost of living

Following on from concern about the financial risks of younger people's employment situation, another concern expressed frequently was about rising costs of living, including, most prominently, the decreasing availability of affordable housing. Home ownership appeared to be an important facet of life for respondents, and one that they aspired for younger generations to access. The increasing cost of living and property were mentioned by about 27% of respondents (around 750 responses) as key issues requiring urgent redress.

"Housing affordability is a serious threat to the Australian way of life. Young couples getting less than 3% on savings while trying to build up a reasonable deposit and then expected to pay over 3% mortgage rate is a government endorsed 'rip off'. Negative gearing must be abolished and foreign investment in housing / apartments / accommodation must be curtailed with legislation to prevent rental incomes / earnings going overseas / offshore."

"Housing is astronomically expensive - almost impossible for most. I really am concerned about what they are going to do in the future."

"A lack of decent, basic affordable housing in major cities - so much of it is out of reach because developers add luxury finishes like granite benchtops, European ovens, pools and so on. Units and homes can be just as lovely with more modest features."

"Young people are brilliant and outdo us oldies every day, but their access to housing at an affordable level is fast becoming beyond even their ability."

"Ability of youth to own their own home - does not look good."

"The high cost of living is causing everyone at every age a lot of stress and distress (except the wealthy). We need more regulation of all areas of the cost of living. Governments need to stop selling utilities and infrastructure. They have no mandate for it."

Issue #3 Education access and standards

Numerous respondents were also concerned about the state of formal education in Australia. However, their concerns were varied. As for employment, housing and the cost of living, some people were most concerned about rising education costs, or access to educational opportunities. Others were concerned about less material aspects of education, such as its quality and standards or curriculum. Some respondents worry that younger people are being left without the "basics" or without practical applications for their formal education. About 20% of respondents (around 560 responses) commented on education issues.

"My life was set up through the opportunities for education and social mobility that were available in the 1950s. I believe that the public school and technical education systems are not being adequately funded to provide the current youth generation with similar chances. Excessive Government support for private schooling should be cut back and the balance between sectors restored."

"Yes, the cost of education. Public education used to supply book and equipment free of charge, now parents in the ACT have to pay over $100 each year for equipment packages. University education seems to be getting to be beyond the reach of many families."

"I believe the standard of education has slipped a lot. In the TAFE & tertiary sector I believe the contact hours in courses & quality of teaching have reduced vastly, yet Uni fees & repayment requirements have increased considerably - the reward for years of study is just not there overall - & that is a vast shame"

"More trained staff should be assisting the classroom teacher, especially if there are special needs children included. Better training for teachers, better pay for teachers. Teaching should be considered a valuable profession and treated accordingly. Indigenous assistance using indigenous teachers"

"a good basic education and on the job for training, university is not the solution to all the problems."

"The education systems seem to be lacking in the basics in some areas. On the whole the young people I interact with are well balanced educated a pleasure to know and I feel this is down to their parents. Parents I feel have the greatest influence on their children."

"The education of our young people is declining partly because there is so many other things being taught & the basics are not being pushed as hard as it used to be. I was told that rote learning of table was not taught in class because there wasn't time. Teaching about not Bullying has led to more ideas been given to the bullies. PE classes led by the teacher has been replaced by paid sports people coming into the school at a cost of $40 per child. Very little history, geography, story writing, poetry is taught in primary school. This is just for starters for education"

Issue #4 Climate change

In addition to these three pressing issues about how younger people can afford to study, work, and buy or rent housing, survey participants were also concerned about whether younger people would even have planet to live on at all, given the changing climate. Respondents appeared to want to leave behind a planet that the next generation would thrive in. As such, many urged for the enactment of quick and effective measures aimed at tackling climate change. About 9% of respondents (around 240 responses) commented on questions related to climate change or environmental sustainability more broadly.

"Unless we act on climate change what sort of world will our children and their children are living in?"

"Stabilizing the climate would ensure that young people have a planet to live on, reduce the chance of war due to climate change."

"the lack of focus on environmental issues e.g. climate change. The reduction of green space in cities which provides amenity and aids clean air and wellbeing"

"Climate change of course, but also the environment and loss of biodiversity. I fear for how my grandchildren will live as it becomes harder for farmers to meet our food requirements."

"Well designed cities. Environmental protection, including our land, oceans and native species."

"Seems that young people are the only ones with enough brains to demand action on climate change - we should support them"

"With the environmental issues facing us today there won't be anything left for the young people for tomorrow."

"The current Federal Government allowing more coal mines to open, Not taking enough steps for renewable resources of all kinds. They are not taking global warming seriously enough seem to only be paying lip service and our grandchildren are going to be left with a very poor planet in every way"

Issue #5 Mental health and resilience

Survey respondents were not only concerned about the material impacts of social and environmental issues on younger people. They were also concerned about the impacts such factors have on younger people's mental health and wellbeing, with many of them specifically expressing concern about youth suicide. Respondents related poor youth mental health to factors such as job insecurity and climate change, but also to other issues including bullying and lack of early intervention and access to psychological support. About 10% of respondents (around 270 responses) raised the issue of mental health and suicide rates.

"I am extremely concerned about the number of young people with mental health issues. How can this be?"

"Unemployment amongst young people is a big concern leading to poverty and isolation and mental health issues; ability to participate in many positive community events and be engaged in organisations."

"Climate change. Do young people feel there is no future? Is this the reason for the rise in suicides or is it more complicated than that?"

"There is not enough mental health assistance - help the youth early and reduce the number of struggling adults."

"Young people with mental health issues. There are few resources and fewer inpatient beds. They are discharged too soon and ongoing [care] is patchy at best, yet more public servants not front line staff are being employed"

"Cyber-bullying and bullying in general, it affects the mental health of our youth and sadly results in suicide. I am for making any form of bullying a criminal offence. To bully you must first make a decision to do so. Where the level of bullying leads to a suicide, those involved in the bullying to be charged with murder, those bullying know what the consequences of their action can be and they have made a decision to do this"

In addition, some respondents attributed poor mental health not to external pressures, but to younger people being insufficiently self-reliant. Many of these respondents compared their own upbringing to what they perceived to be newer ways of raising children that do not foster the child's capacity to cope. This topic was one of those that encompassed both empathy towards young people for what they must endure but also a sense of blame on young people for bringing problems upon themselves. Younger generations were described as lacking resilience and being overly entitled due to a lack

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of good role models, discipline, and hardship. About 6% of respondents (around 170 responses) made comments related to resilience, sometimes but not always relating this to mental health.

"Suicide and their sense of not being good enough and for many having no resilience to get on top of things, especially when they are told no."

"Youth suicide. We have created an environment where they think there is no future. We have also mothered them to the point where they expect everything will be perfect and when it is not they can't cope."

"Youth seem to be lacking in focus and perhaps are not goal driven. I worry about how they will react to all of the problems in the world at this time. I worry about their work principles in terms that they may think that they need a high salary without the responsibility to go with it. I worry about their training and education standards because the future is not as safe as the past in terms of the certainty of the permanent positions of the past in the economy. Their consumer habits are poor!"

"I feel sorry for young people today because they don't have the same advantages I had as a kid. We didn't own a house or have anything fancy, but we had Mum or Dad at home to greet us when we got home from school. We were expected to do chores without pocket money and be thankful for what we had. From this lifestyle we learnt resilience, basic life skills which gave us confidence to have a go and respect for ourselves and others."

"Our young people today are given no boundaries in which to conduct themselves, and any wrong-doing is explained away by a poor home life giving them the belief that they are untouchable. Good values taught at home are not being reinforced in the classroom or by authorities. Nor are they taught any coping skills for adversity. Prizes are given just for participating with no real sense of achievement given to the winners, so the others never learn to take losing in their stride"

"I feel many young people have been wrapped in cotton wool for too long and as a result, they have no resilience, no self-discipline, they refuse to take responsibility for their own actions, and expect government (and society) to pay or provide or be responsible for whatever they want. The parents of these young people have similar views because they have not taught their kids discipline, resilience, working for what you need and taking responsibility for one's own actions."

"I hope we have taught/modelled enough resilience for them to cope with rapid changes. May the universities provide genuinely supportive education to carry them into careers."

Issue #6 Physical health and wellbeing

Related to mental health and wellbeing, a consistent minority of respondents were also concerned about young people's physical health, particularly related to being insufficiently active, having low quality diets, and not getting outside into nature enough. Approximately 3% of respondents (around 80 responses) commented on these issues. Once again, the tone of these comments mixed empathy with blaming young people for their own problems.

> *"Yes, lack of exercise, fresh air and obesity. Never outside as constantly on electronic devices. I believe many parents will be burying their children due to early deaths caused by unhealthy lifestyle."*

> *"Sporting activities, kids need to be more active and smell the outdoors, tennis, walking, sports in general"*

> *"The fact that they do not exercise and play physical games or get out into the countryside and connect with nature and gain useful physical exercise that will benefit them in the years to come."*

> *"Yes primarily the availability of drugs and possibl[y] too much tech gazing and not enough exercise"*

> *"Too much time on mobile phones etc. Should be outdoors and making their own fun like we did when we were kids."*

> *"Get off facebook and watching the rubbish shown on TV and look at the real world. Get off your mobile phone and look outside"*

> *"The youth of today potentially hold the key to saving our world and I would like to say that I am hopeful for their future but I am concerned that many younger people that I know seem overly focused on materialistic and superficial issues. I know it sounds a bit 'hippy' but I feel that many young people sadly have no connection with the environment and mother earth with the result that sometimes they just don't get the important issues in life."*

Issues caused by younger generations

Contrary to feelings of care and concern for youth wellbeing, a sense of disapproval and judgement was also present in the comment set. Unlike lack of resilience and poor physical health discussed above, the issues we include in this section are those that respondents perceived as adversely impacting other people including seniors, not just impacting younger people themselves.

Issue #7 Drug and alcohol use

The level of drug and alcohol use amongst younger people was of major concern to about 23% of respondents (around 650 responses). Strong anti-drug views were present,

with respondents attributing other negative consequences like poor decision-making, deteriorating mental health, violence, and crime to drug and alcohol use. The responses suggest that the growing conversation around safe drug use and legalisation is not palatable amongst a large segment of the older generations, though views did vary. This theme was another that mixed attitudes of empathy and blame towards younger people. Some comments on this issue squarely placed blame on younger people for negative impacts of drug and alcohol use, but other respondents attributed younger people's use of drugs and alcohol to external factors.

"Drugs. They are cheap, easily accessible and creating aggressive, crazy young adults. Obviously, all the drug education has failed."

"This latest issue with "Ice" is going to cost the country millions in the future with violence, health and other issues that are on the increase with this epidemic of drug abuse."

"drugs are a big problem they are the reason for many crimes to pay for the habit we need to give the kids a reason not to touch drugs"

"the use of unknown & illicit substances. I am also aware that the media spin this when the statistics show a different story of how many actually use"

"The use of illegal drugs - also not sure we are doing the right thing with the 'safe injecting room' in [city suburb]."

"Yes. Drugs are illegal. There should be NO drug testing at music festival. Drugs are illegal. No means no, not 'come here and I'll test that drug for you'. Stop pandering and babying the youth, they are our future. If you don't start demanding them to be more responsible for their decisions, then our future is doomed, through stupidity and self-centred behaviours of our youth. Also, you commit a crime whilst being drug affected, then you should do double the time. Drugs are illegal and the crime is illegal. Time for the courts to get [tough] on the youth."

"Substance abuse! Unemployed children are becoming desperate and depressed and turning to substance abuse to replace the realities of life. Substance abuse is a health and wellbeing problem, not a matter for the criminal justice system."

Issue #8 Violence, crime and lack of discipline and respect

While some respondents associated violence and crime with drug and alcohol abuse, others associated violence or crime with what they perceived to be young people's lack of discipline, lack of respect for others and lack of respect for authority. For some respondents, a lack of discipline and respect alone were themselves the issue. About 14% of respondents (around 400 responses) raised one or both of these issues. Some expressed fears for their own safety and called for harsher punishments and deterrents to manage youth violence and crime.

"just the overall violence in today's society scares me terribly"

"Too easy for youth to say 'I'm bored' and then commit crimes. Need to have more education that focuses on respect for everyone."

"Too much violence, on our streets, in our homes, schools. No respect from anyone, or for anyone, especially the police. Courtesy & care on our roads has gone out the window"

"I am concerned about the amount of depression in young people, the drug use, the alcohol use, the amount of violence, the lack of restricting violence on TV and video and the internet. The lack of discipline, the lack of respect, the continual threat of war and terrorism"

"The respect shown to people and property by some young people is very concerning. Violence is increasing at an alarming rate. The choices they make must improve."

"There appears to be a lack of discipline in families and replicated in our education system that has produced a generation with little or no respect for authority or other person's property. Crime amongst youth has increased and the justice system is inadequate to deal with the problem. We need harsher penalties as a consequence of crime"

"the trend of not making people pay for their crimes young people have had no boundaries thanks to stupid do gooders and now society pay for it"

Issue #9 Use of personal technology and social media

Respondents also associated younger people's use of personal electronic devices and social media with disrespectful attitudes, though in a different way. Use of smartphones and similar technologies were associated with various ills including poor communication and poor social skills. Respondents were also concerned about social media's invasion of privacy and spread of misinformation. Some expressed great concern about electronic device and social media "addictions" amongst younger people. Such comments frequently blamed younger people for the resulting issues, while others more generally despaired of the impacts of these of technologies on younger people and societal functioning. In this theme, much more than those discussed on previous pages, the ambiguity of the phrases "young people" and "younger people" was apparent, with some respondents recognising the issues they flagged did not just involve youth. Technology and social media issues were mentioned by about 14% of respondents (around 400 responses).

"Social media has created barriers between the generations."

"Mobile phones have changed the social structure of society."

"I am concerned that youngsters (and some of the not-so-young) are more likely to connect with their friends through social media than by actually

talking face-to-face. Also worried that people in general seem more quick to accept the truth of twitterings on social media than listen to the voices of experts."

"too much reliance on IT and social media. lack of good driving skills - speed and mobile phones - not just a youth issue"

"Social media device addiction and drug addiction are the present-day scourges of our society."

"I think too much screen time and the over-use of social media can be damaging for young people."

"Too much social media affecting young people's communication skills."

"Support in dealing with social media. Parents are probably not much help, because social media didn't exist or was only just starting when the parents were young. It seems that kids need to be shown the world won't end if they can't use social media"

"Young people have given/had taken, their personal space by the invention of social media. I feel this will lead to increasing mental health issues as they continue to be overstimulated socially as they struggle to truly understand who they are. It is also evident an increasing level of aggression and decreasing level of genuine respect of their fellow human beings. Yes, social media can be very destructive to young people - it affects their mental health and self-perception which can be tragic"

"mobile phones, facebook, twitter etc which consumes the day to day activities of youth to the detriment of health, mental wellbeing and the realities of life. The apparent acceptance of no privacy"

"Overuse of screens; invasion of privacy by Social Media and SM companies."

Issue #10 Bad parenting

A prominent minority of respondents mentioned the issue of bad parenting, which they in turn blamed for many of the other concerning issues. Once again this highlights the ambiguity of the phrase "younger people", since most of these comments referred to people of parenting age rather than teenagers and young adults which we might generally associate with the phrase. Harsh judgement around modern parenting practices was observed in the comments of about 7% of respondents (around 190 responses). Parents were variously described as irresponsible, absent, not sufficiently strict, and incapable. There was a general lack of empathy for the challenges younger parents may face. Some comments suggest that younger and older Australians' views and values on parenting are at times incongruous.

"The way the younger generation look after their children or should I say don't look after their children. How many older grandparents are raising their grandchildren?"

"Poor parenting skills leading to a badly behaved generation"

"Bad parenting, inappropriate parenting or inability to parent"

"Most working parents are not able to guide their children in the right direction especially if both parents have to work because of costs and the children are left on their own - what do the parents do - give them ipads or mobiles to keep them occupied. There is too much alcohol readily accessible by children today - they somehow find access to drugs, get into trouble with police and some of them just can't find a way out. Some parents throw them out of the home when they can't control them and these children end up in homeless shelters. Good guidance is needed by parents to guide the children - some parents should take responsibility for their actions in not trying hard enough to help their child or not trying to understand what they are going through in their very young lives."

"Children are spoilt rotten and given too much stuff for too little effort. They expect / demand too much and poor parenting gives in. Schooling is poor and lack of respect for teachers, policemen, adults in general. Too much technology but too little learning. Too little sport and lack of team work. Too little socialisation and lack of teaching of good manners. Too little resilience and too much self-harm and suicide. Drugs, alcohol and poor language are considered normal in youth. Too many young people are just lazy and lack motivation. Poor parenting has a lot to answer for. Too few clubs, societies and diminishing Church values"

"Governments should legislate urgently, to make parents legally responsible for their offspring (might reduce crime if parents keep an eye on what their children are doing and where, then guide them into decency). Not fair to law abiding citizens, that under a certain age, children (stop demeaning by calling "kids" = baby goats) can get away with damaging public property, and even assault. Courts should be required to enforce penalties, despite all the do-gooders/research/etc."

Other concerns raised by respondents and agendas for action

The preceding sections highlight the ten issues we found most often within the survey responses. However, it is worth noting that many respondents mentioned more than one issue in their comments, so the numbers reported above add up to much more than the 2794 people who answered this survey question. In addition, to adequately illustrate the themes we were obliged to use quotes in which respondents elaborated on an issue rather than simply mentioning it. These articulate and sometimes lengthy quotes do not adequately capture the fact that many respondents listed a range of issues without saying more about them, for example in these responses:

"Climate change, health, education."

"Housing, Stable Jobs, Environment, Education, Work training"

"Unemployment   Public transport   Road safety"

"The number of First Nations young folk in prison or detention. I am also concerned about drug abuse."

"Unemployment. Mental Health. Finding fulfilment in their lives. Being connected in civic service."

"Climate change, drugs, wage levels and insecure work."

"House affordability. Education costs. Emotional well-being."

"Safety of children. Job availability."

"Bullying, treatment of women, social media abuse"

"Crime, climate change and corporate corruption"

"Drugs / Bad Manners / foul Language"

"Climate, work availability, safety, happiness"

As these snapshots show, and as might be expected for a survey sample of nearly 3000 people, there were also some issues raised by a smaller number of respondents that were not echoed by large numbers of others. They included, but are not limited to, child abuse, domestic violence, inequality, recognition of diversity (for some respondents too little, for others too much), minimal community support, negative media representations, a lack of national pride, a lack of religion, ignorance about history, and transport issues including use of vehicles such as scooters.

In addition to raising their concerns for and about younger people, respondents expressed a desire to see governmental and community action to address the issues. In most cases this was implicit; for example, people who decry the lack of affordable housing, secure jobs and quality education would likely be in favour of government or community action to provide these things. But in other cases, respondents outlined clear agendas for action beyond what was implicit.

Suggested policy outcomes included (but were not limited to) better environmental regulations, policies to reduce the cost of housing and living, improved employment, income support and education pathways for young people, harsher or more lenient punishment for youth violence and crime, and better mental health rehabilitation and support. A notable minority of about 20 respondents (less than 1%) expressed a desire to see national service reinstated.

"Recognise/accept global warming is occurring & develop long-term policies & take actions to reduce CO2 emissions. Pollies briefed on the

credible science and solutions regardless of personal/party bias. Become mates with some wise & practical advisers. Otherwise the young people will punish you politically when the inevitable disaster eventuates."

"Youth Allowance independent eligibility is ridiculously complex to meet or administer - needs a review. Centrelink access/level of service is just not meeting need. Housing affordability is an issue, but high employment & reasonable wages would help significantly."

"Mental health support - not crisis driven as it is now. Having access to affordable care when needed is critical. It can be offered in a variety of ways but there needs to be a service scaffold for anyone who seeks help for mental health issues to support them until they are well. My son struggled for five years to get help and in the end we had to go the private system because the public system was underfunded, understaffed, the hospitals are hideous and no one can really spend the time needed to do their jobs. Again - a people focus, humans at the centre is needed"

"There is lack of respect by younger people for elders, law enforcement officers, laws of our country in which we live in. Compulsory education. More physical regulated activities. Bring back compulsory Australian history classes into primary and high schools. Teach about local (councils), state and federal governments."

"Drugs and the current 'war on drugs' that criminalises users and locks them up. This creates misery and destroys lives - all over some youthful experimentation. We should be looking at the approach taken by Portugal where over the past 15 years the focus has been on rehabilitation for individual users rather than punishment coupled with harsh penalties only for drug peddlers. Usage levels and jail populations have declined markedly."

"National service and Boot camps should be trialled for the socially inappropriate behaviour of the young. We strongly believe the services will result in improved respect for others and self discipline, and preferable to jail. No handouts unless community work is done. (Remembering the dole work that existed in the Depression in many communities.) The return to us is a safer place to age within."

Finally, there were also a small number of comments in which seniors decided not to list any issues of concern, preferring instead to express a desire for intergenerational solidarity:

"Don't like positioning grey nomads against younger Groups - they are generally our children or Grandchildren we need to join with them In continuing the good Fight just as We Did in the 70s."

"No we all have to pull together, to achieve anything worthwhile."

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"We only hear about the problem young when my experiences with young indicates the future is in good hands"

"My messages are for older People not the younger People many of whom have sound and constructive ideas."

"Mostly they seem to have the right ideas, even if we oldies don't appreciate them!"

Discussion

The population ageing means that the proportion of people who are of working age will decline over the next 40 years and increasing proportions of government funding will be diverted to health care, pensions, and aged care support. These issues must be carefully balanced with the needs of younger people and generations to come. But while commentators have proposed intergenerational unfairness leads to intergenerational conflict (Spies-Butcher, 2014), evidence suggests younger people remain sympathetic to older people (Kendig et al., 2019) and vice versa. The current report has shown older people are most concerned about the hardship younger people face in making ends meet with low wage growth and unmanageable housing costs, and do not expect younger generations to support them unless in need.

Our findings suggest that older people would support the allocation of public resources to address current and predicted social, economic, and environmental issues that impact younger people and future generations. To characterise older and younger Australians as fighting over societal resources rather than being willing to share is to do both generations a disservice. In the words of one participant, "we all have to pull together, to achieve anything worthwhile."

Older Australians demonstrated acute awareness of current social, political, and economic issues when asked about their concerns for issues affecting younger people. They are deeply concerned about younger people's ability to stay afloat financially because of unfavourable social policies with respect to work, welfare, housing prices, the cost of living and the cost of education. They are worried about the state of the environment and planet left to current and future generations and the impacts climate change will have on them if no action is taken. They are aware of alarming levels of psychological distress, including suicide rates, among younger people, and concerned that younger people may not have sufficient resilience to cope with the challenges they face in today's world. They want younger people to have some of the enjoyable aspects of life they themselves had, such as more time outside using their bodies and enjoying nature.

Seniors are also concerned about what they perceive as younger people's overuse of drugs, alcohol, electronic devices, and social media. This concern is partly for younger people themselves, as well as for older people and for society in general. Seniors are similarly worried about increases in violence and crime, and more broadly what appears to them to be a lack of discipline and a lack of respect for others and for authority. A notable minority were particularly scathing about the middle generation of parents, putting the blame at their feet for many of these issues. In raising these concerns, some seniors expressed disdain for younger people of the kind we might expect from the intergenerational conflict stereotype. But comments striking that tone were not in the majority. Most of the blame was instead placed on policy makers and, to a lesser extent, big business (such as social media corporations). Indeed, some seniors specifically sought to counter intergenerational conflict discourse by asserting a position of intergenerational solidarity.

The subtext of many comments on all issues was that these parts of life are worse today than they were when the respondent was younger. Some issues are recent developments, most obviously housing prices and increased use of social media and personal technology. Some issues have an increased presence in public discourse in the current era, including climate change, mental health issues, declining physical activity and the availability and impact of drugs, especially newer drugs like ice. While the other issues might be read as perennial problems, in most cases the survey respondents were concerned that these were escalating or taking new forms that might be more difficult to cope with. In this sense, older Australians concerns centred around the direction Australian society is heading and how this makes life more difficult for younger generations.

Conclusion

The comments convey a strong sense of sadness among older Australians that the lives of younger people may not be as fortunate as their own, or that younger people may not be sufficiently equipped to cope with the challenges we face in Australia today. While some seniors blamed younger people for some social problems, the majority blamed other forces and factors for making life more difficult.

Our enquiry revealed that older Australians are:

- conscious and passionate about the issues that plague younger people.
- willing to support and advocate for improving outcomes for younger people.
- sympathetic to the pressures younger people face in their pursuit of financial stability and home ownership.
- mindful of their environmental impact and what planet will be left behind.
- not expecting younger people to prioritise supporting the ageing population.

Balancing the competing needs between younger and older groups will not be a trivial task, but these sentiments provide comfort and encouragement that intergenerational solidarity remains intact.

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Appendix

Participant characteristics

Table 1. Demographics of respondents who answered the question about young people.

Number of comments n=2794	Percent
Age group	
50-59	9.0
60-69	37.9
70-79	42.4
80+	11.7
Gender*	
Women	55
Men	44
Tertiary educated	43.8
Self-rated health	
Good or excellent	72.8
Fair	22.5
Poor or very poor	4.4
Live with others	67.5
Retired	72.8
Grandparents	25.7

Number of comments n=2794	Percent
Live with others	67.5
Retired	72.8
Grandparents	25.7
STATE	
NSW	21.7
VIC	14.4
WA	10.3
QLD	40.7
SA	4.6
TAS	3.0
NT	1.6
ACT	3.8

*other gender or prefers not to say 0.41%

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