

## Towards a Society for All Ages New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy

The growth in the older population has significant policy implications for all nations throughout the world. In developed nations in particular, much of the debate on the ageing population centres around expected increases in health and retirement income expenditure. However, people are not just living longer; they are also living healthier and can contribute many more years to society. In New Zealand, a feature of the older population is the increasing ethnic and social diversity, with higher proportions of Māori, Pacific peoples and Asians who will have different needs and expectations.

There are many opportunities to be realised as future generations of older people are expected to be healthier, more skilled and educated, and remain more active in the workforce than their predecessors. Positive attitudes to ageing and expectations of continuing productivity challenge the notion of older age as a time of retirement and withdrawal from society. The focus is on lifetime experiences contributing to well-being in older age, and older age as a time for ongoing participation in society.

The development of a New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy reinforces Government's commitment to promote the value and participation of older people in communities. Older people are important members of society and have the right to be afforded dignity in their senior years. They have skills, knowledge and experience to contribute to society and the expected growth in the proportion of older people during the coming decades will provide New Zealand with a valuable resource. Further, continued participation in older age has benefits for the individual concerned, the community, and the country as a whole.

Unfortunately, for some older people, full participation in society is prevented through low sense of worth or because of restricted opportunities. Social exclusion may arise through one or more of a range of circumstances, including a lack of access to personal, community or state resources and facilities, insufficient personal capacity and opportunity, and negative attitudes to ageing.

The New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy seeks to address the risk of social exclusion among older people by identifying gaps in government policy that might contribute to this risk. The purpose of the Strategy is to develop a strategic framework and action plan to promote and support positive ageing in policy and service development across a broad range of portfolio areas.

The concept of "Positive Ageing" embraces a number of factors, including health, financial security, independence, self-fulfilment, community attitudes, personal safety and security, and the physical environment. The underpinning premise is that the years of "older age" should be both viewed and experienced positively. The focus is therefore not only on the experience of older individuals, but also on younger generations' attitudes, expectations, and actions regarding ageing and older people. Promoting positive attitudes to ageing is the first step to achieving this goal.

The ability to age positively is assisted by good investment in education throughout life, to provide individuals with a repertoire of skills and an ability to set and achieve goals. It is also dependent on an environment that provides opportunities for older people to remain involved in society. Positive ageing policies aim to improve each individual's life experiences and create an environment that offers opportunities for continuing participation.

### **Determinants of Positive Ageing**

A stable and secure income in retirement is essential for people to be able to age in a positive and productive way. An inadequate income has negative effects on health and on the ability of older people to remain active participants in society. Good health and positive relationships in childhood, healthy lifestyle choices, and appropriate health and social support services throughout life increase the probability of good health in older age. Māori, in particular, consider that the ability to develop and deliver the holistic, whānau-based services that they want is essential to their well-being. Similar views have been expressed by Pacific people and by other ethnic communities.

Positive ageing is closely aligned with the ability to "age in place"; that is, to be able to make choices in later life about where to live, and receive the support needed to do so. For older people to maintain their independence and age in place successfully, it is important that they have adequate and affordable housing that meets their needs. Most older people do not require support services to live at home, but people aged 80 and over are more likely to require assistance. Concerns about safety and security are also greatest among older people who are vulnerable because of frailty, lack of resources, or isolation.

It is in everyone's interest that older people are encouraged and supported to remain self-reliant, and that they continue to participate and contribute to the well-being of themselves, their families, and the wider New Zealand community. Factors influencing their ability to access services and participate in their community include not only health status and income but also access to and availability of transport.

Retirement from the paid workforce does not mean that people cease to contribute to society; it provides opportunities for participation in different ways and in a range of roles: as employees, volunteers, family members, neighbours, caregivers, committee and trust members, kaumātua, business mentors and advisors, and members of communities.

The choice to work later in life is important in meeting the challenge of positive ageing. The evidence suggests that those who work longer enjoy better health in their old age. In order to achieve this objective, more emphasis must be given to life-long learning for workers of all ages, so that they maintain and increase their skills and productivity as they grow older. It also involves changing everyone's attitudes to ageing and older workers, and providing employment options for older workers, including part-time, job share, flexible hours, and retraining budgets through workplace reforms.

The benefits of positive ageing for individuals are obvious: good health, independence, intellectual stimulation, self-fulfilment and friendship are just some of the valued outcomes. Society as a whole has a lot to gain from these outcomes: a healthy, happy, and confident ageing population contributes a wealth of expertise and skills to the community and the workforce, places less demand on social services, and provides positive role models for younger generations.

Positive ageing policies are those designed to support people, as they grow older, in leading productive lives in the economy and society. It is important that government policies across the range of issues including employment, health, housing and income support allow and encourage older people, and future generations of older people, to experience ageing as a positive and productive phenomenon. The New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy has been developed to achieve this objective.

**Courtesy:** <http://www.osc.govt.nz/positive-ageing-strategy/towards-a-society.html>