

OLDER PEOPLE

THE NSW AGEING STRATEGY STATES:

“This is a great opportunity to realise the benefits of an ageing population and to harness the contribution of seniors in our communities. Equally important will be empowering people to plan ahead for the future they envisage in the later years”¹



OVERVIEW

ACCORDING TO THE MINISTER FOR AGEING:

“Australia’s population is ageing. This presents both challenges and opportunities that will lead to changes for individuals and communities. The significant demographic shift will affect the way we deliver services, design our homes, cities and towns, plan our transport and develop our workforce”²

In almost every country the proportion of people over 60 is growing faster than any other age group, as a result of both longer life expectancy and declining fertility rates. Successful public health programs around the world and socio economic development have been contributing factors, which support improved health, independence and social participation.³

Active ageing is the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.

For COTA (Council of the Ageing) 'active' ageing means participating in the full range of social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic affairs, as well as being physically active.⁴

Youth is a wonderful thing. What a crime to waste it on children.

~ George Bernard Shaw

IN THE BEGA VALLEY

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011 Census and the Bega Valley Community Profile, the Shire has a high proportion of older people compared to the NSW average. 29.9% of people are 60 years and over, compared with 23.6% and 24.5% respectively for regional NSW.

Bega Valley is ranked 29 amongst the 152 local government areas in NSW in terms of its proportion of people aged 65+. It is ranked 67 in terms of its proportion of people aged 85+.

There are 5617 people aged between 50-59 yrs, 4889 between 60-69 yrs, 3874 between 70-84 yrs and 797 frail older people living in the Bega Valley Shire.

The most significant changes between 2006 and 2011 has been in the Empty nesters and retirees age group (60-69yrs) there was an increase of 929 persons, Older workers & pre-retirees (50-59) increased by 644 persons and Seniors (70-84) by 514 persons.

There has been an overall increase in residents of the Bega Valley Shire aged 55+ to 12,351. This is associated with the re-location to the Bega Valley of large numbers of retired people, particularly from Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and other parts of NSW.

The population of older people is dispersed throughout the Bega Valley Shire. Over 16% of those aged 55+ live in Bega, about 49% live in the coastal towns of Eden, Merimbula, Pambula, Tura Beach and Bermagui, and

over 34% live in the small towns, rural areas and other locations in the Shire. This pattern of settlement creates challenges for the delivery of services to older people.

The proportion of older people is particularly high in some of the coastal towns. For instance 49% of the population of Tura Beach is aged 55+, followed by Bermagui (43%) and Merimbula (nearly 41%).

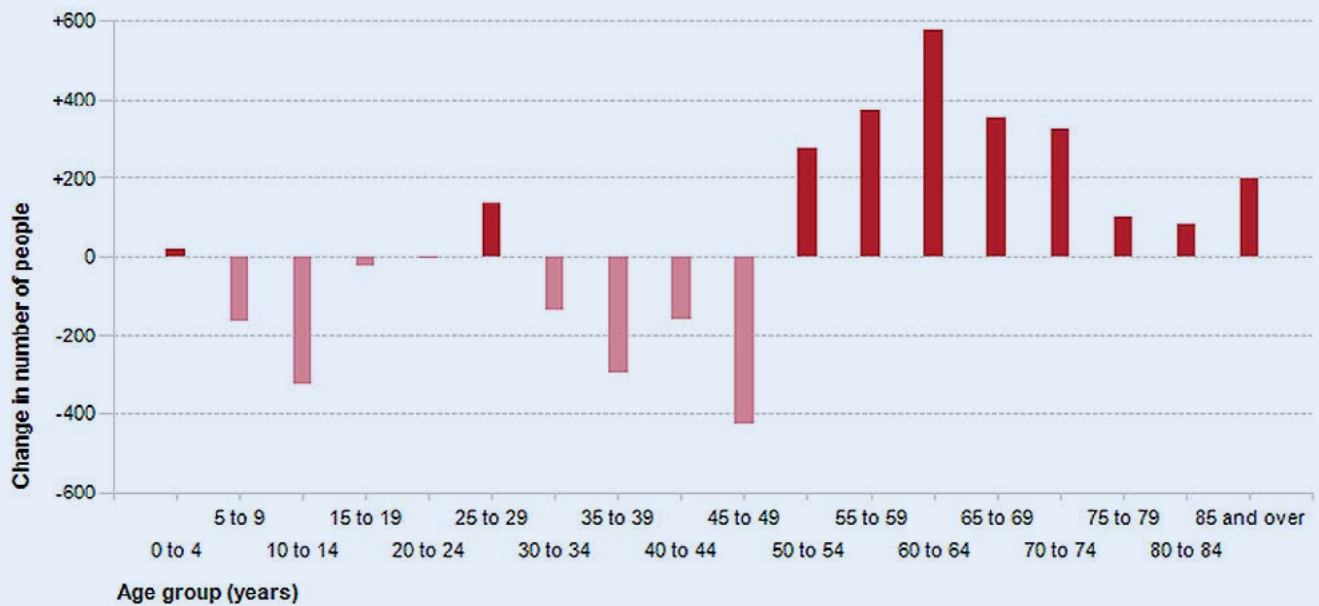
There are 103 Indigenous residents aged 55+, representing just 11% of the Aboriginal population. These people experience particular disadvantage in accessing health, housing and aged care services.

Other groups with special needs include the small number of older residents from non-English speaking backgrounds (primarily Germany and the Netherlands), and older people living permanently in caravans and cabins. In 2006, 40.8% of people aged 75 and over in the Bega Valley reported that they required assistance with activities of daily life, compared to 43.3% in NSW as a whole.



Change in five year age structure, 2006 to 2011

Bega Valley Shire



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2006 and 2011 (Usual residence data)
Compiled and presented in profile.id by .id, the population experts.



Both the number and proportion of older people are likely to increase markedly in the Bega Valley over the next two decades. By 2026, numbers of people aged 55+ within the Bega Valley Shire are expected to increase to 17,696. As a proportion of the total population of the Bega Valley Shire, this age group will grow to 45.7% in 2026. Over the 20 year period to 2026, those aged 75+ will more than double from 2,559 to 5,150 people. Those aged 85+ will also more than double from 602 to 1305 people.

THE CHANGES

As part of the National Health Reforms in 2011, the NSW Government agreed to a divide in the responsibility for aged and disability program funding and operations. From July 2012 the State Government fund services for people with a disability and the Commonwealth Government fund services for people over 65 years.

The introduction of self directed funded packages might have implications for

service delivery in the Bega Valley.

Many local community organisations receive funding to deliver Home and Community Care (HACC) programs that assist people with disabilities and older people to live independently in the community. Following these recent changes there appears to be a level of uncertainty within the community sector.

In April 2012, the Federal Government presented reforms to the aged care system. The Living Longer Living Better aged care reform package provided \$3.7 billion over five years. The commencement of the 10-year reform program aims to create a flexible system that provides older Australians with more choice, control and easier access to a full range of services.

In 2011, there were an estimated 298,000 Australians with dementia. This number is expected to increase markedly over time, with projections suggesting it will reach around 400,000 by 2020 and 900,000 by 2050. Dementia is a leading cause of death,

accounting for 6% of all deaths in 2010. Total direct health and aged care services expenditure on people with dementia was at least \$4.9 billion in 2009-10.⁵

THE SOCIAL ISSUES

Consultations were held in 2011 with older people and relevant service providers to develop the Bega Valley Shire Council's Ageing Strategy. The following information has been identified from this Ageing Strategy.

Access to Health and Home Support Services

Resources for health and aged care services are allocated by State and Federal Government programs through population needs based formulae. This means that funding for services should increase in proportion to increases in the number of older people living in the Bega Valley Shire.

However, this is dependent on the total pool of funding available for health and aged care increasing as the total population increases. To date, Government funding has not always kept pace with population growth and demographic change.

Moreover, there is commonly a time lag between population increases, funding increases to a given area, and the delivery of services on the ground.

The progress of the new regional hospital is a welcome one, it has now moved into the development application stage with a view to be operational in 2016. There is still a level of concern from parts of the community about the future of the Pambula Hospital and at what level it will operate once the regional hospital is completed.

A key concern of older residents was their access to health and community services. Older people want access to support services which promote their independence and well-being and which enable them to continue to live in their own home in the community for as long as possible.

There is also a lack of awareness and information about what is available. Many older people are not aware of the opportunities that exist and do not know where to seek such information.

A range of HACC type services, including transport, home care and case management are operating across the Bega Valley to help people stay in their homes longer. However, these services are unable to meet the demands of older residents. Lack of appropriate resources that reflect the ageing population have resulted in many organisations limiting the services they provide or imposing lengthy waiting lists.

Older people require access to residential care services if they can no longer remain at home. The aged care sector has a number of facilities operating across the Bega Valley Shire for high and low care clients. There are also a number of self care facilities available.

The need for palliative care and a transitional care facility within the Bega Valley for older people returning from major surgery in Canberra or Sydney was identified during the consultations.

There is a need to expand the range of community care packages available, such as Community Aged Care Packages (CACP), Extended Aged Care at Home (EACH) and EACH Dementia packages. Transitional Restorative Aged Care Packages are also provided by Community Health for over 65yr olds.

The limited availability of GP services, particularly those that bulk bill, and long wait times to see doctors is a significant issue. The limited access to specialist medical services within the Bega Valley Shire and the need to travel to specialist medical and hospital services outside the region is an ongoing concern.

There is also unmet need for allied health care amongst older people for services such as podiatry and dentistry. Furthermore, the need for more preventive health/ healthy ageing programs has also been identified by the community. Innovative programs, such as the University of Canberra's Mobile Student Led Clinic is

attempting to address this issue. This is providing low cost access to allied health services by clinically supervised students in a specially modified mobile clinic.

Older people attracted to the retirement lifestyle of the Bega Valley Shire often find that access to health and support services is more constrained than they have experienced in the city.

There is a need for information for older people moving to the Bega Valley Shire to enable them to develop more realistic expectations about their likely access to services. This is especially the case if they choose to live in rural and more remote parts of the Shire which cannot be readily reached by community care services.

Isolation

Social isolation can be a problem for older people living outside the towns and in the more remote parts of the Bega Valley Shire.

The dispersed pattern of settlement and distances between towns creates difficulties for older people. In particular, accessing activities and programs is difficult for those without a car, who do not have a driving license or who cease to drive as they get older. There are no scheduled public bus services to many parts of the Bega Valley Shire.

Public transport services are limited throughout the Bega Valley Shire, constraining access to services and facilities for many older people. Lack of public transport can be a key barrier for older people wanting to lead active and independent lives. Community buses are very popular, but limited both in their reach and frequency due to resources and volunteer capacity. There is a need for Community Transport to operate more frequently on weekends for older people in the Bega Valley.



The Built Environment and Infrastructure

The physical environment of neighbourhoods and town centres is important in supporting older people to remain living at home and to continue to participate in their communities. As well as appropriate housing, older people require an environment which is safe, secure and provides easy access to services, facilities and transport. This is important so that older people can get out and about, remain full and active members of the community and live independently.

CREATING BUILT ENVIRONMENTS THAT ARE AGE-FRIENDLY AND WHICH SUPPORT ACTIVE AGEING INVOLVES PROVIDING:

- *environments that encourage physical activity and an active lifestyle, by making it safe, attractive and enjoyable for people to walk around their area using a continuous accessible path of travel*
- *easy access to shops, services and facilities*
- *ready access to public transport services*
- *convenient parking for older people*
- *public facilities such as public toilets that are well maintained and provide universal access for all abilities*
- *public spaces that are accessible, safe and encourage social interaction, for instance through seating*
- *safe pedestrian and driving environments*



The topography and layout of many communities and lack of footpaths are not conducive to walking with easy pedestrian access to shops and services.

Much of the public infrastructure in the Bega Valley Shire is ageing and does not provide appropriate access for older people. Accessible public toilets, appropriate seating in public spaces and convenient parking, especially in peak holiday times, are particular issues for older people.

Employment, Volunteering and Participation in Community Life

Positive ageing requires that older people feel that the knowledge, skills and wisdom that they have acquired are recognised and utilised and that they are valued and respected members of the community. This requires consideration of social attitudes towards older people and the opportunities

available to them to participate in, and contribute to the life of the community.

Participation in learning, employment, volunteer activities and community events provides opportunities to be involved in meaningful activity and productive social roles in the community. This is important in enabling older people to maintain a sense of purpose, identity, self-worth and to contribute and feel valued for their skills and experience.

Housing

Within the Bega Valley Shire in 2011, 82.9% of dwellings were separate houses, 6.8% were semis or townhouses, 8.3% were flats or apartments and 1.9% were other dwellings, including caravans.⁶

An ageing population requires a greater diversity of housing types. It is important to provide greater choice to older people and ensure that their housing needs can be met within the communities where they live, with familiar shops and services and established social networks.

The lack of smaller, medium density forms of housing in the Bega Valley Shire, located with ready access to shops, services and public transport, will become a key issue. This may be more problematic as the number of older people living in the Shire increases and as older people can no longer manage farms and larger lifestyle blocks.

There is a need to encourage the provision of more accessible and adaptable housing suited to the needs of older residents, including needs for reduced house and garden maintenance.

Safety in and around the home is a further issue of concern for older people. Removing hazards that may cause accidents, implementing falls prevention programs and ensuring homes are fitted with smoke detectors or personal alarm systems are ways in which the safety of older people in their homes can be enhanced.

Rates of home ownership amongst older people in Bega Valley are high, providing them with a substantial asset which can be

used to buy into a retirement village or aged care facilities if desired. Home ownership also means low housing costs for people on limited incomes, many of whom can be described as “asset rich but income poor”.

In contrast, the small proportion of older people who are renters experience high housing costs, low incomes and lack choices to move as their accommodation needs change.

STRENGTHS IN THE BEGA VALLEY

The nature of small communities’ means that the level of neighbour support, sense of belonging and social interaction tends to be high. This reduces problems associated with social isolation for those people living in the major townships.

Council and many community organisations play a key role in creating supportive communities for older people. Programs operating in the Bega Valley Shire include Ricky’s Place, Meals on Wheels social support groups, the shopping bus service, Alzheimer Australia mobile respite team, community health social groups and many more.

The Country Women’s Association, Probus, U3A , Seniors Citizen Clubs, View Clubs, Men’s Shed, Bowling Clubs, Garden Clubs, Rotary and Lions are also engaging older people in the Bega Valley Shire with interesting activities and friendships.

Participation in social, cultural, leisure and recreational activities in the Bega Valley have been identified as a critical ingredient in healthy ageing. These activities promote physical activity, social contact, mental stimulation and quality of life.

As life expectancy increases and people remain healthy and active for longer, it is important to ensure that adequate and appropriate opportunities for meaningful activity are available. Activities need to reflect the diversity of interests, circumstances and abilities of older people.

Within the Bega Valley there is an excellent

provision of social, cultural, sporting and recreational facilities for older people. Most of these are mainstream facilities provided for the whole community, and include spaces for performing and visual arts, libraries, community centres and halls, swimming pools, parks and sporting facilities.

The Bega Valley Shire does not have significant crime statistics and older people can feel reasonably secure as they move about. In most crime categories, Shire averages are lower than State averages, and statistics show that older people are much less likely to be victims of crime than younger people.

THE CONSTRAINTS

The Bega Valley Shire is a relatively isolated rural community, with a large geographical spread of small towns. It is situated 6.5 hours from Sydney, 3 hours from Canberra and 7 hours from Melbourne. There is limited choice for older people with accommodation, care options, shopping, transport and health services due to the geographically dispersed population.

The inability to drive long distances to travel into town is a constraint for older people living on rural properties or outside the main towns. This may increase social isolation and cause some challenges for education, care, health and transport issues.

Meeting the diverse expectations of older people can be an issue for retirees in the Bega Valley Shire, particularly those who have moved away from larger towns or cities. Older people must consider planning to build accessible or adaptable housing for their retirement, this would enable older people to stay in their homes longer.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

There are a wide range of opportunities to participate in varied social, leisure, recreational and cultural activities for older people within the Bega Valley Shire. Recreation opportunities associated



with the Shire's beaches, lakes, national parks and other open space support an active lifestyle (at little or no cost).

Balancing the needs of older people with other groups within the community is essential. Similarly important is the need to respond to increasing demands for appropriate services and facilities to support older people to remain healthy, active and independent.

The airport and associated air links to Sydney and Melbourne are highly valued. This enables older people to stay in touch with families and friends in the cities however, these services are too expensive for many to use.

Partnerships involving all levels of government, community and the private sector may ensure the Bega Valley provides a supportive community for quality ageing. This collaborative approach can play a key role in enabling older people to remain living at home in the community and to

In a dream you are never eighty.

~Anne Sexton

age in place, rather than having to move to institutional care or leave the Bega Valley Shire as their needs change.

References

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5. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Dementia in Australia, <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737422958>
6. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census, http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/LGA10550?opendocument&navpos=220

Further Reading

Bega Valley Shire Council, Ageing Strategy 2011, www.begavalley.com.au

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SOCIAL ISSUES PAPERS

This document is part of a broader Social Issues Paper produced by the Bega Valley Shire Council. To read the document in its' entirety go to www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au

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