

MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW RESEARCH REVEALS WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SENIORS SUFFERING FROM LONELINESS

Seniors seeking companionship look to social media to combat the challenges of dating and intimacy

A new study released today by Australian Seniors Insurance Agency (ASIA) reveals that over eighty per cent of unattached Australians aged over 50 in Western Australia admit to having experienced loneliness, especially around the festive period, where just over forty per cent find their loneliness more prevalent. This timely new research highlights the struggle of seniors as they seek companionship, and reveals the role technology is playing as a potential source of relief for many.

The *Seniors and Relationships* study is the fourth instalment of The Australian Seniors Series - an ongoing national survey investigating the shifting attitudes and concerns affecting Australia's over 50s.

General Manager of Marketing and ASIA spokesperson Simon Hovell said, "Eight in ten unattached Australian seniors suffering from loneliness is a worrying statistic. We all have relatives or family friends who can relate, sadly bringing this unhappy figure to life. Notably, however, the data does suggest that seniors are adapting to common issues and finding solutions as they try to make a positive change. This is especially true as we approach the festive season, a period which can be particularly challenging for many of us, let alone our seniors."

Social media, the impact of dating, and also intimacy have all been identified by the study as factors that highlight the behaviour of senior Australians as they look to meet new people and form relationships.

A telling statistic demonstrates that more than ninety per cent (92%) of respondents in Western Australia believe that seniors over the age of 50 still need love the in same way that young people do. Furthermore, more than two fifths (43%) of those in Western Australia say they are just as likely to fall in love when they are over the age of 50 as they were when they were younger.

"The data paints a picture of a social group whose feelings, emotions and need for love are not given as much weight as those of younger generations. In fact, seniors feel the need for the same kind of love and are willing to use methods not always typically associated with their age group, such as online dating and social media, in order to find it," said Mr Hovell.

The research shows that while half (50%) in Western Australia consider themselves to be socially active to some extent, close to one in four wish they were more so (30%), suggesting that many are looking for a little more in terms of friendship, companionship and relationships.

While more often associated with younger generations, dating remains the main option for senior Australians as they look to widen their social circles and get to know new people. More than half of respondents in Western Australia (57%) who are currently dating say they usually go on dates once a week and a further fifth (14%) say they go out on dates once a month, highlighting a fairly active social calendar for many senior Australians.

Also transcending generations are the challenges that arise for every age group when seeking love or companionship, with almost ninety per cent (89%) of seniors nationally who are currently dating agreeing that it does not get easier even as they get older. Mitigating some of those challenges, however, is the ever present support of social media. The data shows that most seniors in Western Australia (65%) are currently active on social media networks, with almost all of them (96%) having used Facebook to catch up with friends and meet new people.

Of those active on social media in Western Australia, just under forty per cent (37%) claim to have made new friends through social media networks and of them, close to half (48%) say they ended up meeting their new friends in person, suggesting that social media is playing an increasingly important role in providing much needed support for isolated seniors. The majority of respondents in Western

Australians who are active on social media agree or strongly agree that it makes them feel more socially connected (75%) and less lonely (57%). Just under fifty percent (49%) say that social media is a great platform to meet new people.

Dr Bianca Fileborn, Research Fellow at La Trobe University said, “More and more over 50s are turning to social media to find companionship and also intimacy. For many, this is a highly positive experience and an innovative, convenient way to meet a new partner. For others, current research suggests that online dating is a more mixed or even negative experience.”

Revealingly, nearly half (49%) of respondents in Western Australia say they are satisfied with their current sex life. This satisfaction may be supported by behaviours not typically equated with this age group with close to one in six (19%) admitting to having had at least one ‘friend with benefits’ past the age of 50.

Nationally, thirty per cent say they are dissatisfied with their sex life and more than a quarter of these respondents say they wish they were more sexually active. Meanwhile, just under fifty percent (47%) of respondents in Western Australia claim not to be sexually active at all, suggesting that friendship and companionship are the primary focus for a number of relationships.

“Intimacy remains a major part of the lives of seniors. Although there is a lot of variety in how seniors feel about sex, and the importance they place on it, for many, sex is a key component in feeling loved and expressing love for another person. The desire for sex and intimacy does not disappear just because we’ve grown older” said Dr Fileborn.

“For older people seeking relationships, they are often looking for someone with whom to share experiences and life. Companionship is an often vitally important part of what older people value in their relationships. However, many older women are less willing to compromise in their relationships, and want a relationship based on equality and mutuality. Some older people are also embracing more flexible relationships, such as living apart together, or having open relationships,” she said.

While many challenges seem to arise for older generations it seems that mind games within a relationship are not such an issue with the vast majority (83%) of separated, divorced or widowed respondents nationally who are in some form of relationship agreeing or strongly agreeing that at their age they have never been more comfortable with what they want from a partner.

“It seems that Australian seniors are very aware of how quickly time flies as demonstrated by the directness with which they communicate with partners. They value these close relationships and are not afraid to ask for what they want. This runs counter to a common perception that they are afraid to ask for help from the wider society when in need of help. This is especially important to remember when we consider that there are those who unfortunately don’t have partners to speak with,” said Mr Hovell.

“The Seniors and Relationships research has highlighted a group who are sometimes marginalised, and this appears to be having an effect on Australian seniors with regards to perceived levels of loneliness and isolation. Not only is it timely by raising some of the social issues experienced by our seniors during the festive season, but perhaps most of all, the research suggests that the younger generation need to be a little more switched on to the reality of the Australian senior experience and their needs,” concluded Mr Hovell.

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About Australian Seniors Insurance Agency

Australian Seniors Insurance Agency was established in 1998 to provide cost effective insurance solutions for the mature Australian Market, a market too often ignored. Australian Seniors Insurance Agency offers car, home, travel, funeral, pet and accident insurance for Australians over 50.

About the 'Australian Seniors Series'

In order to explore the relationships of senior Australians, CoreData surveyed online 1,000 typical Australians over 50 years old across the nation in October 2016. The sample collection employed soft quotas to monitor representativeness of the Australian senior adult population.

Hard quotas by state were also employed to ensure all the main states were represented with sufficiently robust samples in the research: NSW = 200, VIC = 200, QLD = 200, WA = 200, Remaining states/territories = 200.