

MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW SOUTH WALES SENIORS START DIALOGUE ON DEATH TO BOOT THE TABOO

Survey Reveals Three Quarters of Respondents Want To Talk About Their Dying Wishes

A new study released today by Australian Seniors Insurance Agency (ASIA) reveals that despite the taboo nature of the topic, 75 per cent of New South Wales residents aged over 50 want there to be a more open conversation about dying, death and the details of how they wish to go.

The *Circle of Life* study is the third 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, "It's certainly not a popular dinner party subject, but our research showed us perhaps it should be, with three in four respondents feeling the subject should be approached more often."

The study identified several factors that influence the desire to remove the taboo nature of death, and encourage more open discussions on the subject.

Of those wanting more open discussions around death, nearly 80 per cent (78%) of New South Welshman said their reason was due to death 'being both natural and unavoidable'. Additionally, 'ensuring the deceased's wishes are met' was the second most popular response (66%), while 'easing the grieving process' (54.7%) and 'minimising the financial burden on family' (48.7%) also ranked highly.

The survey also revealed however, overall most are *not* worried about passing on the financial burden of funeral preparation to their family.

"Considering Australians pay over \$1.2 billion in funeral costs on average each year, it's concerning that our reluctance to approach the subject of death may have serious emotional and financial implications on our families," said Mr Hovell.

The research showed 13 per cent of over 50s in New South Wales said their partner or children will pay for their funeral.

Kerrie Noonan, Psychologist and Co-Founder of The Groundswell Project said, "The subject of death and dying is often unspoken among even the closest of families as we're confronted with the sad reality of losing someone we love. However avoiding any future planning leaves us with less emotional capacity to grieve when we need to, as we're forced to instead think about all the things we should have been discussing long before."

While 82 per cent of respondents in New South Wales admitted to making little or no plans for their funeral, some have thought in great detail about their own passing. Of those who have made preparations for their funeral 76 per cent will have nominated whether they want to be buried or cremated as well as also chosen the songs to be played at their funeral (50.4%) and even the epitaph they'd prefer.

However and perhaps worryingly, less than two per cent have made provisions for how it will all be paid for.

In other findings, it appears that traditional burials are fast becoming a thing of the past with almost three in five New South Wales seniors (59%) preferring cremation. Interestingly, a major factor in the shift to cremation centres on environmental concerns with 47 per cent offering it as a reason to opt for cremation.

And of those who nominated cremation, the overwhelming consensus is to have their ashes scattered in a place that's dear to their heart with the most popular option being a nearby body of water such as river, lake or ocean (33.8%). Other popular choices include with their pets (2.7%) and in the garden (5.4%).

Interestingly, 31 per cent of New South Welshman simply didn't care where their ashes are scattered, leaving the decision to family and friends.

"Your funeral is your final farewell to those who you love and who love you so it's little wonder that people are moving away from a 'one-size-fits-all' approach," said Ms Noonan.

"Funerals are traditionally solemn occasions but there is definitely a movement towards making them more of a celebration of a life rather than a commemoration of its ending. That's why the music, location and focus of the eulogies are key elements and should be talked about more openly, more often," she said.

The report also took a look beyond the grave, investigating how we want to be remembered after we're gone, showing three in five of those surveyed (60%) said 'as a loving family member and friend'.

"It's interesting that while an increasing number of us dedicate in excess of 40 hours a week working, and away from our families only 10 per cent of us cite 'hard working' and 'successful' as how we want to be remembered," said Mr Hovell.

"Overall the research offers a great deal of perspective not only on how we want to go, but what we can address today to get more from our lives and plan for the future," concluded Mr Hovell.

The full report and supporting data is available at:

www.seniors.com.au/news-insights/circle-of-life-survey

Additional findings from the report

Preferred Last Meal

- Roast Dinner (31%)
- Seafood Meal (29%)
- Chocolate (8%)
- Food Cooked by My Family (1%)

Top Funeral Songs

- Bette Midler's 'Wind Beneath My Wings' (18.9%)
- Eric Clapton's "Tears in Heaven" (10.5%)
- Eva Cassidy "Over the Rainbow" (10.5%)

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About Australian Seniors Insurance Agency

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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 attitudes to death and dying of senior Australians, CoreData surveyed online 1,000 typical Australians over 50 years old across the nation in early June 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.

About The GroundSwell Project

The GroundSwell Project is a not for profit organisation known for using innovative arts and health programs to create social and cultural change about death and dying.

On the 8th of August, 2016 - The GroundSwell Project will host a public health campaign called Dying to Know Day (D2KDay). It is designed to create a shift in cultural responses to death with Australian's from all walks of life encouraged to engage in rich conversations around mortality, life and loss.