

Over half of over 50s feel like passengers in their own life after they stop driving

New report reveals that after handing in their keys, nearly two in five (38%) older Australians say their social lives worsen and more than one in four (27%) have missed essential health appointments.

Sydney, October 2026 – New data has shed light on a major life transition many Australians over 50 may not be prepared for.

According to the *Golden Gears Report 2026*, commissioned by Australian Seniors, over four in five (83%) current drivers say being able to drive is important to their sense of independence, while the impacts of stopping can be significant.

The report found over half (55%) of former drivers have felt like a “passenger in their own life” at least sometimes since stopping driving. Nearly two in five (37%) say their sense of independence has decreased, 38% say their social life has worsened, and over half (56%) say they leave home less often.

Psychologist and Media Personality Amanda Gordon shared:

“Giving up driving can represent much more than losing a convenient way of getting around. For many older people, driving has been part of their independence for decades – the freedom to decide where they go, when they go and who they see, without having to ask anybody else. When that disappears, people can experience a very real loss of autonomy and control over their lives.

“The risk is that their world gradually becomes smaller. They may decline an invitation because arranging transport feels too difficult, stop making spontaneous visits, or decide something isn’t important enough to ask someone for a lift. Over time, that can affect social connection, confidence and wellbeing. We need to recognise stopping driving as a significant life transition, rather than treating it simply as handing over the car keys.”

Healthcare and essentials out of reach for former drivers

Beyond social connection, the transition away from driving can create barriers to accessing essential services and healthcare.

The survey found over a quarter (27%) of former drivers have missed or delayed a medical or health appointment in the past 12 months because of transport issues.

Nearly seven in ten (68%) believe their last essential health appointment would have taken longer without a car.

Health appointment trips take an average of 17.7 minutes for current drivers, rising to 25.3 minutes among former drivers.

Regional communities are most affected

The report also highlights a clear gap between metropolitan and regional communities when it comes to access without a car.

In metropolitan inner-city or inner-suburban areas, nearly three in four (73%) Australian seniors say essential healthcare is easy to access without driving.

In regional, rural or remote areas, only around two in five (41%) say the same, while nearly three in five (57%) say access is difficult.

Over one in three (36%) Australian seniors in regional, rural or remote areas are also not confident at all relying on public transport to get to appointments.

Becoming a 'passenger in your own life'

The survey also found that losing mobility can affect social connection and everyday control.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of former drivers say they have less control over where and when they go, while nearly seven in ten (69%) feel more dependent on other people's schedules.

This can have a significant impact on day-to-day life. Nearly three in five (56%) former drivers have avoided at least one activity in the past year because getting there felt too hard.

The most commonly avoided activities include visiting friends or family (37%), day trips or holidays (36%), and attending social events (34%).

Despite concerns about relying on others, frequent transport support does not necessarily negatively affect relationships.

Among those driven by someone they know three or more times a week, only 16% say relying on them for transport has negatively affected their relationships, while 24% say it has had a positive effect.

For those who rely on lifts, transport support averages 3.5 hours per week among former drivers.

Australians over 50 say the biggest challenges for family or friends helping with transport include the time involved (34%), fitting trips around work or other commitments (27%), and fuel, parking or other transport costs (26%).

The life transition few are planning for

Despite its impact, the report shows many current drivers have not yet planned for life after driving.

Nearly half (48%) of current drivers say they have given no thought to how they will navigate stopping driving one day, while over four in five (81%) have not openly discussed reducing or stopping driving permanently in the past five years.

For those who have already stopped driving, over two in five (43%) say it takes more planning to get around, while around two in five (42%) say they depend more on other people.

Asking for help can also be difficult.

Over half (52%) of Australian seniors say they feel uncomfortable asking others for lifts or transport help.

Among those who have relied on someone they know for transport, around one in three (32%) avoid asking unless it is essential, while a quarter (25%) worry about being a burden.

Amanda Gordon shared:

“The best time to talk about stopping driving is well before somebody has to stop. Families can make the conversation much less threatening by approaching it as planning for continued independence, rather than taking independence away. The question shouldn’t simply be, ‘When are you going to stop driving?’ but, ‘If there comes a time when you don’t drive, how can we make sure you can still live the life you want?’

“That means thinking practically about the things that matter to that person – medical appointments, seeing friends and family, shopping, social activities and the freedom to go somewhere simply because they feel like it. Having alternatives in place before they are needed can give someone back a sense of choice and control. And importantly, older people should be part of those decisions, rather than having a solution imposed on them.”

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About Australian Seniors

Australian Seniors launched in 1998 to meet the needs of the often ignored over 50s market. Since then, we've helped countless Australians protect the most important things in life – whether it's their family's future, valuable assets, or even their long-planned retirement. We strive to be different through the diverse offering of our life, funeral, car, home & contents, landlords, pet, health and travel insurance products by carefully selecting underwriters that share our vision of providing insurance that's simple, easy to understand, and cost-effective. That's why our policies have helped everyone from hard-working over 50s to self-funded retirees take control of the things that matter most.

About the Golden Gears Report 2026

The Golden Gears Report 2026 explores the evolving experience of older Australians as they transition away from driving. It examines the emotional, social, and practical barriers shaping life without a driver's license, looking at how the change affects independence, access to essential services, and personal wellbeing. The report further examines the lack of planning for this major life event, the reliance on others, and the societal pressures that influence the decision to stop driving.

This report is based on research commissioned by Australian Seniors and conducted by MYMAVINS between 20 April and 29 May 2026. The study was carried out via a quantitative online survey of 1,201 Australians aged 50 and over who currently drive or used to drive. The sample is broadly representative of Australia's senior population in terms of age, gender, wealth, and state or territory.