

## Why do politicians fail the longevity test?

We define 'my longevity' as 'the rest of my life'. It's more useful than vague terms like retirement and ageing, which often have negative overtones and lead to poor decisions.

Lifespans are increasing but the political responses to this are fragmented. A third of potential voters are between 55 and 75, so this is a major social issue. Why are politicians so ill informed? These six perspectives on increasing longevity give a clue:

- Different age groups require different responses to financial, health, aged care and end of life issues. No one solution fits all. We become more different from each other over time, not more alike, requiring personal solutions.
- The economic impact is huge. Even with increasing superannuation levels, older people will require government and other community support. Many need to understand how their longevity may unfold and what they can do about it. Lack of knowledge leads to growing helplessness and adds to the cost. A national problem.
- The behaviour of 'older' people is often misunderstood. A recent UK study suggests that 20% of older people retain substantial mental capability until they die, with a further 50% showing minor decline. Other reports suggest decision making power typically remains intact (if a little slower). The older age group is a valuable and much under- utilised resource.
- We remain physically and mentally capable for much longer than most realise, provided we take proper steps to manage our wellbeing. The opportunity for personal control is under-emphasised, yet capable of yielding remarkable outcomes.
- Acknowledgment of gender differences is poor, reflecting less women in power. A large group of 85 year olds will have more women, who as a group will have more dementia and be less healthy than the men. The women have often seen off their partners. Alone they face their dependent phase, which tends to be much longer for women than men. This whole situation needs more attention.
- We become less alike over time. The 'average' lifespan of a 65 year old is only useful for a quarter of their age group, but how do we know which ones? Many have no idea what their own longevity may look like and why, let alone what they can do about it. Blanket solutions (like institutionalised aged care) lead to bad responses – just watch the current Royal Commission for evidence. Using average lifespans for personal financial plans also increases the risk of poor longer term decisions.

We need an overarching national longevity strategy spanning all portfolios and which is supported by all parties.

The longevity tsunami is rolling relentlessly towards the political landscape. Politicians will be swept away unless they take serious steps towards an integrated response to increasing longevity. Time is running out.

### Not yet a subscriber?

Our Longevity Plan helps you take control of your longevity while our politicians get their act together (if ever!).

You can begin your own planning [here](#):

Start with the  
**SHAPE Analyser now**