



# Australian Grandparents Care

May 2020

**National Seniors**  
AUSTRALIA

## Australian Grandparents Care

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# Executive Summary

The yawning gap in the demand for publicly funded care at home in Australia is being filled by informal, unpaid care. Amongst informal and unpaid carers, a special group of people provide childcare and support to facilitate a better future for the next generation, namely grandparents. Grandparenting, whether done out of love, duty or necessity, is a critical part of care provision and family structure and cultures. This study is a companion report to our report on unpaid care for older adults (*Who Cares?: Older Australians do*, 2020). It explores the unique and irreplaceable contribution of grandparents and seeks to better understand how grandparenting, from grandparents' points of view, should fit into the childcare provision in Australia.

The decision of the National Cabinet through the COVID-19 pandemic to require people, particularly those over 70, to stay at home and social distance has shone a search light on this 'behind-the-scenes' work. The COVID crisis has spotlighted the significant workforce that grandparents provide through the impacts observed when they cannot do it. This report finds that grandparenting motivations are not mercenary but all about contributions to family and society. This provides a significant, free economic benefit which is not a burden on the government. As the COVID crisis has shown, if this free support is stopped, the burden shifts back to businesses and government. The obvious choice then is to sustain and nurture it and maintain the intergenerational solidarity we have had through the COVID-19 crisis.

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# 1. Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on Australian society, has challenged and changed all forms of care, the full extent of this still remains to be seen. One unexpected consequence of the health crisis is that it has forced a spotlight onto otherwise hidden structures which support the ways Australians live and work (1). Structures such as grandparents picking up children from school to enable parents to work a full day; adult children driving older parents to medical appointments when they were unable to do so themselves; neighbours checking on each other; and older adults providing daily care to their partners when one of them is no longer able to care for themselves. The social distancing policies instigated to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus have caused the breakdown of some of these structures, and placed others under extreme pressure. This has resulted in yawning gaps that governments and individuals are scrambling to fill.

While we are still reeling from these changes and wondering where to go from here, it is an opportune moment to acknowledge the contributions of Australians over 50 to the health and wellbeing of the country through unpaid care. The time is ripe to reconsider the value we place on our older Australians and to recognise the vital role they play in our country's future.

# 2. Background

This report is a companion to the National Seniors Australia publication *Who cares? Older Australians do*, 2020. In that report, we highlighted the critical role informal or unpaid care plays in fulfilling the care gap in Australian society. *Who cares?* focused principally on older adults caring for other adults, however there is another large section of the community that older adults care for, and that is children. It is estimated that the unpaid time spent by grandparents on providing childcare is worth \$4.4 billion per year (2-3).

In this report we explore participant responses to questions asked as part of the National Seniors Social Survey in 2019 and survey respondents felt they needed to offer a wealth of detail in their replies. These views voiced by older people provide insights into the rewards and challenges of being a grandparent in Australian society, the factors preventing them from engaging grandparenting in the way they would like, and their opinions regarding how childcare provided by grandparents should be valued in broader society.

In adding to the earlier report *Who cares? 2020*, this report aims to increase understanding of older Australians as grandparents, detailing their characteristics and experiences, and offering their own words under thematic headings that encapsulate the complexity of attitudes towards grandparenting in Australia.

# Data and Methods

## 2.1. The National Seniors Social Survey (NSSS-8)

Every year, National Seniors conducts an online survey of members' behaviours and views across a range of topics relevant to older people's lifestyle, health and wellbeing. The survey is open to members and non-members 50 years and over from all states and territories. A link to the survey was emailed directly to all members who had provided an email address. The survey was available on the National Seniors website and was also circulated via a member online newsletter and in the quarterly magazine. The NSSS-8 was approved by the Belberry Human Research Ethics Committee, reference HREC-2019-04-329. Questions were 'point and click' multiple choice format accompanied by free text boxes enabling participants to elaborate on their responses if they wished.

Data for this report were taken from participants' responses to a component of the Survey titled "The care you give". The questions from the Survey relating to grandparenting are provided as Appendix A. Participants also provided socio-demographic information and their self-rated level of health.

Survey responses were collected online via the survey tool Survey Monkey®. Twelve responses received via a paper copy of the survey were entered into Survey Monkey by a National Seniors Research Officer. A pre-defined data cleaning protocol was used to remove duplicate responses. Data were collated and graphed using Microsoft Excel and Stata (version 15.1).

Text comments were analysed using the thematic analysis framework described by Baum and Clarke (4). Two National Seniors Research Officers separately read and coded the optional text comments provided by participants elaborating on their point and click responses to the 'care you give' section of the survey. Codes were discussed and agreed upon by the researchers and sorted into potential themes arrived at by consensus. Themes were identified primarily through inductive analysis i.e. data were coded without reference to an explicit pre-existing theoretical framework. The researchers acknowledge the influence of their pre-existing theoretical knowledge and understanding on the codes and themes identified from the data (4).

### 3. What makes a grandparent?

There were 4176 responses to the question regarding whether participants provided care to grandchildren, and of these, 26.6% responded positively that they did provide regular care to grandchildren or other children under the age of 12.

#### 3.1. Age

The mean age of grandparents was only slightly younger than other survey participants, at 69.1 years compared to 70.7. The majority of respondents who are regularly grandparenting were in the 60 to 79 age group, with less than eight per cent in the 50-59 age group.

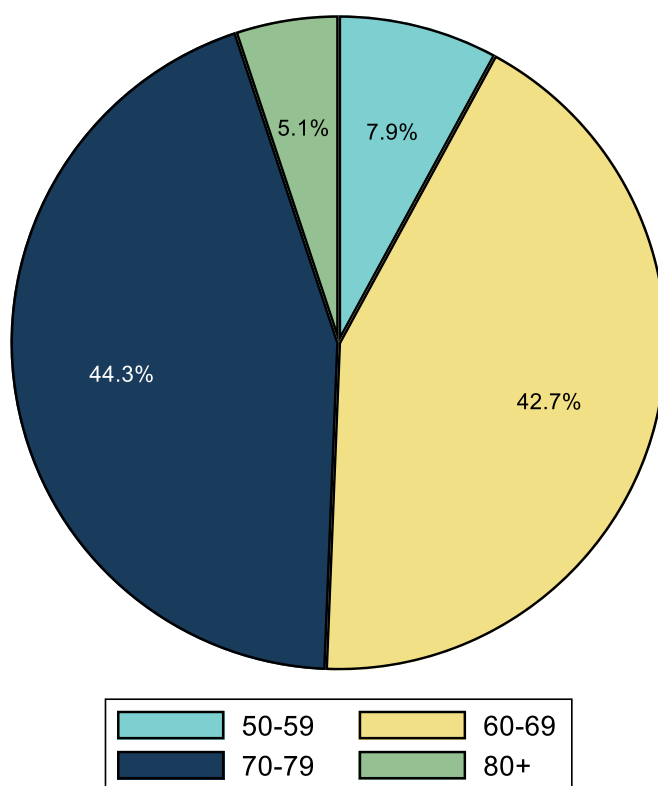


Figure 1: Age groups of those providing regular grandparenting care



The 60-69 age group had the highest proportion of respondents who identified as providing regular grandparent care.

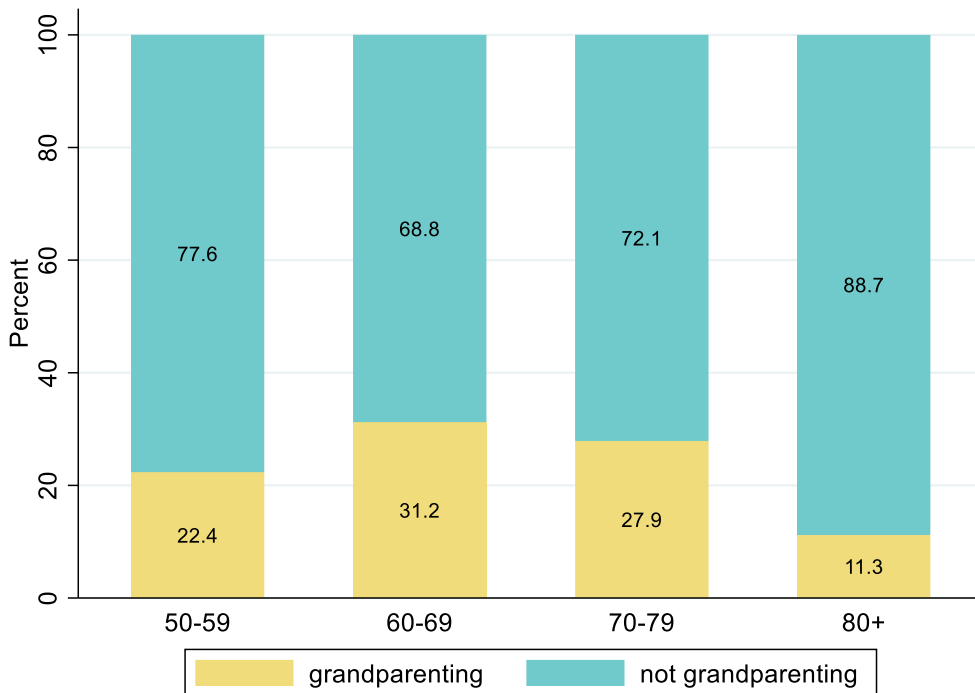


Figure 2: Proportions of participants providing regular grandparenting care, by age group ( $p < 0.001$ )

### 3.2. Gender

There was no statistical difference in the proportions of women (27.2%) and men (25.9%) who were grandparenting and providing regular care for children under 12.

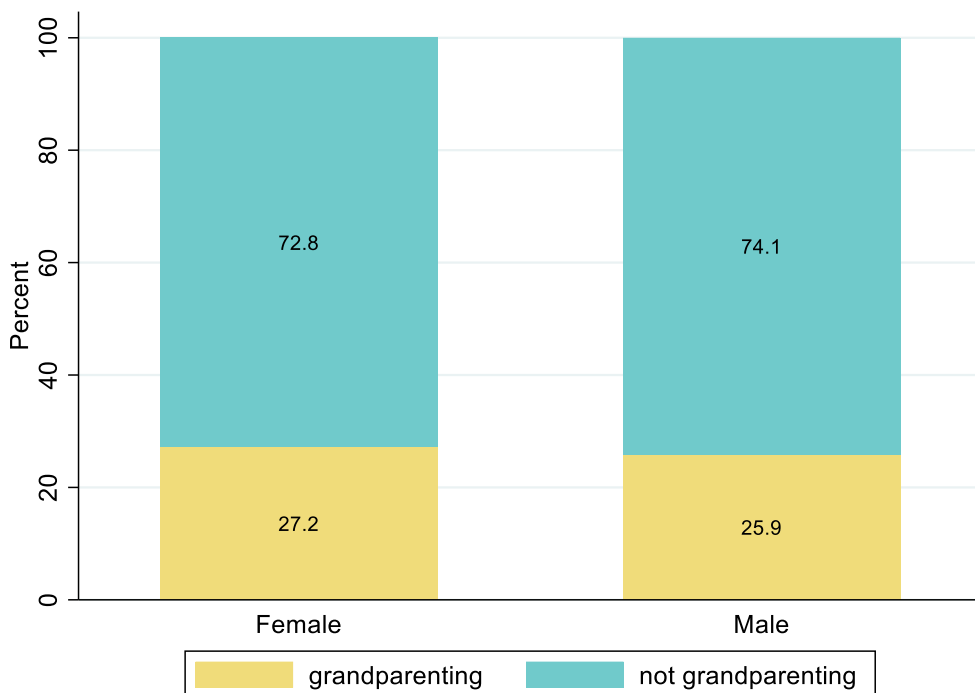


Figure 3: Proportions of participants providing grandparenting, by gender ( $p = 0.331$ )

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The figure below reveals that in fact whether grandparenting is gendered may have a lot to do with partnership status. Male grandparents are most often part of a couple, whereas female grandparents were partnered or alone.

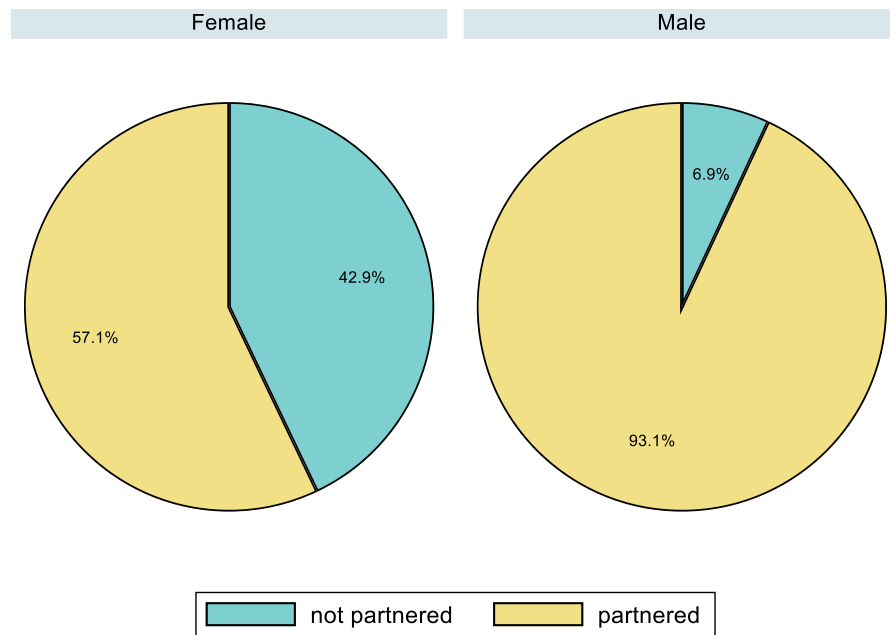


Figure 4: Grandparents by partnership status, differentiated by gender

### 3.3. Partnership status

Being partnered was one of the strongest factors associated with regular grandparenting.

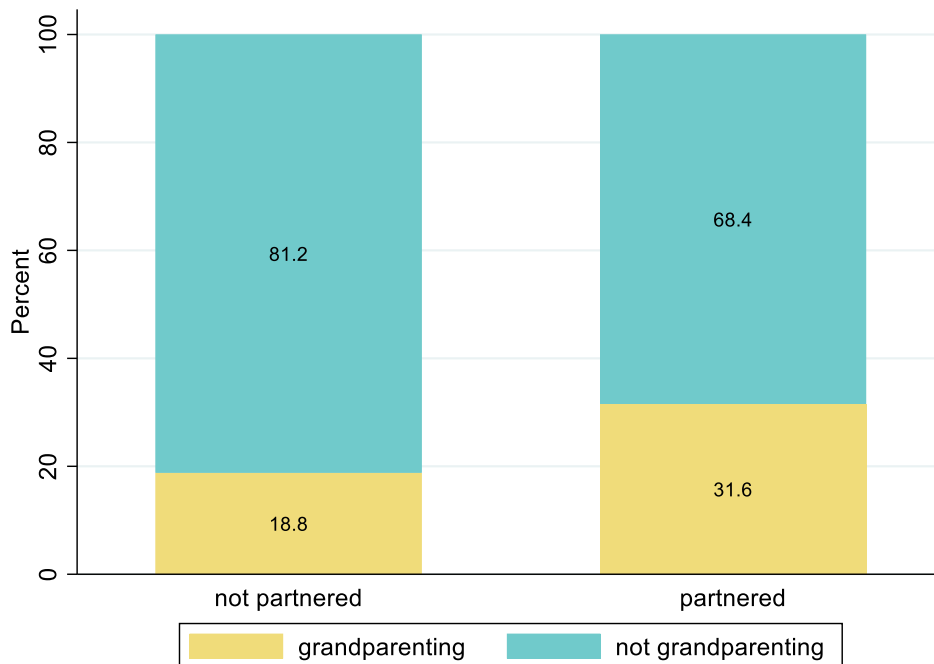


Figure 5: Proportions of participants grandparenting regularly, by whether they are partnered or not ( $p < 0.001$ )

### 3.4. Health

Understandably, a higher proportion of those undertaking grandparenting duties reported being in excellent and good health as compared to those in fair or poor health. This contrasts with previous findings that older carers of adults were less likely to be in good health than those not providing care (*Who Cares?* 2020).

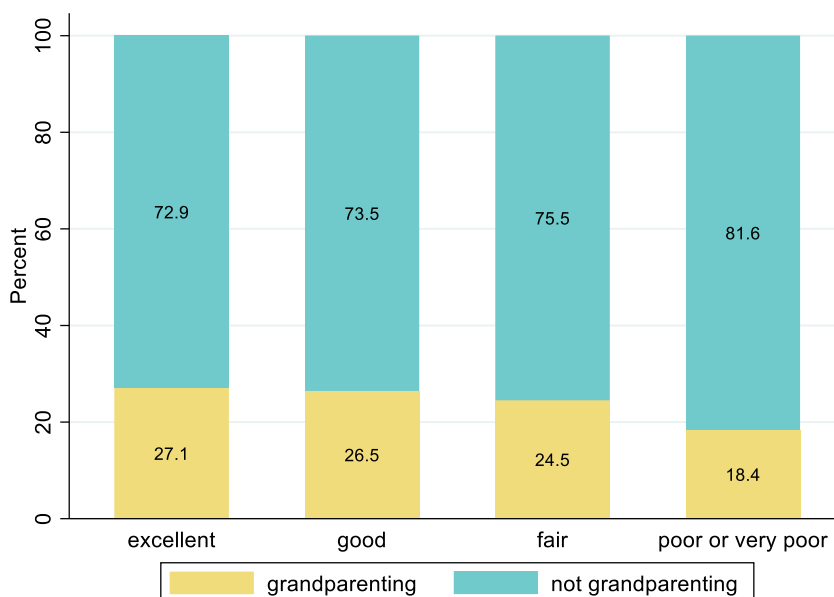


Figure 6: Proportions of participants grandparenting, by health status ( $p=0.065$ )

### 3.5. Wealth

It appears that there was a higher proportion of grandparents amongst participants who had more than 500,000 AUD in savings than those who did not.

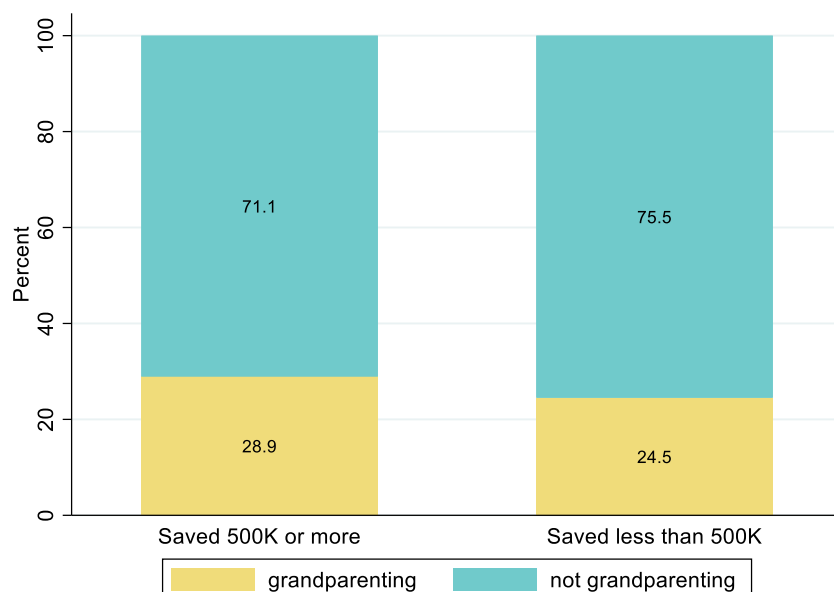


Figure 7: Proportions of participants grandparenting regularly, by whether they have less than 500K saved or not ( $p=0.007$ )

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Participants who reported having the Age Pension as a main source of income were also less likely to be grandparenting than those who did not. This contrasts with previous findings that older carers of adults and non-carers did not differ in levels of wealth (*Who Cares?* 2020).

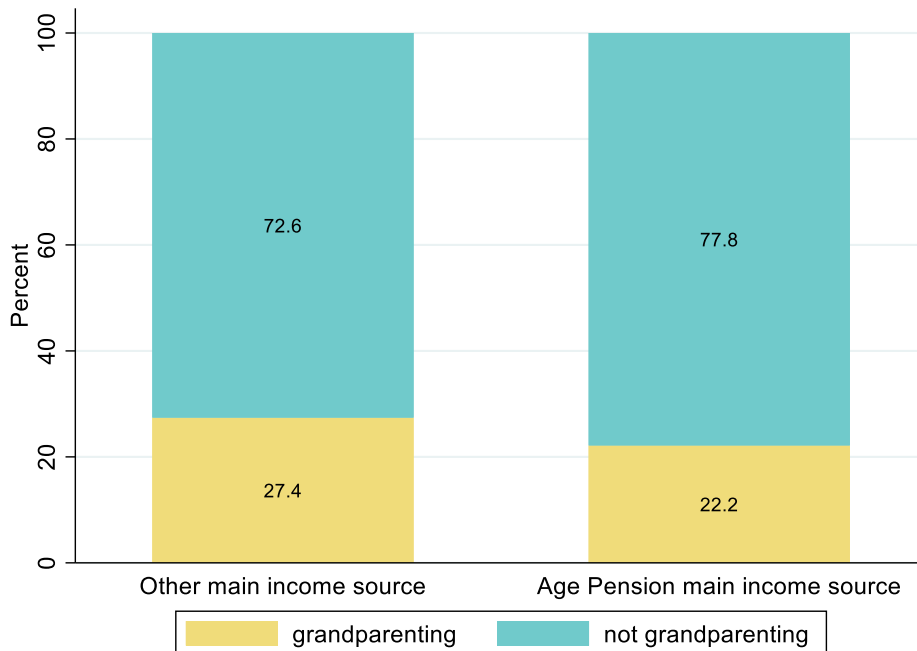


Figure 8: Proportions of participants grandparenting regularly, by whether the Age Pension is a main source of income ( $p=0.001$ )

Interestingly, there were fewer active grandparents amongst participants who reported being retired than those who did not.

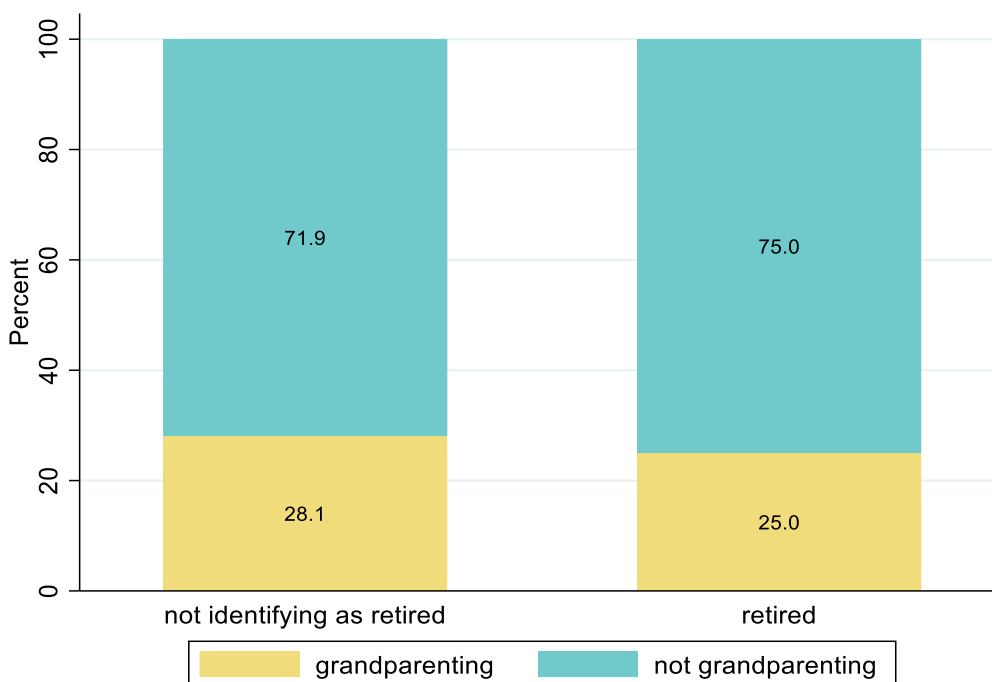


Figure 9: Proportions of participants grandparenting regularly, by whether they identify as retired or not ( $p=0.046$ )

### 3.6. Combined factors

A logistic regression of the above factors found only gender and partner status to be associated with regular grandparenting in a combined model. Men were 20% less likely than women to be doing grandparenting duties and those currently partnered were more than twice as likely to be grandparenting than those who were not. In a multivariate model, age group, health status, savings of 500K, being retired and being a pensioner were all not associated with being a grandparent (logistic model in Section 10.2, Appendix B).

## 4. Evidence of the sandwich generation

Almost a quarter of participants fulfilling grandparenting duties also provided care for another adult. Interestingly, most of these were not part of the so-called “sandwich generation” caring for parents and grandchildren at the same time. As the graph below shows, although caring for parents was the most frequent type of caring for other adults amongst grandparents, many were also caring for their partners at the same time as caring for young children, or else caring for their children *and* their grandchildren.

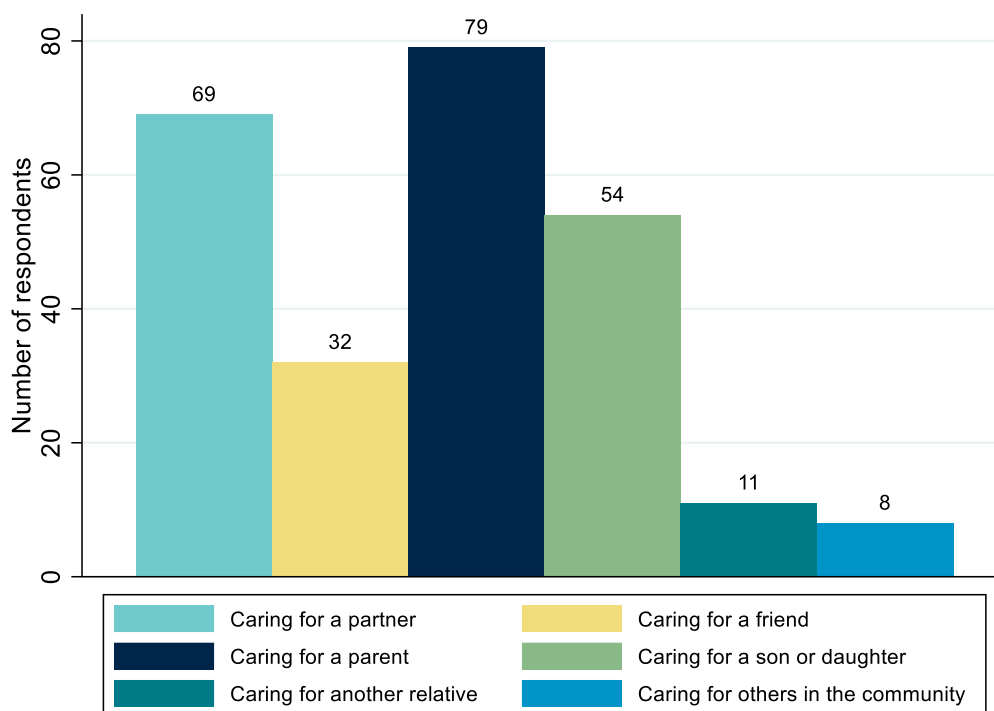


Figure 10: Counts of who participants are caring for, in addition to their grandparenting duties

The mean age of respondents providing double care to grandchildren and another adult was 67.6. There was a significant difference between women and men in terms of mean

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age, with male double carers being older on average at 69.4 than female double carers at 66.6 ( $p=0.001$ ).

Many more women provided double care than men, as the pie graph below shows.

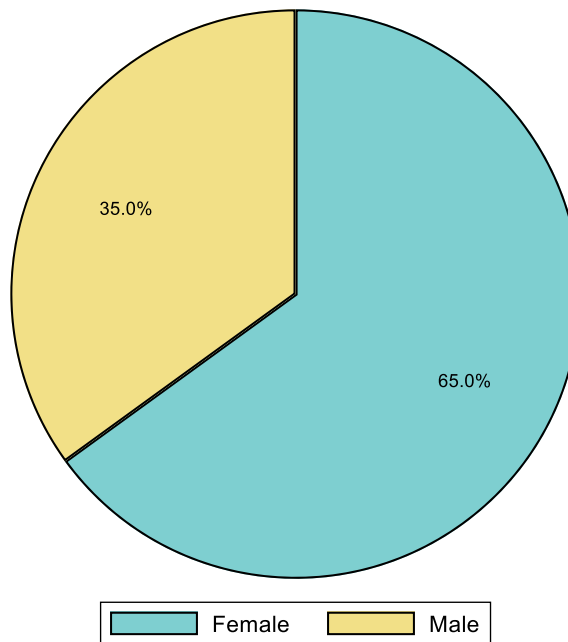


Figure 11: Gender breakdown of participants providing double care

However, as illustrated in the pie graph below, the gender breakdown varied depending on whether the men or women were in a partnered relationship, with few men providing grandparenting and other care when they were not partnered.

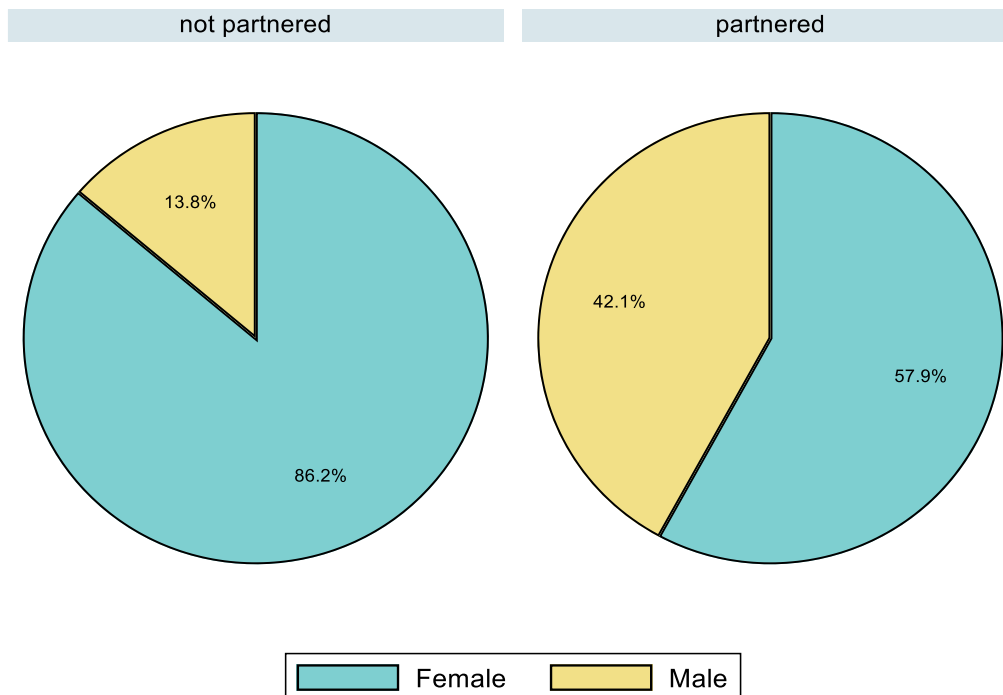


Figure 12: Gender breakdown of participants providing double care, by partnered status



## 5. Time spent grandparenting

On average, participants reported spending 12.1 hours per week on grandparenting duties, although the range extended from 1 hour per week to full-time, at 168 hours per week. 90% of respondents reported less than 25 hours of grandparenting per week. Women reported spending more hours grandparenting (13.0) than men (10.8),  $p=0.04$ .

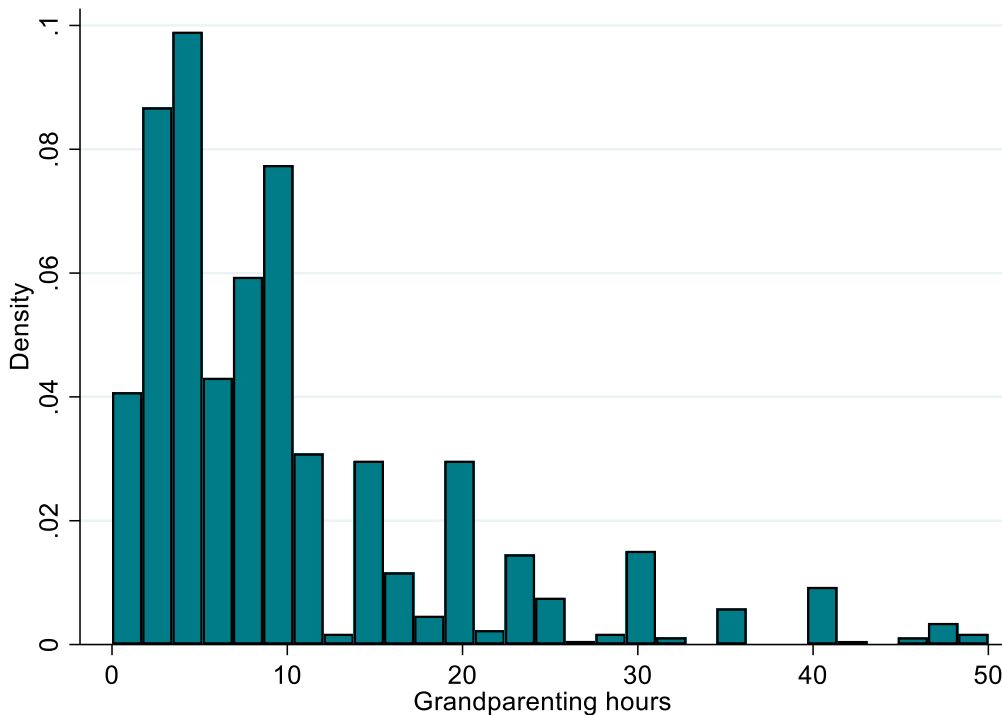


Figure 13: Numbers of hours spent grandparenting per week (responses greater than the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile were excluded)

This significant contribution of personal time to caring for grandchildren begs the question: what motivates people to do it? The motivations and drivers for grandparent care were elucidated by the diverse and rich qualitative comments provided by survey respondents, which are discussed below.

## 6. Why do grandparents care?

Respondents expressed a diverse range of thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and perspectives when reflecting on grandparenting and its role in care provision. They also described challenges, rewards, drivers and barriers to caring for grandchildren, and the nature and practicalities of this care. The key themes and verbatim comments provide insights into why people care.

### 6.1. Positive Thoughts, Feelings and Attitudes Towards Grandparenting

Irrespective of the nature or regularity of their involvement in their grandchildren's lives, many respondents regarded grandparenting as a positive and desired experience. Themes that were identified from participants' comments included:

#### 6.1.1. Love

A deep love for their grandchildren, as well as love of being a grandparent was evident.

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*It is the best feeling to care for your grandchildren, love them to bits...*

*... next year when J goes to high school, we will miss her. She is beautiful.*

*We love caring for these little people. They add to our lives and we consider [this] a special time in all of our lives.*

*We love interacting with grandchildren and their lives whenever possible.*

*It is the best part of my twilight years. I have two amazing granddaughters and two amazing grandsons.*

---

#### 6.1.2. A joy and privilege

Many described being a grandparent as privilege from which they derived joy and fulfilment.

---

*... most amazing experience of our lives gives us so much happiness, love and wonder*

*Spend a lot of time with my grandchildren and my children. Wonderful to see the excitement on their faces when they see me...*

*Wonderful, rewarding, and enlightening.*

*Wouldn't miss it for the world.*

*I love being available to look after [and] spend quality time with my grandchildren, it is a joy for me*

*A wonderful child and [it is] an honour to look after her regularly*

*Greatest thing in my life. Very rewarding...*

*Best job in the world looking after the grandkids and watching them learn and grow*

*The greatest gift my son and daughter-in-law have given me [is] three grandchildren and the trust to look after them before and after school and during school holidays for the past 13 years.*

*It's great [and] keeps us alive*

*Best experience one could have is to look after Grandchildren.*

*Best job in the world looking after the grandkids and watching them learn and grow.*

*Grandparenting is one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life. it is such a privilege to have our precious gift entrusted into my care... It is so much fun. I am exhausted from playing by the end of the day but so happy.*

*I think it's the best stage of life.*

*My grandchildren are all now well-educated men and women who give me great joy, as do my great grandchildren.*

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### 6.1.3. Excitement

Respondents also expressed excitement for future (great) grandparenting experiences.

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*I can't wait to have grandchildren to play with.*

*Best experience one could have is to look after Grandchildren*

*Only a new grandma, I hope to be babysitting soon.*

*... now we're going to be great grandparents and are excited!!*

---

### 6.1.4. An opportunity to make up for lost time

It was also regarded as a chance to make up for lost time and missed experiences.

---

*Being a person who did not show enough interest in the raising of my children, as I[ve] got grand[children] and great [grand]children, I made sure I was in their lives and interacted as much as possible.*

*Great for me as I worked to survive when my kids were small. So now it's like paying back for them not having me at home.*

*Magnificent. Spend more with my grandchildren than I ever did with my children.*

*They allow a freedom that you may not have experienced with your own children.*

*Fantastic experience for us, chance to spend more time and hopefully pass on more knowledge than we did with our children.*

---

### 6.1.5. Distinct from parenting

The distinction between parenting and grandparenting was clear, with respondents articulating that the latter carried less weight or responsibility.

---

*... Being with them is always fun and games and one hands them back to their parents for the hard work.*

*Wonderful, easier than parenting ...*

*Wonderful but good to return them to their parents after*

*... Made it clear to my children that it is their responsibility to care for their children I love them dearly and we do lots together, but I don't want to raise them.*

---

## 6.2. Negative Thoughts, Feelings and Attitudes Towards Grandparenting

Respondents expressed negative feelings associated with the physical or emotional distance between them and their grandchildren, and the expectations placed on grandparents. The following themes were also identified from participants' comments:

### 6.2.1. Sadness

A handful of respondents expressed sadness relating to longing for closer relationships with their grandchildren or wanting more active grandparenting roles.

---

*Sadly, all my grandchildren grew up away from me.*

*... Some [grandparents] are "kept out" of this "sharing the load" of co-parenting (for whatever reason) and have little relationship with grandchild (that's us too) - very sad.*

*... Sadly, alienated from my own grandchildren.*

---

### 6.2.2. A longing for more

Many expressed hoping for more time and closer relationships with their grandchildren.

---

*Will love to take care of grandchildren, but my children prefer to take care themselves in their own way. Did try to live close to grandchildren and getting close to them, but relationships are not that close.*

*I would love to be closer to my grandchildren but factors out of my control have distanced me from them.*

*Greatly enjoy their too infrequent visits...*

*Would love to see my only grandchild more.*

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### 6.2.3. Obligation and resentment

In some cases, the obligations and expectations associated with being a grandparent brought about feelings of dread or resentment.

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*So glad I am out of this chore.*

*... For some I can see that grandparenting is a real joy and gives meaning to their existence; for others it is a chore and a bind....*

*An expectation that I resent. I am at an age where I feel it is my time to live and relax.*

*Too much is expected from grandparents...*

*Too many grandparents have their lives ruined as full-time babysitters*

*Too many grandparents are trapped in bringing up their kids' children.*

*Too many grandparents, regardless of their health or lifestyle, treated as expected babysitters ... Retirement means you are expected to baby sit grandkids while parents work. Parents have no back up plan for babysitting except grandparents.*

---

### 6.2.4. Left with no choice

Some felt they had no choice but to fulfil this gap in care.

---

*... how can you say no to your own grandchildren when you know they will spend almost 12 hours every day in care by someone else.*

*We feel obliged to undertake at least one day per week of grandparenting due to the excessively high cost of childcare borne by our daughter...*

*With this generation needing to be 2 income families, and the cost of childcare being horrendously expensive, what choice do we grandparents have?*

*I do not believe in grandparents caring for their grandchildren while their parents work. There should be enough affordable childcare facilities.*

---



### 6.2.5. Injustice

For some, the expectations for grandparents to provide unpaid childcare brought about feelings of injustice.

---

*... it is clear that my peers are being taken advantage of by their children, in many cases; those children should be taking care of their parents, instead of using them as free child-minders.*

*I love our grandchildren, but it is unfair that grandparents are put into the situation of needing to be unpaid child carers, when we haven't even had the chance to experience empty nest*

---

## 6.3. Perspectives on the Role of Grandparenting Care in Society

A substantial proportion of families depend on grandparents to provide some form of childcare or support. Various characterisations of the role of grandparenting in care provision emerged.

### 6.3.1. Passing on wisdom

Grandparent care was regarded as an important way to pass on knowledge to future generations.

---

*... We are laying the foundation for her future life.*

*... helping to mould the minds of the next generation.*

*... grandparents contribute history and worldly experience to grandchildren ....*

*Fantastic ... to be able to answer any question about life and topics they are anxious to learn about.*

*...exposure to older people helps establish connections between ages. Teaches tolerance and respect for older people.*

*... A life experience for younger generations to draw on.*

*(Grandparents) are bringing up the nation's most precious asset and imbuing them with old-fashioned, common sense values.*

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### 6.3.2. Unpaid care

Grandparenting was perceived as a form of unpaid childcare by many respondents.

---

*2 days per week unpaid care of 2 grandchildren. Gave up work as teacher.*

*... I take my 'hat off' to all of the grandparents who look after their grandchildren. In most cases for no payments...*

*Pensions are forcing Grandparents to become free child carers for their children....*

*Although not blessed with natural grandchildren, our vicarious experience suggests that many modern families could not function without the unpaid and poorly acknowledged contribution of grandparents.*

*As both parents work to pay the mortgage, we are providing school pick-ups, and after school care 3 - 4 days a week, [which is] about 16-20 h[our]s [of] unpaid care.*

---

### 6.3.3. An undervalued contribution

There appeared to be a consensus that grandparent care was undervalued or unacknowledged within society.

---

*I feel that grandparents do not get enough credit or appreciation for caring for/raising grandchildren ...*

*Grandparenting has become an integral part of life. It is very responsible and tiring and demands more government help...*

*Babysitting grandson weekly.... Applied for a carers allowance and was knocked back by the gov[ernment]*

*(Childcare provided by grandparents described as) a system of part time slavery ...prevalent in the western world today...*

*... many modern families could not function without the unpaid and poorly acknowledged contribution of grandparents.*

*... we should be paid by the Government.*

*... Maybe parents should have some tax concessions or able to claim some costs where family members do the childcare....*

---

## 6.4. Challenges and Rewards

Respondents expressed several burdens and benefits associated with caring for grandchildren.

### 6.4.1. A personal sacrifice

Being able to provide care and support through grandparenting was juxtaposed with having to sacrifice desired lifestyle and personal needs.

---

*is often a balancing act, between providing support and care to another generation and sacrificing own personal time...*

*... affects your freedoms*

*...Can have significant negative impacts on quality of retirement and planned retirement lifestyle and expectations.*

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### 6.4.2. Financial strain

Expenses incurred because of caring for grandchildren included travel, food, entertainment, and other costs associated with daily living. For some this resulted in financial strain.

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*Financially difficult at times.*

*I love building relationships with my children and their partners and being involved with my grandchildren, but it can be taxing and costly.*

*I do get tired and travel expenses are a challenge*

*... it can be quite expensive to take them on outings and buy lunches.*

*... Expensive, lots of extra kilometres in Grandpa/Grandmas taxi...*

*It isn't always just the time but the expense of entertaining the children, parents should appreciate or be made aware we are living on strict budgets generally...*

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*Grandparenting is a real challenge... We have to buy our granddaughter most of her clothes...food, staples and normal kitchen equipment just to make sure they have a functioning household. All of this costs [money] and is a real drain on our pension.*

*We budget to enable us to either travel to see them which means paying for family accommodation or to fly the children once a year to stay with us.*

---

### 6.4.3. Demanding

Caring for grandchildren was associated with emotional, physical and time-demands.

---

*Burnt out at the moment, they've lived with us for 3 years.*

*It is quite physically and emotionally demanding.*

*... The downside, is that it is all about being energetic and the day after babysitting, the wife and I check out our backs and joints for pain level!*

*...at times strenuous but do it for love of grandchildren.*

*I enjoy it very much but as I am growing older it has become more demanding.*

*...It is hard work and after they have gone home you feel exhausted...*

*Enjoyable until it becomes too long in duration. Tiring and time-consuming*

---

### 6.4.4. Tiring but rewarding

Despite being draining and exhausting at times, grandparenting was simultaneously described as rewarding and fulfilling.

---

*Hard work as you get older. Very rewarding when your grandchild gives you a great big smile.*

*Can be very demanding physically but well worth the rewards in having a close relationship with you*

*Becoming a grandparent at 80 years of age is physically tiring but brings a lot of joy into my life.*

*Very time consuming, very tiring but it is what it is. We're helping out and we get to share time and love with our grandchildren*

*Can be very rewarding and amusing. They learn some things very quickly.*

*Caring for a 2-year-old grandson is the most rewarding experience of my personal life...*

---

#### 6.4.5. Vitality

One positive benefit of spending time with grandchildren was feeling re-energised.

---

*lifegiving and keeps you young!!*

*I am becoming amazed at the energy, vitality I find within myself when with the grandchildren.*

*absolutely love it, keeps me happy, young, and moving.*

---

#### 6.4.6. Mental and physical activity

Other positive benefits of grandparenting included mental and physical activity.

---

*... It has kept me active physically and mentally since my retirement.*

*Very rewarding. Keeps me fitter. Keeps my brain sharper... Keeps me up to date on what's going on.*

*...makes you feel younger, keeps you physically active.*

---

#### 6.4.7. Mutual learning

Intergenerational learning appeared to be an aspect of caring for grandchildren which respondents deemed valuable.

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*Interaction with grandchildren to teach them and learn of their thought processes helps keep one informed and [feeling] younger.*

## Australian Grandparents Care

*Marvellous [as] you learn so much from them.*

*I learn so much interacting with Grandchildren... Especially IT.*

*We ... spend at least 1 day a week during school holidays undertaking targeted activities. I believe we all enjoy and learn from each other on these occasions.*

---

### 6.4.8. Shared experiences

Active grandparenting also created opportunities for positive shared experiences.

---

*We love to share our love of camping with the girls, only do about once or twice a year.*

*When our grandchildren visit from the country we love to look after them and tell them and show them things we did when we were young. [We] go caravanning with them and enjoy the beach and other adventures.*

*... Looking after them introduced me to a new interest, that of amateur theatre, dancing and costume making. It kept the family together with a common interest as my husband became involved with the building of the sets etc.*

*An absolute joy to discover the way my grandchildren view the world, their emerging language skills, their ability of make sense of the world around them, and to introduce them to new experiences of nature, art, culture, food, travel*

---

### 6.4.9. Connectedness

The comments suggested that caring for grandchildren may foster connectedness and closeness within the family unit and community.

---

*I think it was good for them and us, as grandparents, to spend so much time together.*

*Totally makes you feel connected to your family and community... and makes you feel valued.*

*It is important to be part of your grandchildren's upbringing. In order to bond with them you need regular contact. This is mutually beneficial.*



*We have actively cared for all of our grandchildren through their formative years. Now young adults. We are the ones needing care now. We are a close family.*

---

## 6.5. Drivers and Barriers

Comments provided insight into the drivers and barriers to involvement and caring for grandchildren.

### 6.5.1. Providing support

Drivers of active grandparenting included providing parents with care relief, practical or emotional support.

---

*Wonderful and rewarding experience for me while helping the younger family cope with their daily time pressures.*

*It's necessary so our children can get ahead*

*Young parents today rely on parents and grandparents to share the load with children and we are happy to help out.*

*Wonderful being able to assist our children and care for our grandchildren.*

*Can get very tiring at times, but just trying to help my kids*

*We have to mind grandchildren because both parents are hospital shift workers and there is no other childcare available to cover their working hours.*

*We spend every second weekend participating in activities with grandchildren and visit another interstate when possible to give her parents a break from parenting*

---

## Australian Grandparents Care

### 6.5.2. Economic benefit

Another clear incentive of engaging in grandparent care was the economic benefit, such that childcare cost could be avoided, and to allow parents to undertake paid employment.

---

*Both daughters and sons-in-law work so grandparent responsibilities essential to keep their families functioning harmoniously and without financial strain.*

*Grandparents save their children a lot of babysitting fees.*

*it would be great If my daughter would have access to affordable childcare as it is not easy or someone my age to look after small children when she needs my help*

*... at least fortnightly care ... so parent can work*

*... Saves the parents over \$1200 a month.*

*Child minding of one grandchild because we love her and love to spend time with her. while assisting her parents to limit the costs of childcare.*

*Day care is out of reach for most of the young families.*

*Do so very happily. Children's parents are very grateful for our availability and the money we save them by not having to pay.*

---

### 6.5.3. Barriers to involvement

Barriers to caring for grandchildren included physical distance, poor health, breakdown in familial relationships and ongoing employment.

---

*Great distance affects our ability to provide as much involvement in the growing up of our grandchildren as we would like.*

*Geographically separated from children and grandchildren... Staying connected even with modern technology is a problem.*

*I live [in] Qld, and my grandchildren live in Melbourne. I get to see them for a short while once a year or so. I would love to tell them the family stories, let them get to know me, spoil them, have fun with them etc. Very hard to do.*

*Would like to do it more but family is spread between [Queensland] and [South of Sydney], like many families. This probably means many grandparents aren't as involved in grandchildren's lives.*

*Lately it has depended on my health and I feel guilty at not being able to help as much as I'd like.*

*I used to do a lot of caring for grandchildren and great grandchildren but due to poor health I am not able to care for young children on my own...*

*...two of my grandchildren have been alienated from me and my family since the breakdown of their parent's marriage...*

*... we have limited access to our beautiful grandies as their parents are separated and their mother took them interstate and controls contact - will not engage in mediation and taking to court has prohibitive costs. The family law system is in need of a significant overhaul. The children are the ones being harmed by a system that has far too many barriers.*

*... I wish I could do it more often, however full-time work gets in the way.*

*Very rewarding, but difficult when still working so much.*

---

## 6.6. Nature and Practicalities

The nature, regularity, duration and type of care provided varied between respondents.

### 6.6.1. Needs-based

In some cases, support was provided in response to immediate need.

---

*We see them often. Assist when needed, always available.*

*I [am] called to help when required.*

*We are "First call" when something goes wrong at school*

*On call for emergency [or] unplanned care ...*

---

## Australian Grandparents Care

### 6.6.2. Regular care

Common types of regular care provided included helping with transportation, and before and after school care.

---

*I retired from teaching at 55 to look after 2 grandchildren for 10 years; then helped with drop off and pick-up from school...*

*We have our two grandchildren dropped in every school day by their Mother. We give them breakfast and I drive them both to school. I then pick them up after school and take them home before their Father arrives around 30 minutes later.*

*We take our granddaughter to school 3 days a week*

*I regularly do school drop offs and after school pick-ups as my work allows*

*I help out with pick-ups from school and day care and regularly look after my grandchildren on weekends*

*Have done so for 4 grandchildren over 20 years providing before and more recently after school care*

*I have always helped my three daughters with minding my grandchildren - they range from 18 to 8. I am still minding the eight-year-old two days a week, before and after school...*

---

### 6.6.3. School holidays

Another common form of childcare assistance was provided during school holidays.

---

*We usually mind our two grandsons every school holiday as their mum works...*

*... lived on acreage used have children most school holidays, had to have [a] 7 seat vehicle to transport them all.*

*... We regularly have them for periods in the school holidays...*

*Both my son and his wife work full time therefore I help care for the children during holiday periods.*

---

#### 6.6.4. Grandparenting outside of familial structures

Interestingly, for some respondents 'grandparenting' was broadly construed as an act of caring for the younger generation, regardless of kinship.

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*I have no grandchildren, but have become an "adopted Grandma" for three families who do not have grandparents at all. They range in ages from 3 to 10, and whilst I do not provide care for them on a regular basis because of distance, I am very present in their lives and visit them often.*

*[We] are pseudo grandparents to daughters' friends children...*

*I have no children or grandchildren. I look after other peoples' children and grandchildren from new-born to 14.*

*I want to and also because there is no other option...*

---

## 7. Discussion

As childcare has grown into a substantial commercial business in Australia, grandparenting has maintained its market position as a major service to working families. Grandparenting takes on a substantial burden of care, particularly in family units where both or single parents are working. This form of care work is both historical and re-emerging due to growing necessity and sustained by deep cultural and social values as articulated in the comments in this report. Further, increasing healthy life expectancy has been advantageous for the voluntary service of grandparenting and allayed the care burdens created by the trend of later births.

In 2020 COVID-19 has exposed the scale and strength of Australia's grandparenting care system and provided society with the opportunity to realise and recognise its value. Disruption, distress and impacts on working parents have resulted when older Australians were asked to maintain strict social distancing standards, unveiling how large the grandparenting workforce is. In the face of widespread working from home arrangements, which may continue in the world post-COVID-19, adaptive and flexible grandparenting arrangements are required to meet changing needs. It is thus timely to develop initiatives to support and nurture the precious contribution of grandparenting care with a future-focused perspective.

From older Australians' point of view, grandparenting is one of their major contributions to society and sadly, many feel unrecognised. Through interactions with younger generations older Australians pass on wisdom and engage in mutual learning. The desire to give back is so strong that some people choose to become adopted grandparents. The value and importance of grandparents' work may be evident within individual families, but it receives little public recognition despite the size of its economic contribution. This neglect is hurtful and compounded by strong voices saying that older Australians should be taking on greater economic burdens, as they are better off than younger generations. In reality, these matters are rarely intergenerational and mostly about the divide between rich and poor in society as discussed in a previous report: *Respect for Age: going, going or gone?* 2018.

As Australia faces a growing economic deficit from dealing with COVID-19, older Australians will be making many social and economic contributions to future generations. Grandparenting is just one shining example of the ways older people are supporting younger Australians. The act of grandparenting is a skilful, intellectual, and economic gift which successfully passes from one generation to the next. Remembering this, Australia must strive to maintain the intergenerational solidarity evident through the COVID-19 crisis and retain an 'all in this together' attitude as we look toward the future.



## 8. Acknowledgements

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## 10. Current Publications

### 2017

- McCallum, J. & Rees, K. (2017) *Consumer Directed Care in Australia: Early stage analysis and future directions*. Brisbane: National Seniors. Published 18/8/17.
- McCallum, J. & Rees, K. (2017) *'Silver Economy' Consumer Co-design: An Australian Perspective*. In *Innovation in Active, Healthy and Smart Ageing Sector* edited by Guangsheng Guo and Jianbing Liu: Beijing Science & Technology Publishing Press 2017 pp 273-283. Published 12/9/17.
- National Seniors and Challenger (2017) *Seniors More Savvy about Retirement Income*. Brisbane: National Seniors. Published 3/10/17.
- Lamont, A. & Sargent-Cox, K. (2017) *Healthy Ageing: The State of the Evidence and available resources*. Brisbane: National Seniors. Published 12/10/17.
- Rees, K., McCallum, J. & Cantwell, J. (2017) *Be Heard: Snapshots of members' views – A report to members from the CEO*. Brisbane: National Seniors. Published 2/11/17.
- Earl, J.K., Gerrans, P. and Hunter, M. (2017) *Better ways of assessing cognitive health*. Brisbane: National Seniors. Published 9/11/17.
- Rees, K. & McCallum, J. (2017). *Downsizing: Movers, planners, stayers*. Brisbane: National Seniors. Published 27/11/17.
- McCallum, J. & Rees, K. (2017). *Growing older, feeling younger*. Brisbane: National Seniors. Published 5/12/17.
- McCallum, J., Rees, K. & Maccora, J. (2017). *Bridging the Digital Divide*. Brisbane: National Seniors. Published 14/12/17.

### 2018

- Rees, K. & McCallum, J. (2018). *A Little Help from My Friends: Getting good advice in the Information Age*. Brisbane: National Seniors. Published 18/1/18.
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- National Seniors & Challenger (2018). *Once bitten twice shy: GFC concerns linger for older Australians*. Brisbane: National Seniors. Published 9/7/18.
- Rees, K. & McCallum, J. (2018). *Dealing with Diversity: Aged care services for new and emerging communities*. Brisbane: National Seniors. Published 14/8/18
- Rees, K., Maccora, J. & McCallum, J. (2018). *You don't know what you don't know: The current state of Australian aged care service literacy*. Brisbane: National Seniors. Published 26/9/18.
- McCallum, J. & Rees, K. (2018) *Respect for age: Going, going or gone? Views of Older Australians*. Brisbane: National Seniors. Published 21/12/18.

### 2019

- National Seniors submissions to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety:

## Australian Grandparents Care

1. Witness Statement 31/1/19;
2. Review of recommendations of prior reviews that were not implemented 6/2/19;
3. The dementia journey legacy of trauma and what to do about it 9/5/19;
4. Response to the Interim Report of the Aged Care Royal Commission 22/11/19

McCallum, J. Hosking, D. & Rahn, A. (2019) *Feeling financially comfortable? What retirees say*. Brisbane: National Seniors. Published 12/3/19.

Maccora, J., Rees, K., Hosking, D. & McCallum, J. *Senior Surfers: Diverse levels of digital literacy among older Australians*. Brisbane: National Seniors Australia. 13/8/19.

## 2020

National Seniors & Challenger (2020) *Retirement income worry. Who worries and why?* Canberra: National Seniors Australia 14/1/2020.

National Seniors submission to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety: Response to 'Visions for Aged Care' Consultation Paper 1 24/1/2020

Hosking, D., Maccora, J., Ee, N., and McCallum, J., (2020) *Just doing it!? Older Australians' Physical Activity*. Canberra: National Seniors 3/3/20.

Maccora, J., Ee, N., Hosking, D., McCallum, J. (2020) *Who Cares? Older Australians do*. Canberra: National Seniors 18/5/20.

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# 11. Appendices

## 11.1. Appendix A: Grandparenting questions from NSSS-8

**15. Do you regularly look after any grandchildren (or other children under 12)?**

- Yes  
 No

Please feel free to share anything you'd like to about your thoughts or experiences of grandparenting

**16. How many hours per week would you say you spend on this grandparenting care, on average?**

## 11.2. Appendix B: Logistic regression of factors associated with being a grandparent

```
. logistic grand agegrp 2.gender health_simple partnered less500k retired pensioner

Logistic regression                Number of obs   =       2,862
                                LR chi2(7)       =       79.32
                                Prob > chi2        =       0.0000
Log likelihood = -1603.4332        Pseudo R2      =       0.0241
```

grand	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]
agegrp	.9073221	.0560753	-1.57	0.116	.8038123 1.024161
gender					
Male	.7913203	.0750011	-2.47	0.014	.657167 .9528596
health_simple	1.019118	.0597072	0.32	0.747	.9085628 1.143125
partnered	2.185428	.2242195	7.62	0.000	1.787332 2.672192
less500k	.8753225	.0886295	-1.32	0.188	.7177628 1.067469
retired	1.026005	.1098061	0.24	0.810	.8318626 1.265458
pensioner	.9305588	.1004054	-0.67	0.505	.7531837 1.149706
_cons	.3134352	.0645414	-5.63	0.000	.2093493 .4692712

Note: \_cons estimates baseline odds.

Figure 14: Results of logistic regression of factors associated with grandparenting

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