

Baby boomers open up about old age

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Kathy Glasgow, who is graduating with a PhD in Social Policy this week, interviewed mid-life baby boomers around New Zealand to explore their views about old age and compare their expectations and values with current policies for older people.

"A desire for choice and control came through strongly. Boomers grew up through a period of rapid social change, and were exposed to a

broadening of possibilities so they expect a choice in how they create their own lifestyles in old age."

While boomers are expecting to work longer and know they need to prepare financially for their old age, they want to do it in their own way, says Kathy. "If there's any sense of being forced or coerced through policy decision making I think there'll be strong resistance. Boomers value independence and self-reliance. But like their parents before them, there's still an underlying sense that it's the state's responsibility to care for [older people](#) who are in need."

Boomers expect to live in a variety of housing situations, says Kathy. That could include adapting the retirement village model to reflect their worldview, such as creating eco-style retirement villages or small settlements that are communally managed. Some people she talked to were planning communal living arrangements akin to the flatting arrangement of their teenage years.

"Flatting was a part of the boomer experience that was different to their parent's generation, which commonly only left home when they got married.

"There's also the desire for the coastal [lifestyle](#) or bush retreat, but this is tempered with thoughts of wanting to be close to social activities and family."

With families no longer living as close to each other as they used to, there wasn't a strong expectation that children would be around or able to provide much support. "This implies the need to explore opportunities for supporting more creative social networks," says Kathy.

Although many boomers said they were looking forward to reducing work hours their key emphasis was on work-life balance. "The

underlying values that came through were about choice—being able to choose where they live, who they live with, as well as what lifestyle they led. Flexibility, such as more control over hours and opportunities to work from home, were important too."

Boomers expected to lead an active lifestyle in their older age. "When you dug deeper, there were some fears about growing old and health was definitely one of them. However, there was also an optimism amongst boomers that they could transform their own experience through leading a healthy lifestyle."

Provided by Victoria University

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