

# Older people become invisible

Felicity Barr  
President, Australian Association of  
Gerontology (Hunter Chapter)

“Older People and the social inclusion agenda”  
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# Felicity Barr

- Former Chairman, NSW Ministerial Advisory Committee on Ageing
- Former Deputy Commissioner (NSW) for Veterans' Affairs
- Researcher in social gerontology
  - PhD thesis on social capital of older people
  - Mature aged student
- Former Chair, War Widows Guild (NSW) Board
- Quasi retired ageing person
  - Sea changer

# Becoming invisible

- “Don’t matter any more”
  - Loss of identity
- Loss of partner
  - Loss of social roles
- “stupid old cow”

“I am me and I have  
grown older”

# Why is this happening?

- Why does this happen?
- What effects does it have?
- Is it just a 21<sup>st</sup> century problem?

# Why does this happen?

- Industrialisation and urbanisation
  - (Russell, CA in *Longevity & Social Change in Australia*, 2007, p. 100)
  - Problems of old age
    - Men's issue on retirement from work
    - Women's issue of low workforce participation
- Medical & technological advances
  - Increased longevity
  - Digital divide

# What effects does it have?

- Media representation
  - Images on TV in programs and in news stories
  - Images in advertising
- Shopping
  - Bright, loud selling to attract young shoppers
- Town planning
  - Shopping centres vs ribbon development
  - Places to sit and watch or just rest

# What effects does it have? (2)

- Research

- medical research often inappropriate
- demographics fail to capture full picture of internal migration (over 65+)

- Digital divide

- modified by social networking
- techno-networking very popular

# Primacy of work

## ■ Value of time

- “Back when we were young, you and I, you’d go and visit your parents but these days if you want to see your children you go and visit them. We’ve changed; the whole of life has changed.”
- “That is the only thing about living up here, I don’t expect my children to come up here all the time because I know what it was like when I had to do the trek down to see my dad. With three children it is not easy. One of my daughter-in-laws works full time and they have got one child and another on the way. I couldn’t expect them to come up every second weekend, that is why we go to see them.”
- “Well they found it rather difficult because they both work. Of course I went to Sydney for the funeral.”



# Australian national discourse

- Dominated by work or “productivity”
  - “Australian working families”
  - Economic issues
  - Immigration policies
  - Education
- Older people are invisible in policy
  - except as cost item for care

# What can we do?

- MACA produced booklet on *"Older People – Myths and realities"*
- Raise issues with government

*Thank you*