

Stages in Longevity

A new Australian study¹ allows us to update an earlier newsletter. It reviews three longevity stages – disability free, some disability but independent, and dependent.

The table shows the expected average number of years in each stage at 65, 75 and 85.

Age Now	Disability Free Years	Years with Some Disability	Dependent Years*	Totals
65	10	7	4	21
75	5	4	4	13
85	2	2	3	7

**Dependent years have severe or profound core activity limitations. Core activities comprise self-care, mobility and communication.*

The new study shows that disability free years have increased at all ages and reaffirms that on average more remaining years will be independent. Even those who reach 85 can on average expect another few years before becoming dependent.

The numbers still support the view that ‘the longer you live the longer you’re likely to live’. At 65 the average lifespan is 86. For survivors to 75, this has increased to 88 and at 85 the expectation is 92.

Gender differences still exist. While women on average outlive men, their dependency is 1-2 years longer.

Putting the numbers in perspective

1. There are limitations on numbers like these. They are averages. Also, as we age, personal abilities and conditions vary more widely between people.
2. As medical and social responses to ageing improve, life expectancies and the time in each of the stages will change. The good news is that as we age there tend to be fewer dependent years.

This information is more optimistic than many people might have expected. What could you do about it?

Managing the Stages

The first step is to take a view on whether you are likely have a different longevity from average. Your SHAPE Analyser results will help you with this.

Since the number of dependent years drops slightly with increasing age, a longer than average life expectancy will probably end with about the same number of dependent years but having had more active years.

The next step is to take a view on the possible impact of disabilities on your lifestyle. To help with this, separate possible disabilities into three groups:

- **Your current disabilities.** Ask your medical advisers to explain how they might evolve and clarify what could minimize their impact.
- **Family-linked disabilities.** Knowing whether there were family tendencies towards disabilities which might affect, for example, vision, hearing, mobility and mental acuity could help you factor in your own response. It would be useful for other family members too.
- **Disabilities that might arise from your current condition and behaviour.** This is an opportunity for a frank discussion with your medical advisers about what you can do to minimize preventable disabilities.

While a focus on disabilities may seem a bit morbid, the goal is to minimize their impact for as long as possible. The first rule of war is to know your enemy!

Planning Ahead

Using this approach, develop a timeline for your remaining years. As well as summarizing your current thinking, this will help you to respond better to the unexpected issues that may arise.

This kind of personal planning also enables you to contribute much more effectively to developing and committing to a financial plan.

There is no plan without a time frame. The best time frame is the one that you develop for yourself. Then you can have a constructive conversation with your financial adviser – just as you will have had with your medical adviser.

Understanding more about the stages in your longevity is a step towards taking more control of your life and achieving a more fulfilling future.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017. **Life Expectancy and Disability in Australia 2003-15.**