

We The People

Program 76

An Ageing Asset



Most will be aware of Australia's aging population and many will believe it represents a burden on society. They are wrong and for a whole raft of reasons. A person who displays wisdom regarding immigration, an aging population and sustainability is Melbourne MP Kelvin Thompson and his enlightened views on where Australia is and where it's going and why it should not grow in size. He says, those societies which are the oldest by age are also the richest, healthiest and have the greatest life expectancy. Those societies which are the youngest are also the poorest, sickest, and have the lowest life expectation. Increasing the population does not help society or social welfare.

Worrying about the population ageing devalues older people and the significant contributions older people make to our society. Research shows that seniors make a great contribution to our community, providing child care and acting as mentors and role models. Employers who complain about not having enough workers forget to mention there has been a massive increase in women's participation in the workforce in recent decades and that having grandparents to look after the kids is often an important foundation of that. Older people have also been found to make more financial contributions to their children and grandchildren than the other way around. Far from being a burden on us, they continue to contribute. We should recognise that population and workforce ageing will help us solve some of the most deep-rooted and serious problems we have in our society. The whole ageing workforce concern is based around the idea that the ageing of the workforce will lead to labour shortages. However, many age pensioners take on part time and occasional work and should be encouraged and rewarded for these valuable contributions to our community.

Older people are not a social and economic burden. The vast majority of older Australians enjoy healthy, active and independent lives, with 93 per cent living in private homes and only 7 per cent in residential care. Many make significant financial contributions to their families and participate in voluntary community activities. If we were not so preoccupied with meeting the needs of a growing population we would be more focused and much better able to meet the needs of an ageing one. Population ageing is not being cured by population growthrather it is yet another casualty of it.

Age brings wisdom and you can't buy that, you have to earn it. Two thousand seven hundred years ago the Roman Senate was literally a Council of Elders and had a minimum age not a maximum age. The Romans realised that age brought wisdom and that was prized for its self evident worth. Many today confuse knowledge with wisdom and arrogance with strength but the wise know the difference. Just think ahead in time and realise that your grand children may well live to 100 and so ageing will have a very different meaning at that time and society should value them.

It is a nonsense to keep focusing on an aging population as though it's a problem, it's not and there are plenty of examples where if today's youth would listen to the elders they would be spared so many mistakes and build a world of genuine sustainable living in every sense of the word. Forty years ago the king of Bhutan had the right idea when he introduced GNH instead of GDP as a national measure of wealth. GNH means *Gross National Happiness* and his philosophy was spot on as that inclusive wise attitude far outweighs all the economic arguments put together. Gross National Happiness is a unifying concept that values everyone and recognises seniors, holding them in high esteem. Seniors have fought for this country, raised families, endured financially, laughed and cried, overcome illness and enjoyed happy days and sad and perhaps even been denied justice. Seniors have paid their taxes and done their bit for this country and still are. So elders don't think for a moment you are a burden on society or that the self righteous have a point to make. They don't. To all you courageous and noble seniors I say be proud of your standing in the community and take your rightful place at the head of the table. Why, even the sometimes challenging and autocratic octogenarian who runs 4CRB is proof positive we all have something of real worth to offer society and 4CRB values wisdom at its very core and so attracts listeners just like you. **Until next time this is Kent Bayley**