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Back to school for boomers

Australia's baby boomers want to go back to school.

Continuing education is one of the most important issues for people over 50.

They are confident about their ability to take on new courses in computing, languages and trades. If there were more courses in suburban, country and regional areas they would participate.

These are the findings of a national survey of over 2500 people aged 50 to 75 selected randomly across Australia.

The survey was conducted for insurance company, APIA. It is part of a major research effort by APIA to understand issues of interest and concern to people aged over 50 and not working full time.

Education was one of the top four issues. The others were climate change, health and being able to spend time with families.

Over 80 percent of those surveyed strongly agreed that they could "learn new things" given the opportunity.

Despite the view that computers are for younger generations, Australia's over 50s see them as important for their ongoing education. They are also a key means of keeping in touch with family, friends and community events.

APIA's National Operations Manager Craig Dingle says the research highlights the fact that education is not just a need for Australia's youth.

"Most government, business and community investment is for the education of young people. That is obviously important and a key influence on Australia's current and future standard of living.

"APIA's research shows that the education of people over 50 will also become a significant social issue.

"The ageing of the Australian population means that the over 50s are the fastest growing sector.

"They see continuing education as an important influence on their quality of life. They also believe it enables them to continue to work longer and contribute more to their community," Craig Dingle says.

The APIA research is consistent with the findings of Australia's leading adult education representative group, Adult Learning Australia (ALA).

ALA Executive Director, Ron Anderson says adult education is becoming a higher profile issue in Australia.

"We have some of the world's finest adult education centres and teachers in Australia.

"Yet there will need to be an increase in government and corporate funding for adult education if we are to keep pace with the growing demand.

"People want to continue working past the traditional retirement age. They believe they need to continue their education to do that.

"They also recognise that their mental and physical health is linked with their ability to access courses and continue to be actively engaged in their communities through ongoing learning, " Ron Anderson says.

The latest APIA research found that Australia's over 50s believe they have a good balance of "life experience" and a desire to continue learning and experiencing.

That is why they are confident they are "better prepared for life's challenges" today than they were 10 years ago.

For further information contact: Ron Burke (APIA) 03 8629 5705 or 0419 334 452
Ron Anderson (ALA) 02 6274 9504 or 0410 602 267