



# Many things worry older men...

## HOW TO HELP... yourself and others

Ever wondered how tough it can be for an older man?

These are some of the hidden realities for ordinary Aussie men, some tips on how men can help themselves to overcome these challenges, and how families and friends can help an older man to rediscover a fulfilling life.

### HIDDEN HARDSHIPS

#### Physical Health Problems

Sometimes no matter how active and healthy you are, you can experience physical health problems. Physical illness is tough enough to deal with on its own, however it can often trigger a range of emotional issues that men find hard to talk about.

Health issues can shatter the dreams and dignity of a man. These issues may result in the loss of their highly valued independence, a lack of mobility, not being able to do tasks, and having to ask for help. They may feel they need to remain stoic and strong for the family and some think they become a burden.



#### Retirement – when the honeymoon is over

When we are busy working, it is hard to envisage what the emotional impacts of retiring will be. We talk about it for so long and dream about the holidays, doing jobs around the house and having time to do the things we enjoy. The reality is, often after a few years of retirement, the novelty wears off and the honeymoon is over, leaving many to ask, "what's next?".

So often, men associate their self-worth and purpose in life with their job. Without a job to go to, many men lose their identity, their sense of achievement, and contribution. Without something to do, they no longer feel valued for their skills and experience, and their confidence can suffer. This is made worse by society's unwillingness to value older generations.

In addition to this, the workplace is often where men find friendship and support with their work colleagues. With retirement this network disappears, and a sense of disconnection may occur as the world moves on without them.

Adapting to change can be very challenging for a lot of older men. Many have had only one or two jobs over the past 50 years, which can make it difficult to adapt to being at home all the time. This also brings about changes to relationships with their partners, who are now together most of every day. There is also a change in daily routine and a change in role from being the provider and protector of their family which can be confronting for some.

## Relocation – having to start somewhere new

Whether it be moving house or moving town, relocation can cause a number of hardships for older men. Moving for older men is typically due to failing health or following retirement and often men play little part in the decision making process.

This challenging time leads to some significant changes in everyday life including the loss of friendships and support networks, and the loss of their place within the community. For instance, moving into care may cause a major loss of freedom and independence, they may also feel there are limited opportunities to engage with others, and that many activities are oriented towards women.

Often it can be too daunting and exhausting to have to make a new network of friends which can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

## Becoming a carer

It is very hard to understand the true physical and emotional toll becoming a carer can have on a person, particularly if it is unexpected. A constant focus on the needs of the person being cared for can see the carer's needs get pushed aside.

Feelings of resentment and guilt are a common part of caring, and are often hidden.

When the caring role stops, carers can feel they have lost their identity and reason for getting up each day. No longer do nurses or other support persons come calling and the social interaction ceases to exist, leaving a sense of isolation and loneliness. This is compounded by the loss of their partner from the home or life itself.

## Loss – losing a partner

Losing a partner can be a particularly difficult time for older men. Not only have they lost their wife or long-term partner but also their most trusted companion, the person who connects them socially to the outside world and is typically the driving force behind the home and family.

The grieving process overwhelms many with complex emotions, and life changes so dramatically they begin to fall apart. These men are at significantly higher risk of depression and suicide.

Every experience is unique and people don't just 'get over it'. They need to learn to live with it and move forward.

Every day, these issues become too big to handle for more than one Australian man over 65 who takes his own life.

For thousands more, there is little enjoyment left.

## Loneliness and isolation

Everyone can feel lonely sometimes, even those with a supportive family. The difference with older men is they are usually wary about revealing their inner most thoughts and so keep this loneliness hidden.

Having a group of men to talk to, where they feel safe to express their concerns, opinions, and thoughts is extremely important. Men only groups help to support these friendships and conversations, reducing the loneliness and isolation.

## Depression in older men

Depression is not a normal part of ageing, however around 15 percent of older persons and around 35 percent of those in aged care are affected by the illness in Australia. Men tend to be conditioned not to show weakness in any form and are therefore less likely to admit they are suffering.

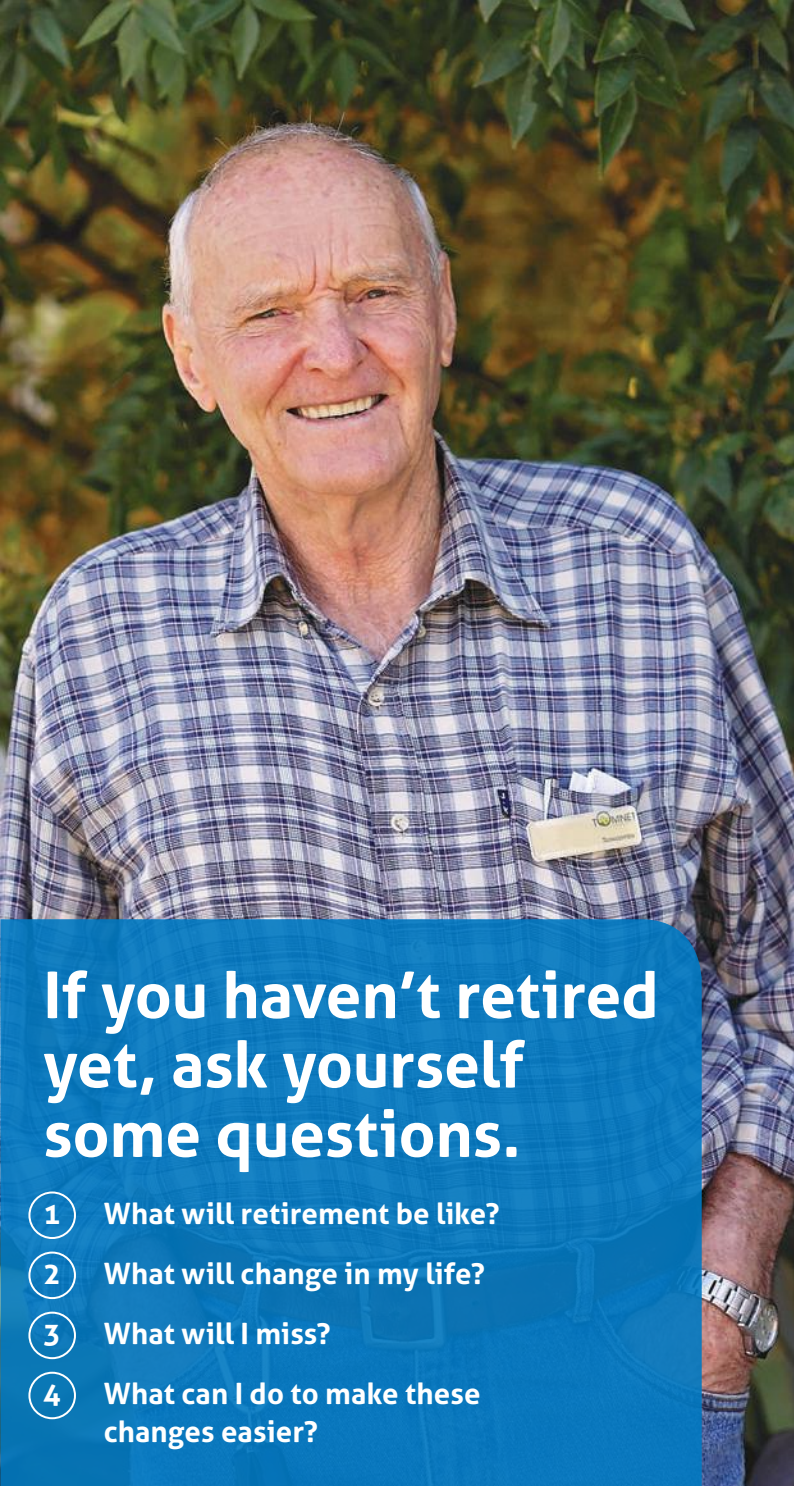
Depression in men is often masked, and tends not to show up as feeling hopeless or helpless, but as being irritable, angry and discouraged, so may be difficult to recognise. Even if a man realises that he is depressed, he may be less willing to seek help. Support from concerned family members or friends, and encouragement to seek help, can make a difference.

**There is hope for a better life.  
Your life really can start at 65.**

*"This is what I say to men dealing with hardships: don't let it beat you.*

*We are all mates, and there is always someone to talk to. Throughout my boxing career, I never gave up. And with TOMNET's help, nothing can beat me."*

– Neil



## If you haven't retired yet, ask yourself some questions.

- 1 What will retirement be like?
- 2 What will change in my life?
- 3 What will I miss?
- 4 What can I do to make these changes easier?

## How you can help yourself

Retiring and growing older will present major changes in your life, however there is no reason why you can't turn your post-retirement period into one of the most satisfying times in your life.

## Here are some suggestions

- 1 **GET INVOLVED** in a network like ours where you will find friendship, trust, understanding and support.
- 2 **CONSIDER VOLUNTEERING** and share your skills and life experiences with others.
- 3 **TRY SOMETHING NEW.** Is there something you're interested in doing but never had the chance? Make it happen.
- 4 **KEEP IN TOUCH** with family and friends. This is vital.
- 5 **REALISE YOU ARE NOT ALONE.** You will have good and bad days but speaking to other men or a member of the TOMNET Professional Support Team is one step towards being heard and supported.
- 6 **SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP** for any unresolved issues.

## How you can help an older man

Do you know an older man doing it tough? Here are some easy ideas to help you connect with them and to make a difference in their lives.

**START** a meaningful conversation with your father, brother, uncle, neighbour, or other older man.

**TALK** with genuine interest about what they are doing and how they are feeling.

**VALUE** their life skills, abilities, and their past and present contribution to family and community.

**ENCOURAGE** them to come up with their own ideas on how they can lead a fulfilling life and support them to make it happen. Some examples are

joining a network like TOMNET, volunteering, exploring their interests, and keeping in touch with family and friends.

Encourage them to seek **PROFESSIONAL HELP** for any unresolved issues.

Take **WARNING SIGNS OF DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE** seriously and act immediately. Don't keep the plans a secret. Seek professional help.

Reaching out could save a life.

*"It's not always easy, indeed it's mostly very hard for older blokes to tell you how they really feel."*

– Royce



*“There are many circumstances why we come here. It’s a great thing to be involved in. I love every second of it.”*  
 – Peter

At TOMNET we create networks of retired men who genuinely care about the welfare of each other. TOMNET provides a sense of belonging. We hold weekly gatherings, events, interest groups and barbecue services. We also run volunteering programs and provide professional support.

TOMNET is about retired men supporting each other through hidden hardships to improve their mental health and well-being, and prevent suicide. Through rediscovering fulfilling lives, TOMNET men regain purpose, the ability to connect, and contribute to the community.

## Where to go for help

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[www.tomnet.org.au](http://www.tomnet.org.au)

TOMNET has affiliate groups in Toowoomba, Brisbane, Bundaberg, Crows Nest, Goondiwindi, Highfields, Inglewood, Millmerran, Mt Gravatt, Oakey, Roma and Tara.

**If you are thinking about suicide or experiencing a personal crisis, help is available.**

## 5 ways TOMNET supports older men in the community

Members provide peer support to:

- 1 Male residents in aged care facilities
- 2 Isolated, at risk older men through home visits
- 3 Isolated Members through telephone support
- 4 New and established Affiliate Groups
- 5 Disadvantaged youth by sharing skills and mentoring

We are gratefully supported by:



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# The challenge of retirement...

## Expectations and realities for men

On Geoff's coffee table sat a bundle of retirement brochures filled with glossy pictures of cruises, caravans, and couples strolling along a beach.

As he stared at them blankly, Geoff felt an unexplainable sense of emptiness. He had completed his list of 'all the things I'm going to do when I retire' in the first two years. He had travelled with his wife, painted the house, and knocked over the list of odd jobs. Now there was no clear direction for his future and he was starting to ask himself, 'What's next?'

While some men approach retirement with gusto, many others like Geoff, struggle. Whether you spent years planning for retirement, or found yourself made

redundant early, the emotional impact of retirement is often unexpected. It can be a shock to realise that the busy days, structured routines and familiar faces all stop very suddenly once the job ends.

Retirement can trigger a range of emotions, some of which can lead to depression, anxiety, anger and suicidal thoughts. With one man over 65 committing suicide every day in Australia, retirement can present many challenges.

## Retirement realities

Many men are emotionally unprepared for the loss of their stable work routine and the sense of purpose it carried. They find themselves struggling to identify who they are now that their career has ended.

They might have carefully planned their careers for the past 40 years or more, but now they are in retirement, which could last almost as long, they realise they have not contemplated how they will feel about their new life.

Most men consider the financial impact of retirement a necessity for retirement planning, but few realise that planning for the emotional impact of retirement and the changes that it brings, is just as vital.



# Common retirement realities

Men frequently associate their self-worth and purpose in life with their jobs. However, when their career ends many lose their identity, sense of contribution and achievement. They begin to feel no longer valued for their skills and abilities and their confidence can suffer. These hardships are often unspoken, yet quite common.

## Feeling lost

For decades, work has provided men daily challenges, boundaries, rules, structure, routines and defined roles. For many, it has given them a reason to get out of bed every day. The sudden loss of work can leave many feeling lost.

As many transition to retirement, there is much new-found free time to be enjoyed. However, with a lack of meaningful things to do, men can start to feel restless and depressed about life. Feelings of disappointment, irritability and frustration of no longer being in control is common. When their job ends, men can easily lose their identity, self-esteem and self-confidence which may lead to depression and illness.

## A sense of disconnection

Many men see work as a definition of themselves, and their sense of value is often based on their career achievements. When men retire, they often reflect on this and wish they could keep connected to the roles they were loyal to. The reality is, the job you had will carry on without you, things will change after you leave, and new staff won't recognise you. This feeling of disconnection can be confronting.

## Losing your social network

Work is where men find male friendships, camaraderie, and an opportunity to share thoughts and ideas. Without work, this social network is lost. This is not uncommon.

While women tend to develop social relationships more easily than men, and often have a more active social life outside of the home, relying on them for your social life is not the answer. Some retired men get angry as their wives get busily enjoying new things.

## Relationship challenges

Talk to your spouse or partner about what you expect from them when you are retired. You might have very different ideas about how to spend your time together. Divorce rates increase and peak after five years of retirement so it's important to communicate and plan together what your retirement will look like.

## Depression in retirement

While retirement can be wonderful, it can be a time when enormous changes are taking place which become more difficult to cope with. From time to time everyone 'gets the blues', or feels irritable, listless, angry or despondent. However, when these feelings are prolonged you may be suffering from depression. If you are feeling this way, it is ok to seek help – talk to your peers, family, doctor or contact a group like us. It is more common than you think.

**Make your retirement  
a satisfying chapter  
of your life.**

*"Two years into retirement, the wheels fell off. Retirement is not just about financial planning and a bucket list. I wish I knew about the real impact of retirement earlier."*

- Terry



# Planning for a successful retirement

Retire from work, don't retire from life. By planning early, you can continue to have a fulfilling life and take control of your own emotional and physical well-being. Here are some tips to get you started.

- 1 If you are getting ready to retire, give serious thought to how you will **SPEND YOUR TIME MEANINGFULLY**. Think about transitioning to part-time work, and get involved in new things before your retire.
- 2 **HAVE A DISCUSSION WITH YOUR PARTNER** to make sure your retirement vision aligns. Spend time together, but also make time for yourself.
- 3 When you retire, it is normal to **TAKE TIME TO ADJUST**. The transition period can feel daunting and overwhelming, and produce a sense of loss as you close the chapter of your work life.
- 4 **GET INVOLVED WITH A NETWORK** like ours, where you can find new friendships, trust, understanding and support.
- 5 **CONSIDER VOLUNTEERING** and sharing your skills and life experiences with others. List who in your community you may be able to share your time and lifetime of experience with, and contact them.
- 6 **TRY SOMETHING NEW**. Is there something you're interested in, but never had the chance? Make it happen.
- 7 **WRITE A NEW BUSINESS CARD** for your retirement e.g. volunteer, artist, traveller, community driver, club member, gardener or mentor.
- 8 **FIND A WAY TO KEEP CONNECTED** with family, new and old friends, and with your community. It's tough finding a new network. Try as many new groups as you can e.g. instead of just reading, join a library. Got an interest, join a club and help out.
- 9 **PLAN TO STIMULATE YOUR BRAIN**. The saying is true, if you don't use it, you lose it.
- 10 **TAKE ACTION ON YOUR PLAN AS SOON AS YOU RETIRE**. Many men will tell you there is a honeymoon period with retirement, often two years before the novelty wears off. If you sit in a chair waiting for it to happen, over time it will erode your confidence making it very hard to pick yourself up.



## You define your retirement experience

**Retirement is a shift away from a working life, but not a shift away from life itself!**

The personal qualities, natural abilities and skills that you developed over your working career don't end just because work has stopped.

Maybe you were competent in mentoring new employees or known as a reliable communicator? Perhaps you have a natural ability to solve problems? Those same feelings of importance, contribution and benefit that you experienced in your job, can also be found in new life experiences.

Finding out where you can put these valuable skills to good use is part of the challenge and reward of this new phase.



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– Peter

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