

“ *Welcome to the unknown –  
how do you prepare for that* ”

Mixed-method analyses of ageing-related  
preparation by 3,450 older Australians.

Diane Hosking, Lindy Orthia and John McCallum

[d.hosking@nationalseniors.com.au](mailto:d.hosking@nationalseniors.com.au)

National Conference Australian Association of Gerontology

Adelaide 24<sup>th</sup> November 2022



**National Seniors**  
AUSTRALIA

# BACKGROUND

Planning and preparing for the future are intrinsic to early and mid-adulthood.

Less the norm amongst older people.

Society's expectation of later life vs younger years?

Later-life encompasses loss and vulnerability: potentially more challenging to contemplate.

Ageing-related preparation definition:

*“The continuum of thoughts and activities about how to age well, often beginning with the awareness of age-related changes, or the anticipation of retirement, and concluding with specifying end-of-life wishes” Sørensen, S et. al. (2021).*

Evidence of positive effects of ageing-related preparation for retirement adjustment, care choices and outcomes and end of life decisions.

Limited knowledge about ageing-related preparation across other aspects of life including health.

# BACKGROUND

Preparation for later life determined by:

- Intrinsic personal characteristics (personality, disposition, cognitive ability, attitudes etc.)
- External factors including cultural norms, social structures, socio-economic status; education; community resources and social policy.

Likelihood and opportunities for preparedness will differ across countries and cultures.

- Most studies of age-related preparation are set in the US, northern Europe with emerging literature from China.
- Australian-specific studies needed to better understand ageing-related preparation in an Australian context.

# METHOD

National Seniors Australia is a not-for-profit advocacy and research organisation for Australians aged 50-plus.

The National Seniors Social Survey is an annual online survey of National Seniors' members and online community.

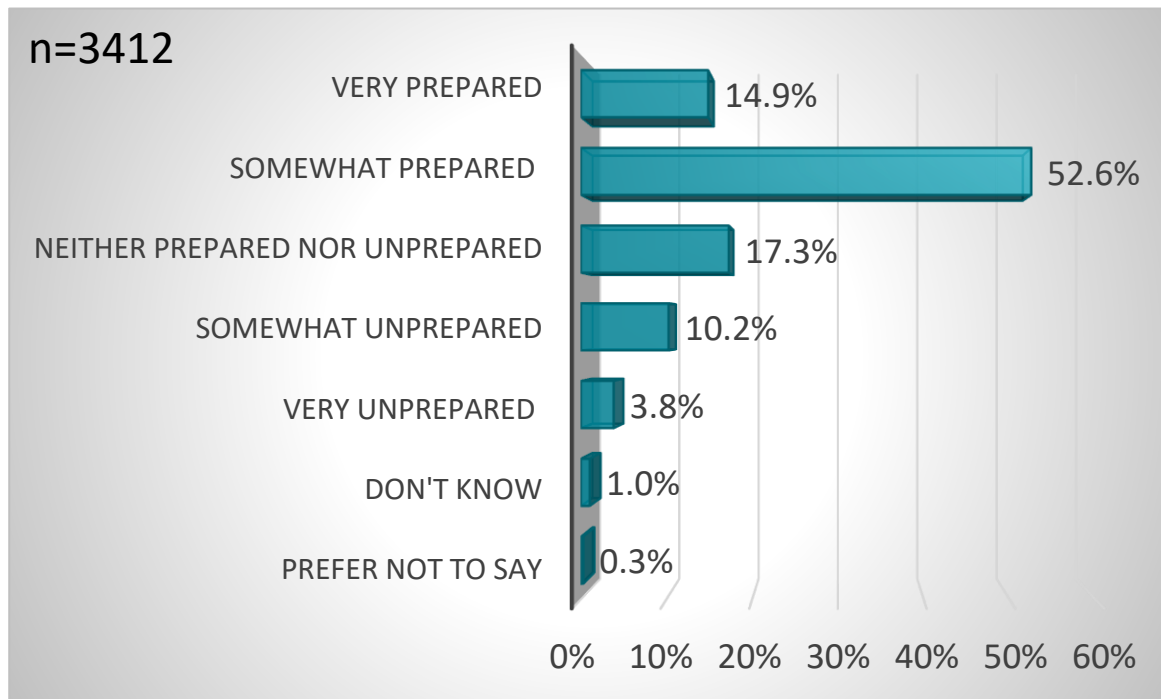
- Open to all Australians 50 years and over.
- Sample of convenience: 4000-6000 responses
- Results used to inform advocacy campaigns and government policy initiatives.
- Survey modules designed by National Seniors researchers and focus on topics relevant to seniors' lifestyle and wellbeing.
- Questions are in point and click format with some text-box options.

The 2022 ageing-related preparation questions were adapted from the United States of Ageing Telephone Survey 2015<sup>#</sup>

<sup>#</sup> <http://www.advancingstates.org/hcbs/article/united-states-aging-survey-2015>

# RESULTS

*Overall, how prepared do you feel for the process of ageing?*



Sixty-eight percent of respondents felt prepared for the process of ageing.

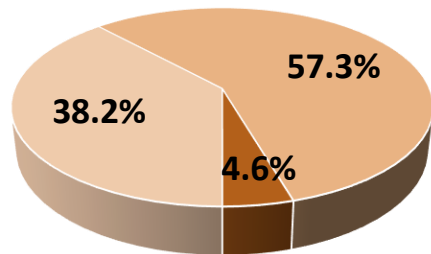
In adjusted logistic regression models:

- Feeling prepared associated with being older, having better self-rated health or greater wealth.
- Feeling neither prepared nor unprepared significantly associated with being younger or having less formal education.
- *(gender, partner status or belonging to a diversity group n/s in models)*

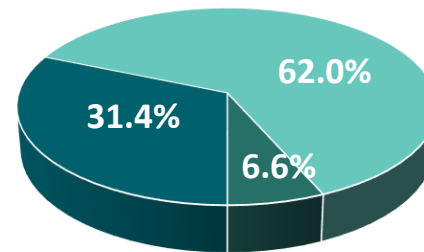
# RESULTS

## *Ageing-related preparation and ageing sentiments*

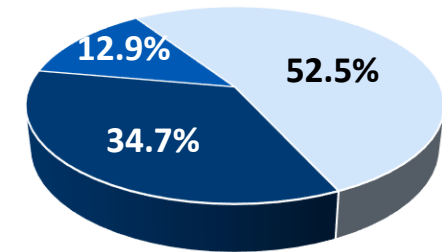
*Do you have any concerns about ageing? (n=3363)*



*Do you feel there are positive aspects to ageing? (n=3401)*



*Quality of life (QoL) change over 5-10 years*



■ No ■ Yes ■ Don't know/prefer not say

■ No ■ Yes ■ Don't know/prefer not say

■ QoL gets better ■ QoL stays the same  
■ QoL gets worse

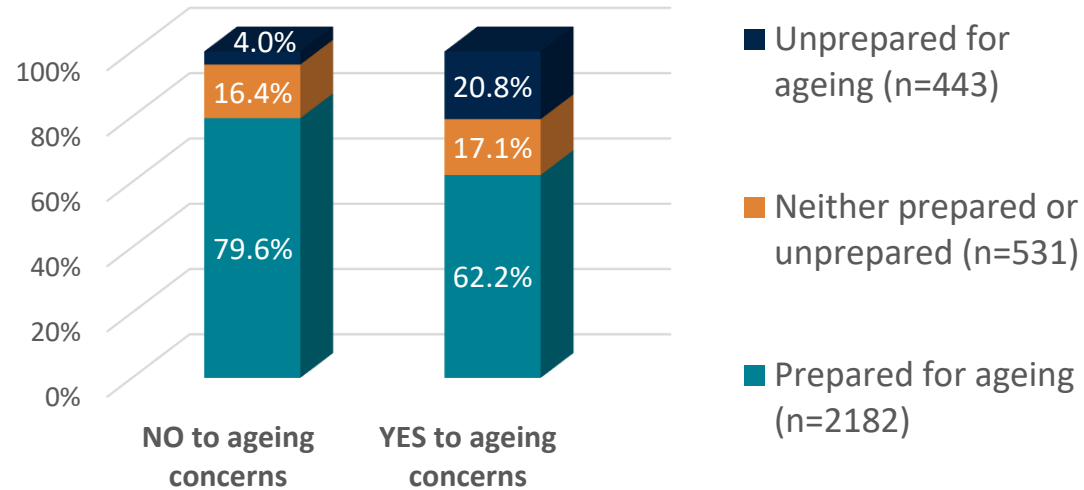
Ageing sentiments: stronger effects than demographics in ageing-related preparation model.

- Having concerns about ageing: 4.3 times greater odds of feeling unprepared.
- Positive aspects to ageing: 3.4 times greater odds of feeling prepared, 53% less likely to be neutral.
- Expected worse quality of life: 20% less likely to feel prepared.

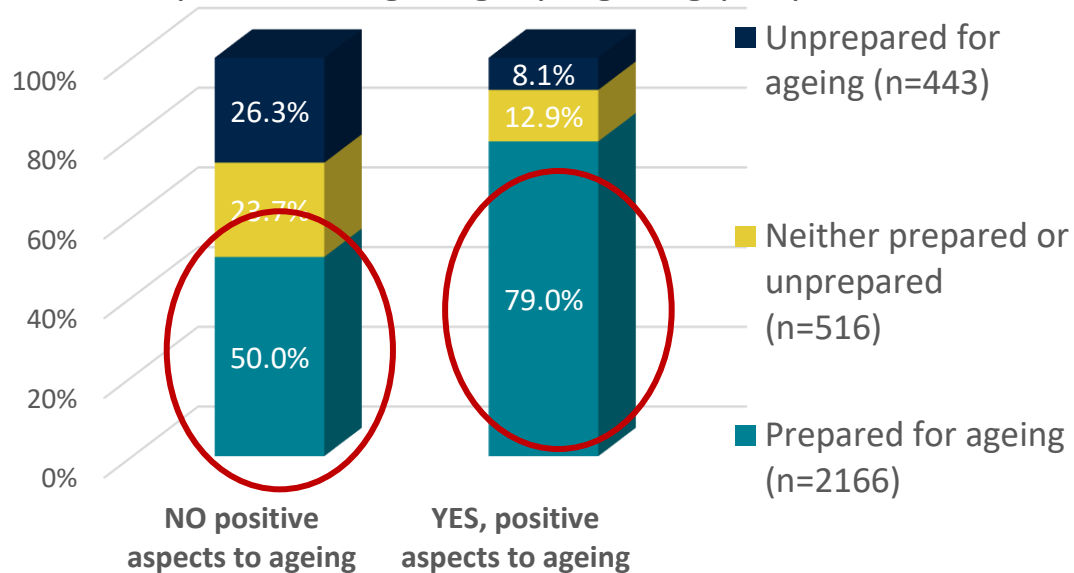


# RESULTS

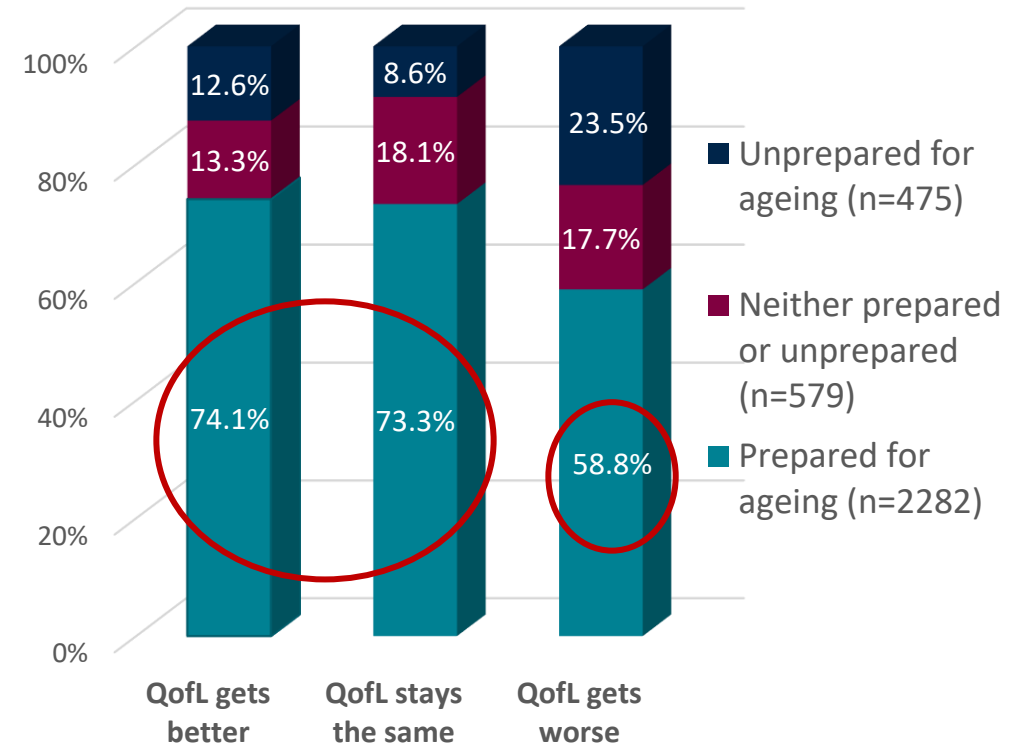
## 1. Ageing concerns by ageing preparation (n=3156)



## 2. Positive aspects of ageing by ageing preparation (n=3125)



## 3. Quality of life expectations by ageing preparation (n=3336)



# QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

*Text responses to “Overall how prepared do you feel for the process of ageing” n=1231*

“We aren’t taught what it means to age. We’re only taught how to stay fit, stay healthy, stay young. Children should be exposed to all ages of life in their education. My school had a day of community service available for one term and it was great”

“How do you prepare for poverty and lack of agency?”

“started preparing years ago”

“Process of Aging is different for everyone as we all have different DNA’s”

“There is always more to learn. Ageing is part of life's process and if you over prepare you will be disappointed. Its have a kinda sort of a plan and modify it as you go. The problem we have is people get a plan and all set on how it will work for them and something happens and they are devastated. People must always realise their life is only on loan and it can can in a split second without them doing anything - then what they knew is no more. Planning needs to be done then be totally flexible “

“I am finding getting older a bit scary as I have had the big bit and what is left is the small bit”

“How can you prepare for Alzheimer’s disease? That stuffs up any plans you may have”

“I am prepared but I don't necessarily like the process”



# QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Significantly higher proportion of people who provided text response felt unprepared (19%) versus prepared (11%) for ageing.

Iterative, inductive thematic analysis identified:

- a. DOMAINS: aspects of life that respondents connected to being prepared for ageing
- b. SCRIPTS: representing a particular narrative, approach, experience and/or attitude to preparedness within a domain

Three largest domains:

- Health and bodily abilities (497)
- Accommodation (227)
- Finances (187)

*Non-preparedness related comments:*

- *philosophical musings on ageing (324);*
- *sources of knowledge about ageing (144)*

Smaller, less coherent domains:

- End of life paperwork and decisions (64)
- Body image and other peoples' attitudes (55)
- Work transitions (45);
- Emotional preparedness (28);
- Wellbeing of others (14).

# QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

*The Domain/Script approach: example comment*

“I am not sure. To be honest it is very scary and we are trying to prepare as much as possible by staying fit and healthy. Also by insuring we have enough money to retire and live independently. We do not want to go into a nursing home ever and want to stay in our own home out on our farm”.

Three different domains are present within one comment; domain-specific scripts are identified that capture preparation sentiment.

Domain: health and bodily abilities

Script: keeping active fit and healthy as long as possible.

Domain: Finances

Script: having enough is an area of concern.

Domain: Accommodation

Script: fear of residential care and desire to age at home.

# QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

## *FOCUS: Health and bodily abilities most prevalent domain*

Health and bodily abilities (497 comments): Scripts	%
I knew ageing would happen, but my health decline is debilitating, and I dislike and fear it	17.3
I know ageing is likely but I'm keeping active, fit and healthy as long as possible	16.5
We can't avoid ageing but I'm preparing aspects of my life to cope with it	14.1
Health is key to good ageing so bad health is a big future fear, but it's hard to plan for	13.9
I was not prepared for the sudden declines or shock changes that occurred in my life	13.9
I'm concerned I don't have supports in place/services are inadequate/money is short	6.3

Health and bodily abilities (497 comments): Scripts	%
Ageing is difficult sometimes, but acceptance of limits and positivity are important	5.2
I have knowledge of ageing from study, work, others' experience or my disability/illness	3.4
My health/body/genes are in good condition (so I'm not thinking/talking about ageing)	3.2
I have the necessary services and supports in place to support my ageing body	2.2
I am/was ignorant of what would happen to my body and how to prepare for ageing	1.8
Miscellaneous/other	2.0

# QUALITATIVE & QUANTITATIVE SYNTHESIS

## Health domain scripts: positive sentiments

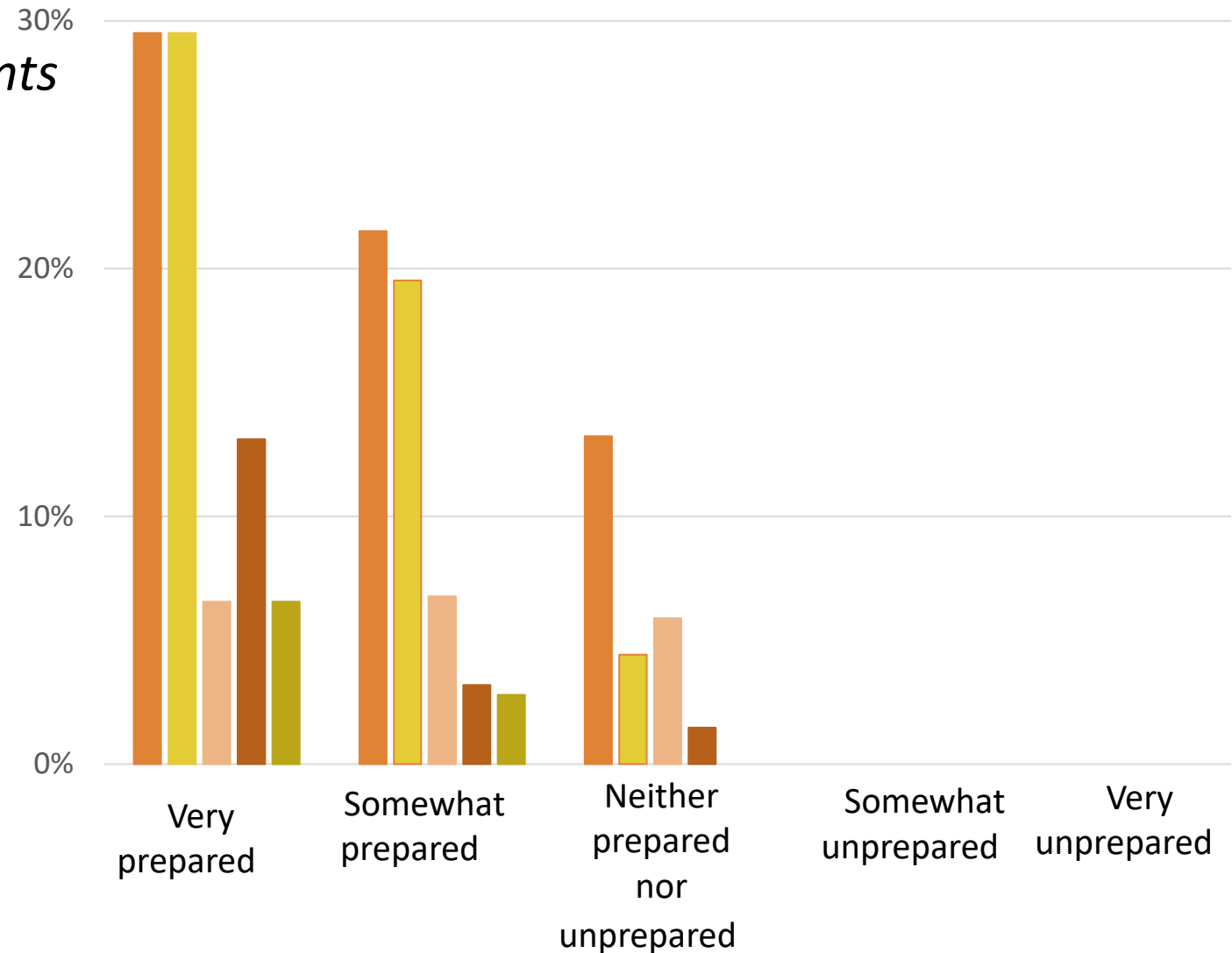
➔ I know ageing is likely but I'm keeping active, fit and healthy as long as possible.

➔ We can't avoid ageing but I'm preparing aspects of my life to cope with it.

➔ Ageing is difficult sometimes, but positivity and acceptance of limits are important.

➔ I have knowledge of ageing from study, work, others' experience or managing my disability/illness.

➔ I have the necessary services and supports in place to support my ageing body.

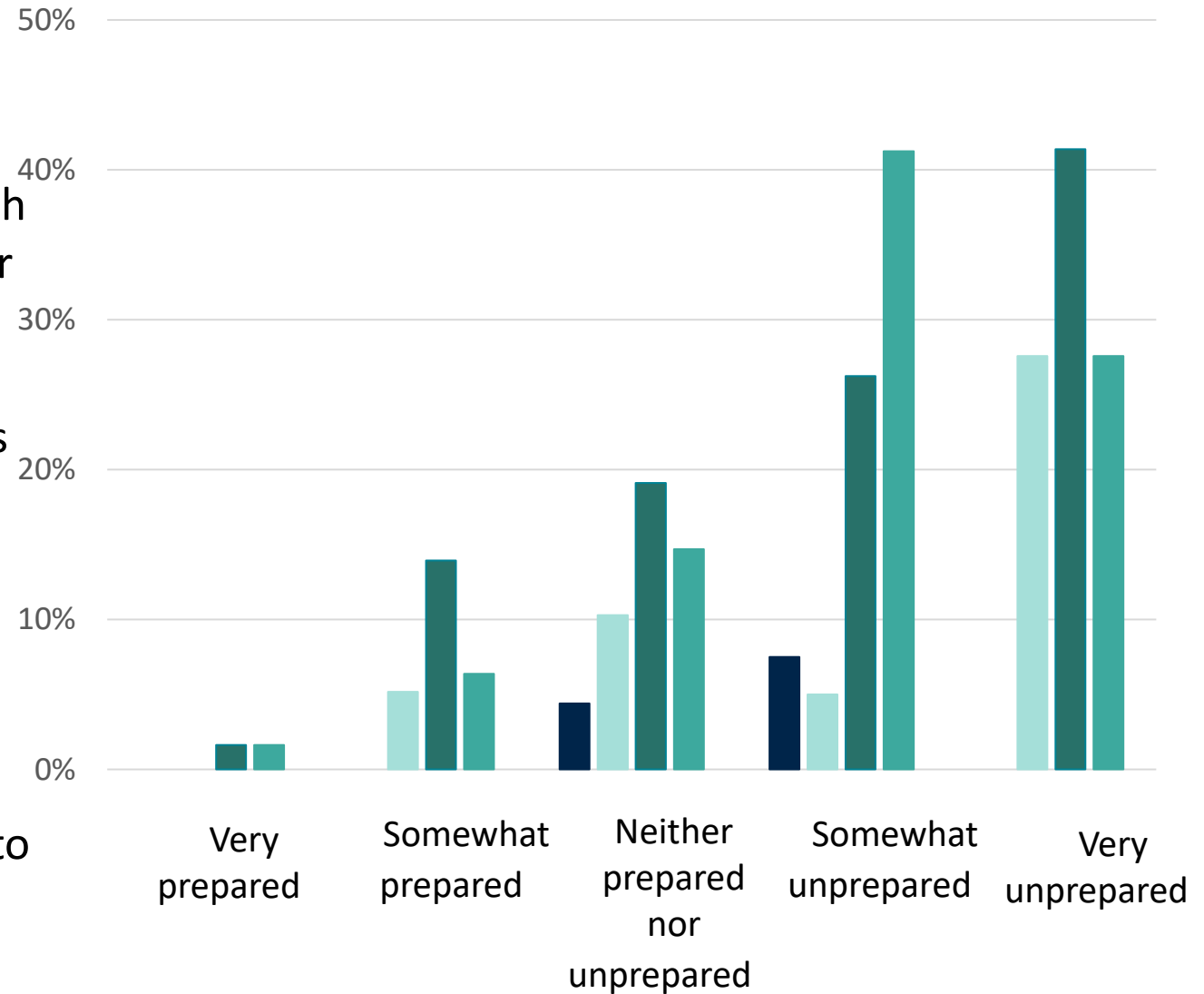


% represents percentage of comments in this response category (very prepared, somewhat prepared, etc) that fit this script

# QUALITATIVE & QUANTITATIVE SYNTHESIS

## Health domain scripts: Negative sentiments

- ➔ I knew ageing would happen, but my health decline is debilitating, and I dislike and fear it.
- ➔ I was not prepared for the sudden declines or shock changes that occurred in my life.
- ➔ I'm concerned I don't have supports in place/services are inadequate/money is short.
- ➔ I am/was ignorant of what would happen to my body and how to prepare for ageing.

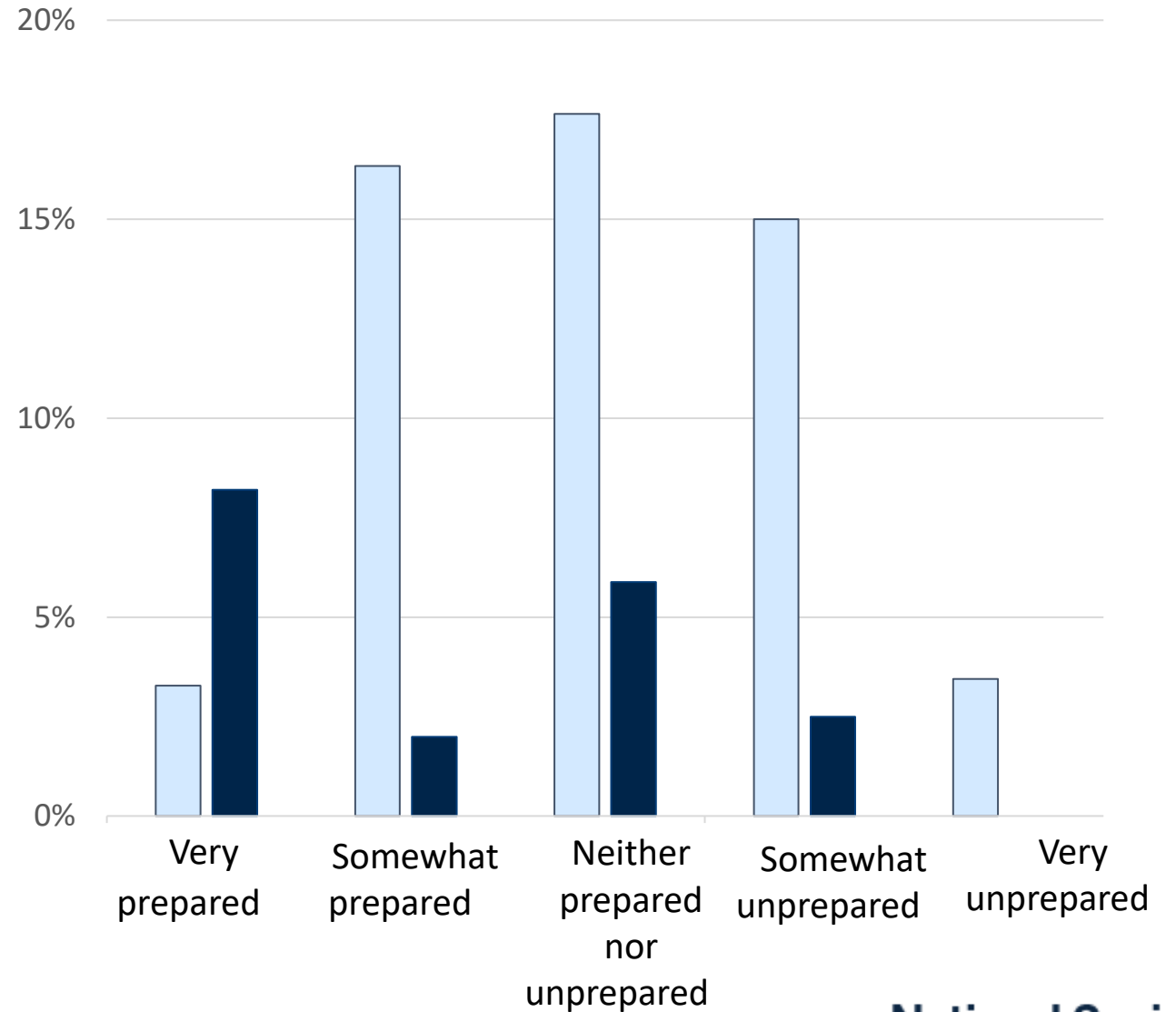


# QUALITATIVE & QUANTITATIVE SYNTHESIS

## *Health domain scripts: Uncertain or disengaged*

➡ Health is key to good ageing so bad health is a big future fear, but it's hard to plan for.

➡ My health/body/genes are in good condition (so I'm not thinking/talking about ageing).



% represents percentage of comments in this response category (very prepared, somewhat prepared, etc) that fit this script



# SUMMARY

Our findings provide snapshot of how prepared older Australians feel for the process of ageing.

- Those who feel prepared likely to be in older and have better self-reported health and wealth.
- Other demographic associations were not significant.

Ageing perceptions were strongly associated with ageing-related preparedness. Expectation that quality of life would get worse also associated with feeling less prepared.

In qualitative analyses, the largest single domain of preparation was 'Health and bodily abilities':

- Comments illuminated why people felt prepared or unprepared
- Domain scripts aligned predictably with quantitative response categories.

# SIGNIFICANCE

For older people healthy ageing is the key to feeling prepared for the future.

Healthy ageing is a challenge:

- Eighty percent of older Australians (aged 65 and over) have at least one chronic disease, 28% have 3 or more.
- For dementia the risk doubles every 5-6 years after age 65.

What would better enable people to plan for a healthier later life?

- Start planning earlier (but ageism an issue).
- Implement social policies and structures to normalize and enable health-related planning specifically for older age.
- Incorporate home care planning into health-related planning.

# National Seniors

AUSTRALIA

[nationalseniors.com.au](http://nationalseniors.com.au)