

MEDIA RELEASE

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Downsizers value spare rooms and will leave neighbourhood for new home

Space remains important to Australian downsizers, with over a half moving to a dwelling with three or more bedrooms and a third moving to an apartment, AHURI research released today finds.

The research, *'Effective downsizing options for older Australians'*, undertaken for AHURI by researchers from Curtin University and Swinburne University of Technology, compares households that downsized with those that haven't to understand who is likely to downsize and why, and where they move to.

According to the report, downsizers are mobile with nearly half moving to new neighbourhoods while the main reasons for downsizing include lifestyle, financial and reduced maintenance burden.

Lead report author Dr Amity James from Curtin's School of Economics, Finance and Property said the research saw downsizing as not so much about moving to a lower value dwelling with a reduced number of bedrooms and on a smaller land area, but about moving to a dwelling that is appropriate for a household at a later stage of life.

"While downsizing may include a reduction in dwelling size, to older Australians it points to a housing aspiration where the internal and outdoors spaces are manageable, and represents a financial benefit," Dr James said.

"Australian governments typically see downsizing, or rightsizing, as a way to use housing stock more efficiently, with downsizers reducing the number of bedrooms in their dwelling freeing up larger dwellings.

"However, most downsizers still want space and regard spare bedrooms as necessary in a dwelling."

Based on the ABS definition of spare bedrooms, which compares usual residents and the number of bedrooms, the AHURI research reveals that, just under two thirds (66 per cent) of older Australians who had downsized still have at least one extra bedroom, as do 73 per cent of older Australians who hadn't downsized.

The most common uses for spare bedrooms are as a room for guests, a home office and as somewhere for children and grandchildren to stay.

Dr James said that as there are huge costs for governments when older Australians move into residential aged care, ensuring affordable, accessible and adaptable housing options for downsizers so they can 'age in place' safely is a key policy concern of governments.

"Among those who had downsized, only 22 per cent remained in the same neighbourhood as their original dwelling," Dr James said.

Other key findings include:

- 26 per cent of the 2422 older Australians (aged 55 and over) surveyed for this research had downsized, although another 29 per cent indicated they might consider doing so.
- 40 per cent of these households said they would be likely to move if there were suitable housing in their preferred locations.
- There was a large variation in the availability of established dwellings that suit the size and tenure aspirations of older Australians.
- In the three states studied as part of the research, South Australia, Western Australia and NSW, the top five local government areas in each state with the greatest proportion of older households were all in regional areas, had very little housing diversity.
- The research proposes incentives for developers to deliver a diverse range of housing options suitable for older Australians, including medium-density housing products, rather than higher-density apartment developments, which are not preferred by most.

The report can be downloaded from the AHURI website at <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/325>

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