



# INEQUALITIES IN HEALTHY LIFE YEARS IN AUSTRALIA

A RESEARCH BRIEF BY THE UNSW AGEING FUTURES INSTITUTE

New analyses of Australian data shows gender and social disparities in years lived free from disability have been maintained, and in some cases widened, over the past two decades.

## BACKGROUND AND CURRENT ISSUE

Australians are living longer than ever before. The extent to which gains in life expectancy comprise years of healthy, independent living has critical implications for the ongoing sustainability of our social welfare and healthcare systems. Improvements in the health and functioning of older adults will also help to maintain their capacity for both paid and unpaid work (including provision of care).

A fundamental question for Australia's ageing population is whether our extra years of life are predominately healthy ones. However, there is limited data examining how improvements in Australian healthspans compare across different socio-demographic groups.

## SUMMARY OF CURRENT RESEARCH

Health expectancies divide life expectancies into periods lived with and without good health. We used nationally representative data to estimate health expectancies for a range of outcomes including (i) limiting long term health conditions, (ii) disability, (iii) self-rated health, and (iv) mental wellbeing. Cohort differences in health expectancies were examined by gender, and markers of socioeconomic status.

Our findings reveal a complex picture of ageing in Australia, highlighting poorer outcomes for women and widening social disparities in years lived with and without disability.

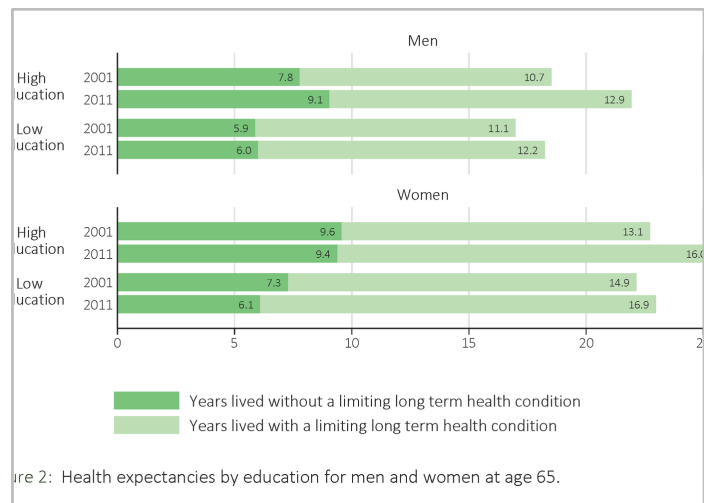
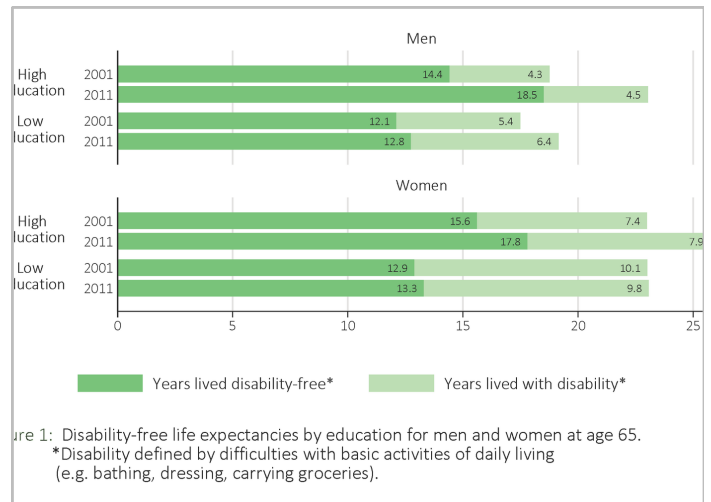
## RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Improvements in health expectancy were predominately observed for men with higher socioeconomic status. A major challenge for public policy is to ensure gains in disability-free life years are maintained, and reductions in the years lived with disability continue, particularly for those with fewer socioeconomic resources.

Interventions intended to improve healthy life years must address social determinants from an early age, and support vulnerable groups in later life, including older women and those who do not own their home.

## REFERENCES

1. Tawiah R, Jagger C, Anstey KJ, Kiely KM. Trends in disability-free life expectancy at age 50 in Australia between 2001 and 2011 by social disadvantage. J Epidemiol Community Health. (2021). DOI: 10.1136/jech-2020-214906



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Kiely is a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Psychology at UNSW. He holds a conjoint appointment with Neuroscience Research Australia (NeuRA).

Dr Kiely's research uses population data to understand lifecourse determinants of healthy longevity.

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