



**Global Centre for
Modern Ageing**

Empowering Older Australians with Better Product Usability

Older consumers told us that products
in the market can be...

Time-wasting
Small Instructions were useless Pain
Complicated Expensive
Heavy Difficult Waste of Money
Didn't help No idea
Frustrating Impossible Very Small
Disappointing Confusing
Difficult to use Bulky
Could not use safely Instructions



Foreword



At the Global Centre for Modern Ageing (GCMA), we are dedicated to unleashing the value of people's lived experience.

As the CEO of the Global Centre for Modern Ageing, I am excited to present the 'Empowering Older Australians with Better Product Usability' report, which explores a critical aspect of modern ageing – the importance of product usability for older consumers.

Australia, like many countries, is witnessing a demographic shift, with the population aged 65 years and over set to increase dramatically over the coming decades. This shift requires a proactive approach to support the sustainability of our economy, and enhance the health, wellbeing, and independence of older Australians.

This report recognises and responds to the evolving needs and preferences of our population living longer, so people can maintain choice and autonomy throughout. Our research explores the real-world implications of design decisions on the daily lives of older Australians, revealing how they interact with, and think about, the products around them.

We've identified that there's a significant gap between industry's belief that products are user-friendly for older consumers and the actual usability challenges faced by older Australians every day.

Through a national survey of more than 1000 Australians aged 65 years and over, we gathered essential data on product usability perspectives, common usability challenges, and product information sources. These findings are crucial for businesses looking to support modern ageing and tap into the substantial buying power of older generations.

In closing, I invite you to explore the insights presented in this report. These findings provide an opportunity for industry to strategically cater to older consumers' needs and preferences, driving innovation, and ensuring business success, while creating products that enrich the lives of older Australians.



Julianne Parkinson

Chief Executive Officer

Global Centre for Modern Ageing



“

With new products for older people, companies should focus more on usability, like easier-to-read labels, user-friendly design, and better ergonomics.

”

Survey respondent

“

My voice assistant is a very useful tool. But I can only use it to a limited extent because it's too difficult to set up all the features that could potentially make my life easier.

”

Survey respondent



Importance of product usability for older consumers

Globally, the population is ageing, with the World Health Organisation forecasting a rise from 1 billion people aged 65 years and over in 2020 to 2.1 billion by 2050, with the number of people aged 80 years and over set to triple¹.

Australia mirrors this trend, with the 65 years and over demographic expected to increase from 3.7 million in 2016 to more than 10 million by 2066². The team at the Global Centre for Modern Ageing (GCMA) believes this demographic shift brings opportunities and challenges, highlighting the need for a proactive approach from government, industry and the private sector to support the sustainability of the economy, and the health, wellbeing and independence of Australians as they age.

The longevity economy recognises older adults as a diverse and active consumer group, currently valued at more than US\$7 trillion in the United States alone and expected to increase to US\$13.5 trillion by 2032. It reflects the growing economic activities associated with products and services for older adults³, spanning various sectors including technology, healthcare, lifestyle, tourism, education and training. The longevity economy presents a significant opportunity for business to innovate and tailor products and services for this powerful global consumer market.

The GCMA recognises the potential within this demographic shift, viewing modern ageing as an opportunity to enhance the wellbeing and independence of older adults and foster their active participation and empowerment within society.

1 [World Health Organisation](#). (2022). Ageing and health.

2 [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#). (2023). Older Australians.

3 Scott, A.J. (2021). [The longevity Economy](#). *The Lancet*.



One of the GCMA's core competencies is researching the usability of everyday products and assistive technologies for older people. Using living labs processes and co-design with older populations, the GCMA has identified significant usability gaps in products for this demographic.

Older adults, like everybody else, are part of a broader product ecosystem, interacting with a wide range of products in their daily routines from coffee machines and can openers, to smartphones, ovens, blood pressure devices and walking sticks. This product ecosystem plays a significant role in making our environments accessible and routines, possible, especially as we get older.

With age, our abilities change, turning previously overlooked products into essential tools that support our independence and quality of life.

To deepen the understanding of older consumers' product usability experiences, the GCMA conducted a nationwide survey of more than 1000 Australians aged 65 years and over.

The aim of the research was to understand older consumer:

- Product usability perspectives.
- Primary sources of product information.
- Usability challenges encountered.

This research is key for innovative businesses aiming to engage with the modern ageing trend and older adults seeking user-friendly products that support their lifestyle and independence.

Key Findings

Finding: **Older consumers are seeking user-friendly products to use in their daily lives.**



93% of respondents believe that product usability supports independent living.



Yet more than half of the survey respondents believe products are not user-friendly.



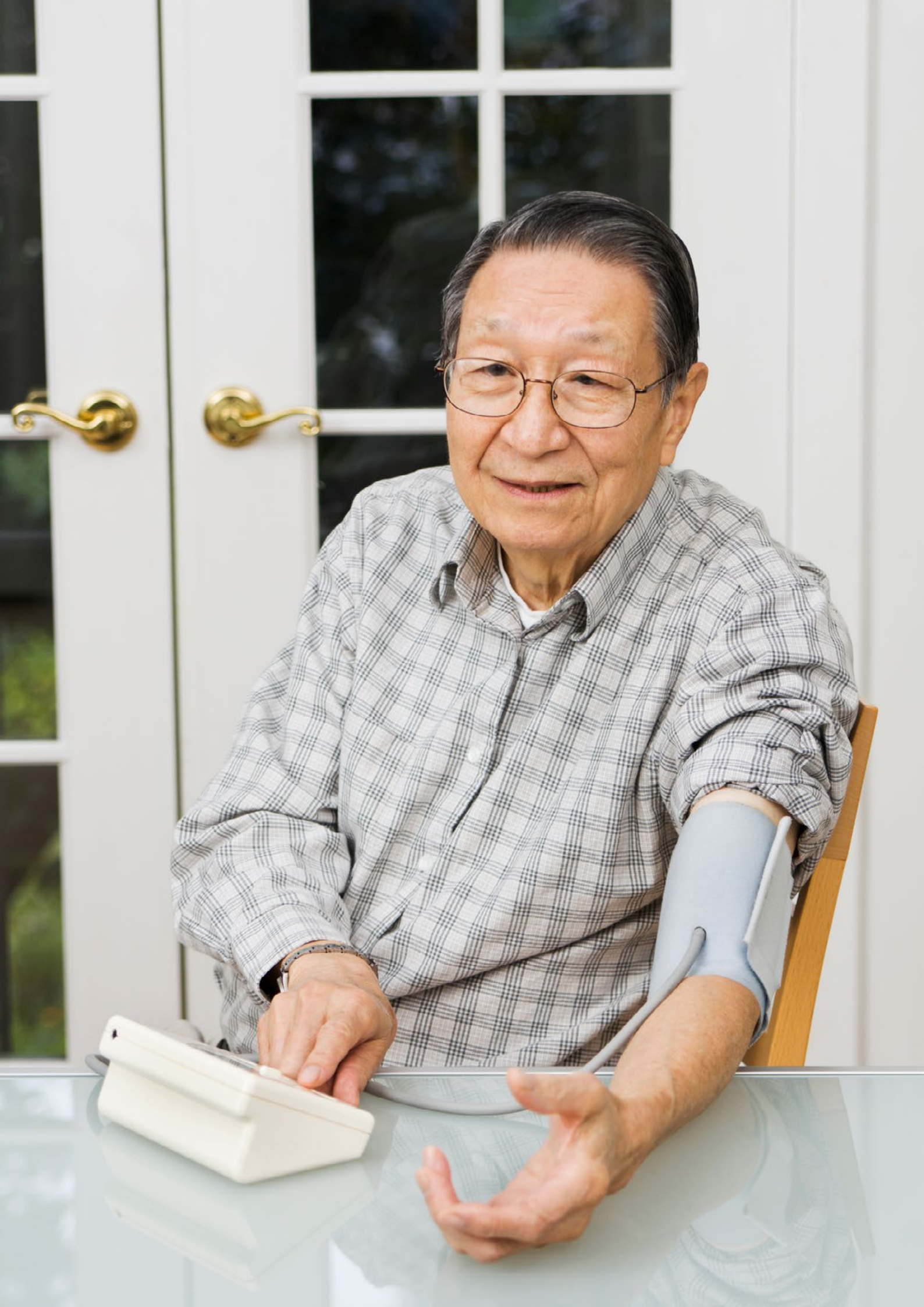
43% rarely or never seek assistance or request the adaptation of purchased products even when dissatisfied with product usability.

Opportunity for industry: **Untapped Potential**



The research indicates that although 93% of survey respondents recognise that usable everyday and assistive technology supports independent living, more than half report that products are not user-friendly. This highlights a gap between recognising usability's value and the market availability of user-friendly products or customisations tailored to the specific needs and preferences of older consumers.

Additionally, there is an increase in leisure spending within this demographic, motivated by their desire for meaningful experiences in later life. This emerging trend further highlights the growing market potential for products and services that are easy-to-use and meet the needs of older adults, presenting a valuable opportunity for industries and businesses to connect more effectively with this expanding consumer segment.



Key Findings

Finding: **There is a gap in the market where the needs of older consumers are overlooked.**



More than half of the survey respondents initially find it difficult to understand the functionality of new products.



81% of respondents feel that product designers and manufacturers overlook their needs.



Unpacking Usability – Diverse dimensions for older consumers

Small Fonts

49% of respondents have trouble reading small text, making products harder to use.

Grip Issues

76% of respondents struggle with hard-to-hold parts like slippery handles and tight lids.



Unpacking

77% of respondents find it challenging to open product packaging.

Confusing Instructions

66% of respondents find product manuals difficult to understand.

Key Findings

Finding: **Older consumers seek guidance before purchasing products.**



More than half of the survey respondents always read online reviews before purchasing products.



74% of respondents want age-friendliness information for products in their demographic.



72% of respondents said online product reviews categorised by reviewer demographics including age, would be beneficial.



Opportunity for industry: **Purchasing Behaviour and Information Gathering**

The research indicates that older consumers increasingly rely on online reviews before making product purchases, with more than half of the respondents engaging in this practice. However, the relevance of these reviews can be limited, as the specific needs and preferences of older consumers are frequently not addressed in general consumer product reviews.

An example of this is product grip – a critical feature that may not be as important for other consumers when rating and reviewing products. Yet, for older consumers, ergonomic design and ease of grip are key factors in their purchasing decisions.



Older consumers' key product usability challenges

GCMA research has identified eight common challenges experienced by older consumers when using everyday products and assistive technology:



Complicated Technology

Various electronic devices, including smart TVs, smartphones, laptops, and kitchen appliances, are often cited as challenging to use due to complex features, small buttons, and unclear instructions.

Opening Mechanisms

Jars, bottles, cans, and blister packs are frequently mentioned as challenging to open, often requiring additional tools or assistance.

Weight and Handling

Heavy or cumbersome products, such as vacuum cleaners, kitchen appliances, and suitcases, can be difficult to use and or carry.

Small Print

Difficulty reading the small print on labels, instruction manuals, and product packaging is a common concern, especially for those with low vision.

Safety

Safety concerns are highlighted, including difficulties in safely using products such as power tools, ladders, and certain kitchen gadgets.

Remotes & Interfaces

Difficulty using remote controls for devices like TVs and air conditioners were highlighted, especially when navigating menus and functions.

Inadequate Instructions

Challenges with poorly written, inadequate, or confusing product instructions, making set up and operation challenging.

Connectivity and Compatibility

Issues connecting electronic devices like printers, cameras, and Bluetooth devices to other devices or networks.

About the Research

Aim

The aim of the 'Empowering Older Australians with Better Product Usability' research was to understand older consumer:

- Product usability perspectives.
 - Primary sources of product information.
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Methodology

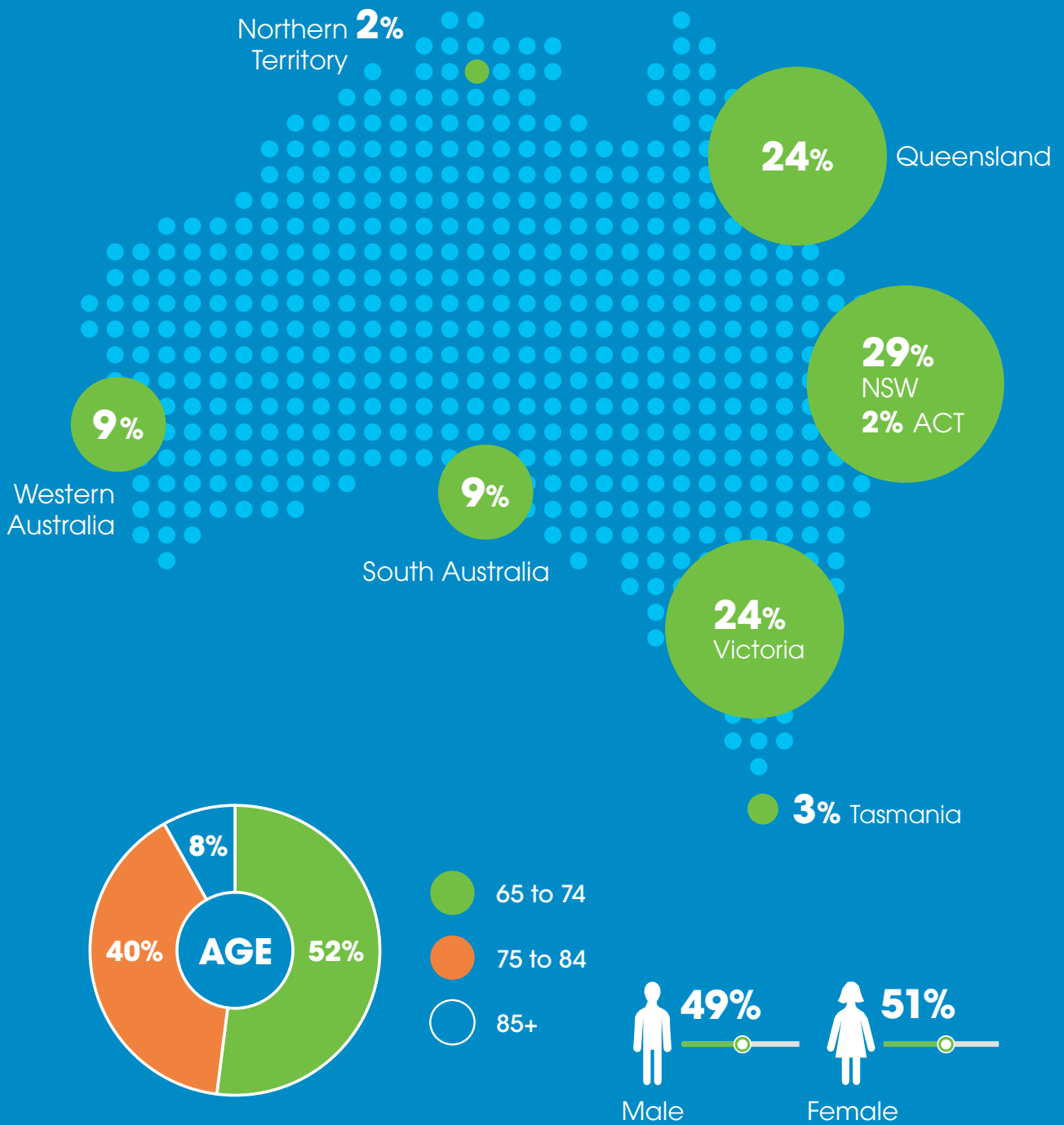
Through a national online survey featuring 28 questions managed by an online panel provider, the Global Centre for Modern Ageing sought insights from 1023 Australians aged 65 years and over.

Questions about the Research

Questions about the 'Empowering Older Australians with Better Product Usability' research can be directed to the Global Centre for Modern Ageing.

Please email: info@gcma.net.au or call +61 8 6117 5510.

The sample



This sample was self-selected. Respondents were recruited via an online panel provider.



About the GCMA

The Global Centre for Modern Ageing (GCMA) serves as a leading response to the international ageing phenomenon.

Modern ageing sparks an inclusive future that engages people throughout the whole of life's course to participate and belong in the ways they value.

The Global Centre for Modern Ageing provides world class research, advisory, advocacy and living lab services for governments, businesses and organisations. Our evidence-based insights inform improvements to the development of products, services and solutions, and to understand the challenges and opportunities presented by the changing demographic landscape.

The GCMA is a not-for-profit organisation that provides national and global clients with an independent, specialist and internationally acclaimed service offering.

Led by CEO Julianne Parkinson, the GCMA and its LifeLab® network includes a product and technology testing environment facilitating user co-design, located in South Australia's Tonsley Innovation District.

gcma.net.au



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