

# Growing up and growing old – exploring baby boomer identity and expectations

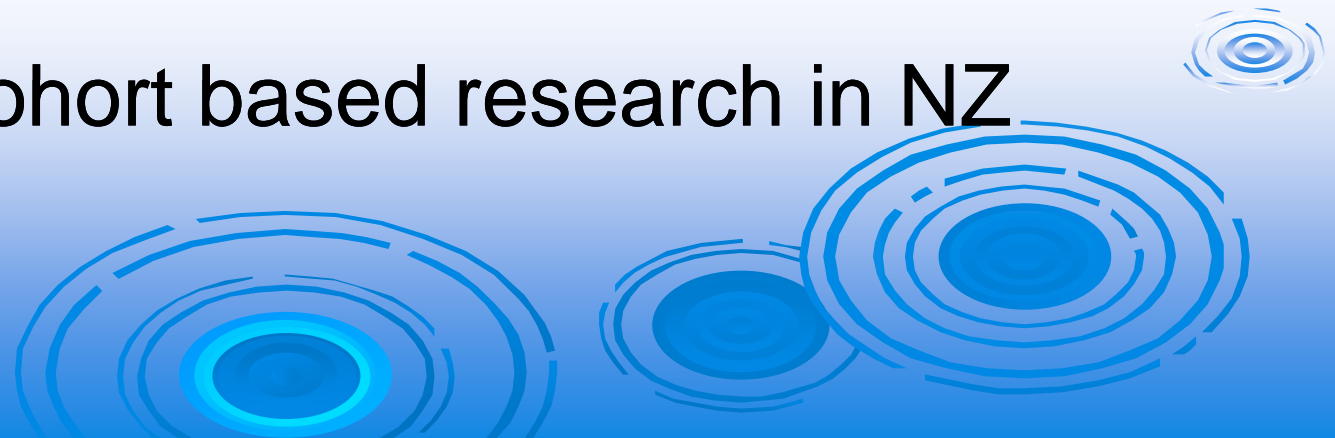
2009 NZAG & ACNZ conference: Kathy Glasgow

# Overview


- Background to research
- Context
- The focus groups
- Key findings
- Discussion & Implications

# The Boomers

- Born 1946-1965
- Currently aged between 44 & 63 years
- Approx 1.125 million NZ boomers
- Assumptions that boomers will behave differently to current generations of older people
- But little cohort based research in NZ

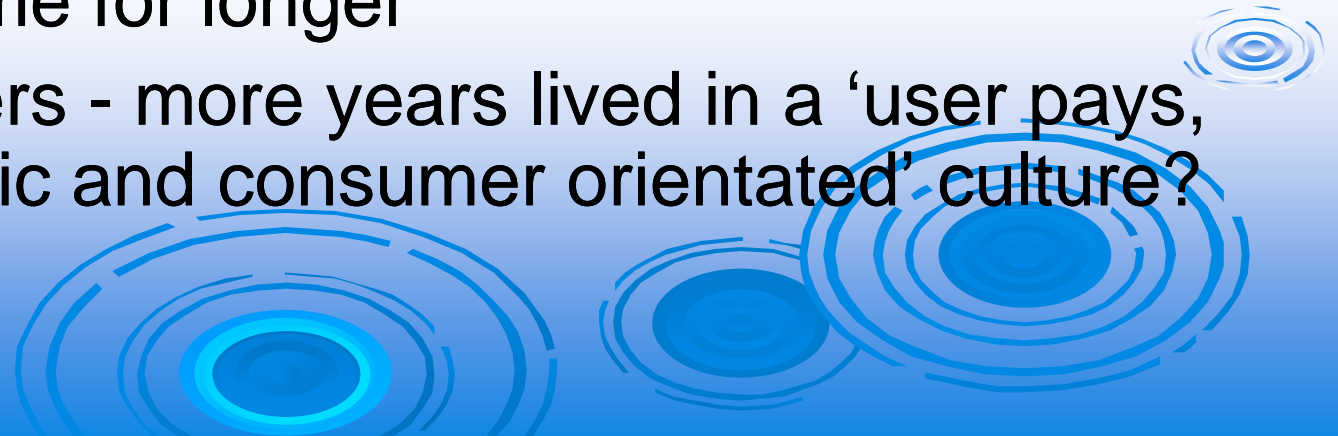


# NZ boomers compared to parents

- Higher level of education
  - More mobile
  - Married later and had fewer children
  - More never married, higher rate of marriage break up and remarriage
  - More diverse family structures - blended and beanpole
  - Generally healthier but rising levels of obesity and diabetes; unclear if more years will be lived with disability
  - Increased female labourforce participation, decreased male workforce participation, more self employed, more part time
  - More likely to continue working later in life
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# Early versus late boomers

- Early boomers had more 'traditional' pathway re marriage, children, home ownership and empty nest experiences
- Early boomers benefited from family friendly housing & social policies
- Late boomers are a larger sub-cohort
- Late boomers had fewer children but they are living at home for longer
- Late boomers - more years lived in a 'user pays, individualistic and consumer orientated' culture?



# Context as boomers age

- More diversity of employment and more diversity of incomes – with sub-cohorts who have experienced lower incomes as a result of labour market changes (Callister, 2006)
- Ongoing impact of earlier work history and life circumstances on plans for retirement (Davey, 2008; Glasgow 2009)
- Part time work increasingly being used as a transition to retirement (Callister, 2006)
- Expectations of work & retirement shifting (Davey, 2007)



# Context – Societal change

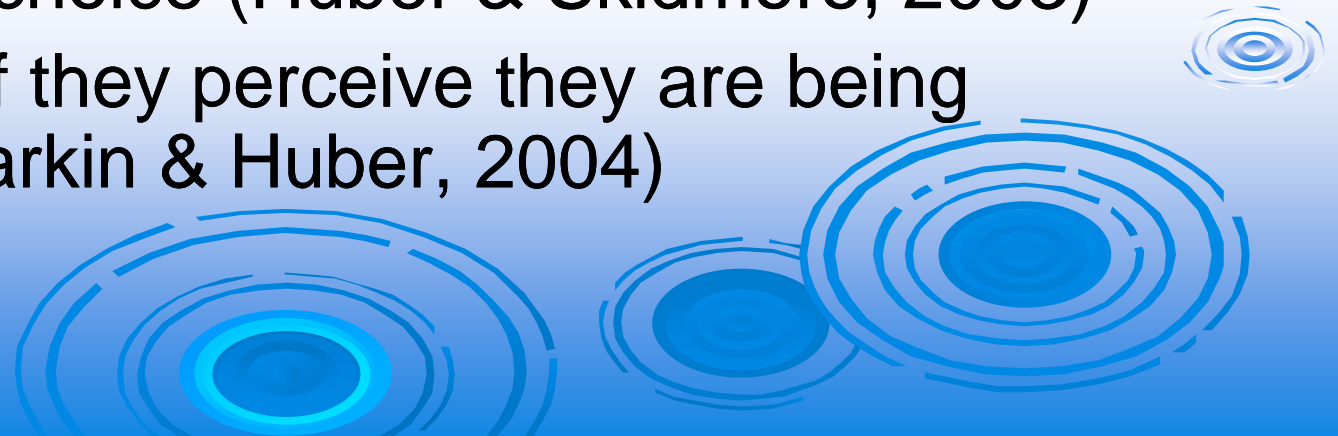
Drivers of value change include: (Davies et al, 2001)

- Increasing social freedom & choice
- Greater level of education
- Increased detachment from politics & institutions
- Growth of individualism
- ‘Decline’ of the family
- Increased influence of the media
- Increased international awareness
- Declining national identity



# International Research

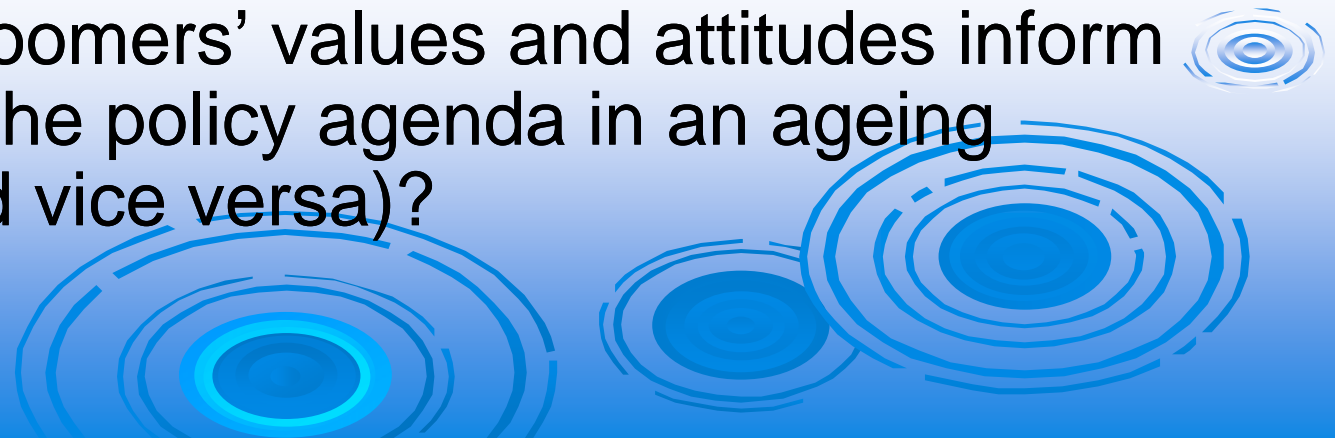
- Boomers distinct history and diverse characteristics may bring change to cycles of learning, caring, work and leisure (Huber & Skidmore, 2003)
- Will behave in very different ways in late life (HSBC, 2005, Quine, Bernard & Kendig, 2006)
- Boomers non-conformist, individualistic, value freedom of choice (Huber & Skidmore, 2003)
- May resist if they perceive they are being coerced (Harkin & Huber, 2004)



# Background

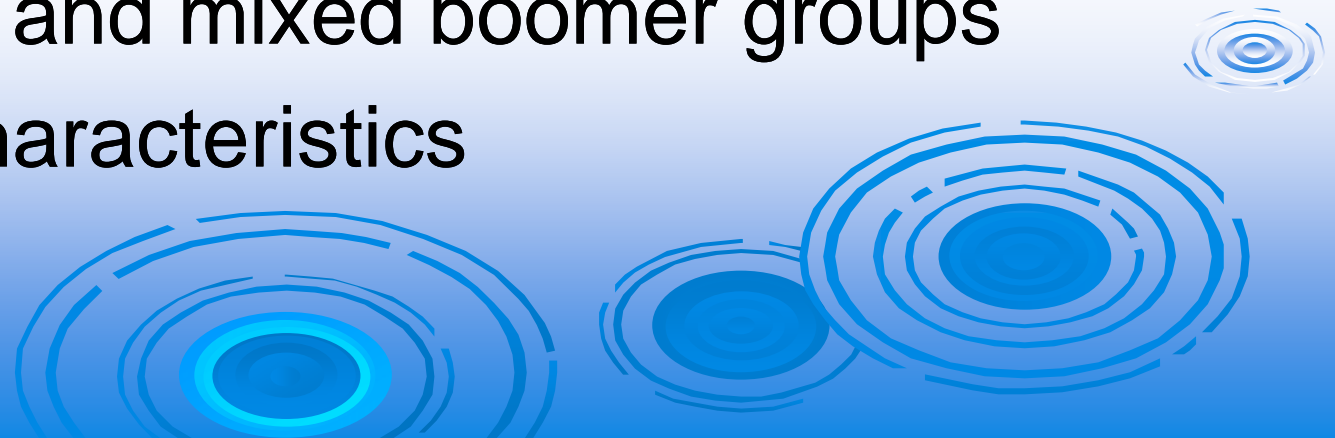
PhD research – *A new old age?*

- What kinds of expectations do boomers have about their life in older age?
- What attitudes and underlying values contribute to boomers' expectations?
- How congruent are boomers' values and expectations with current policy paradigms?
- How may boomers' values and attitudes inform and shape the policy agenda in an ageing society (and vice versa)?



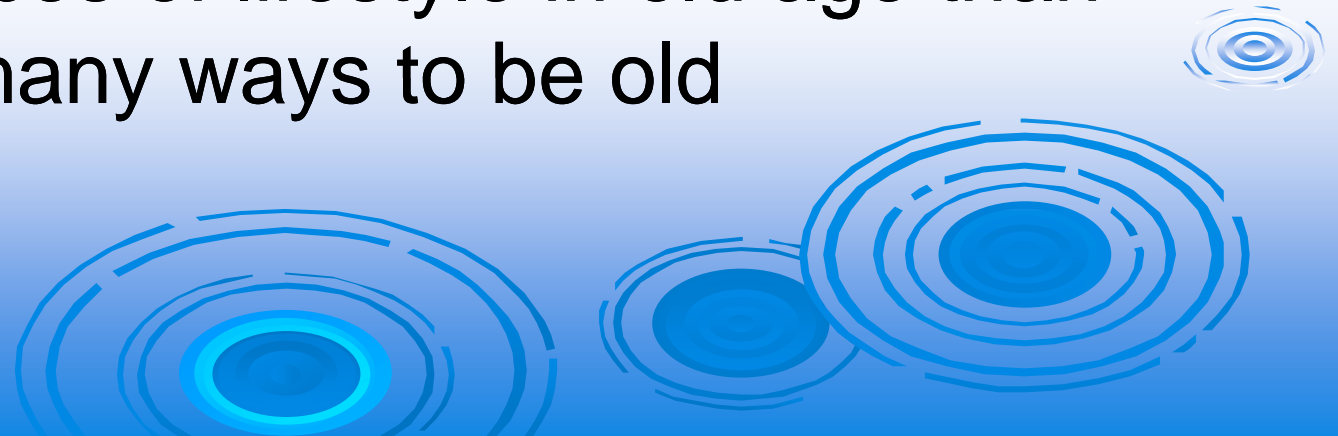
# Research Method

- Exploratory qualitative research
- 11 focus groups
- 65 boomers, aged 42 – 63
- Urban and semi-rural settings
- Male, female and mixed gender groups
- Early, late and mixed boomer groups
- Diverse characteristics



# Boomers view of old age

- 'Old age' now over seventy - but only loosely related to age
- 'Old age' defined by attitude, behaviour appearance, and strength
- 'Old age' relative to context and culture
- More choices of lifestyle in old age than before – many ways to be old



# Expectations of own old age

- Expect to age differently to parents
- Expect to be healthier and more active
- Expect to work longer and transition to retirement
- Expect to be able to choose to participate in paid or unpaid work
- Optimistic about own ability to choose lifestyle, but aware of ageism



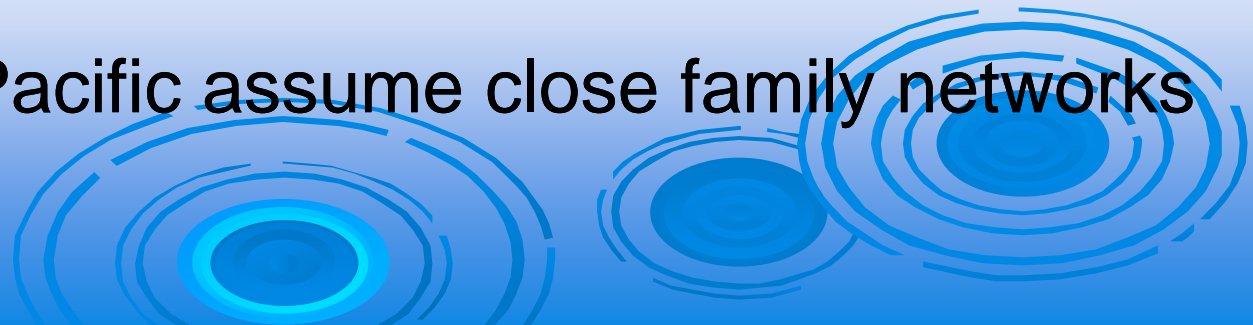
# View of self growing older

- Do not welcome physical changes
- Fear: losing their independence through reduced health, loss of work and income; being patronised
- Look forward to: more time to do the things they enjoy; less and better work; changing family responsibilities; reduced pressure to conform
- Anticipate opportunities to 'give back' to others



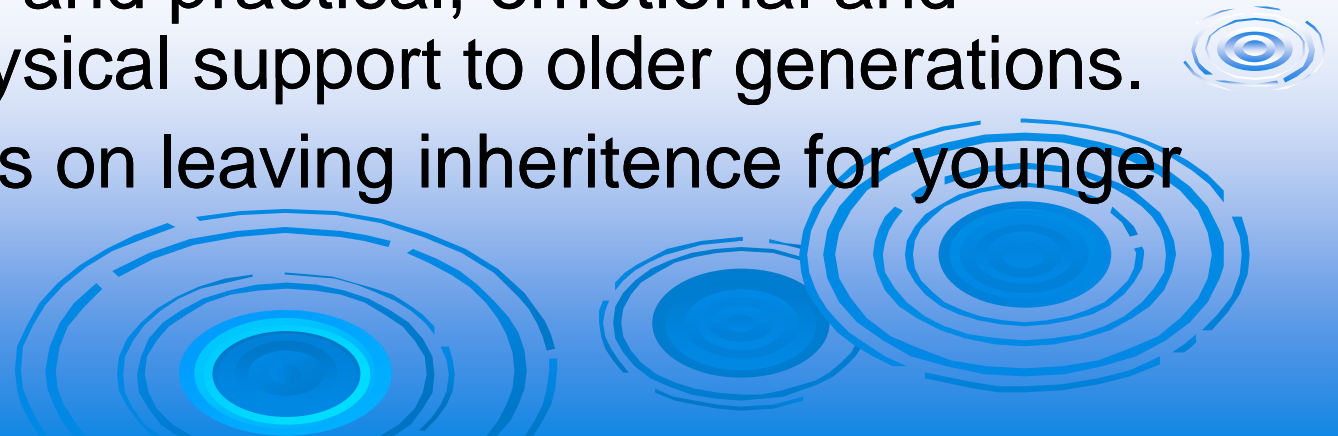
# Anticipated lifestyle

- Satisfying balance of paid and unpaid work, leisure and family based activities
- Active lifestyle, including some travel (less international travel, more NZ based)
- Simplified and more sustainable living with strong sense of community desired
- Coastal, semi-rural or communal city living
- Desire autonomy with proximity to friends, and family visits
- Maori and Pacific assume close family networks



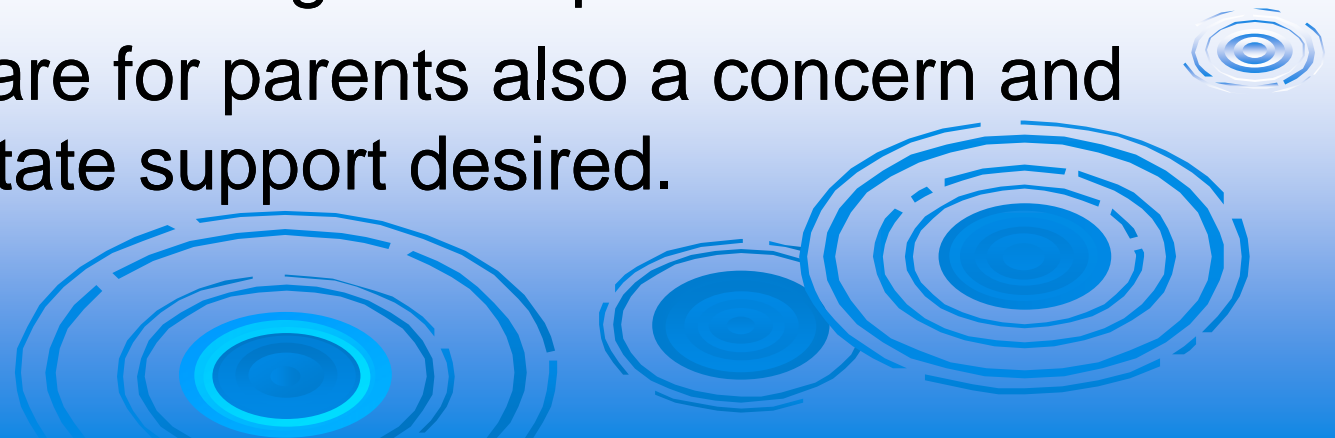
# Anticipated family support

- Most wish to 'avoid burdening' family but hope to receive social/emotional support
- Physical and financial support from family was generally not expected nor desired. Alternative support anticipated from friends, partners and formal support services.
- Expected to provide financial support to younger generations and practical, emotional and perhaps physical support to older generations.
- Varied views on leaving inheritance for younger generations



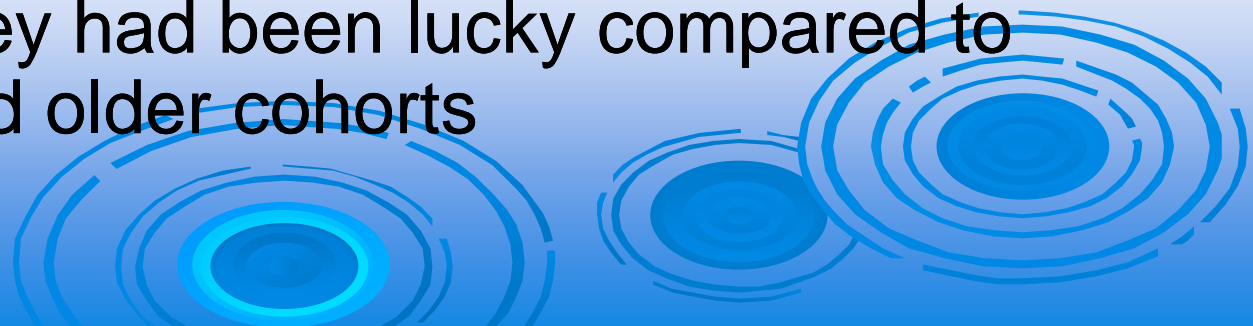
# Expectations of State support

- Low level of confidence in support from the State
- Access to a state pension seen as a citizens right, but reduced access anticipated in own lifetime
- Access to comprehensive health care an immediate and future area of concern, and a potential focus for organised protest
- Quality of care for parents also a concern and increased state support desired.



# View of selves as boomers

- Sense of shared identity as baby boomers
- View boomers as non-conformist, less deferential, anti-establishment
- View selves as pioneers and change agents
- Confident in their ability to advocate for change
- Younger boomers see selves as more self indulgent than older boomers
- Older boomers see selves as more radical
- Most felt they had been lucky compared to younger and older cohorts



# Perceived influences

- Protest marches in the 60s & student radicals
- Womens liberation                      Access to childcare
- Flower power                              JFK
- Vietnam war                                Man on the moon
- Music    Emigrating
- Springbok tour                              Dawn raids
- Muldoon's 'think big'                      Threat of nuclear war
- Parents experiences of war & the Depression
- TV, Computers                                Media & marketing
- Global travel                                 Free education

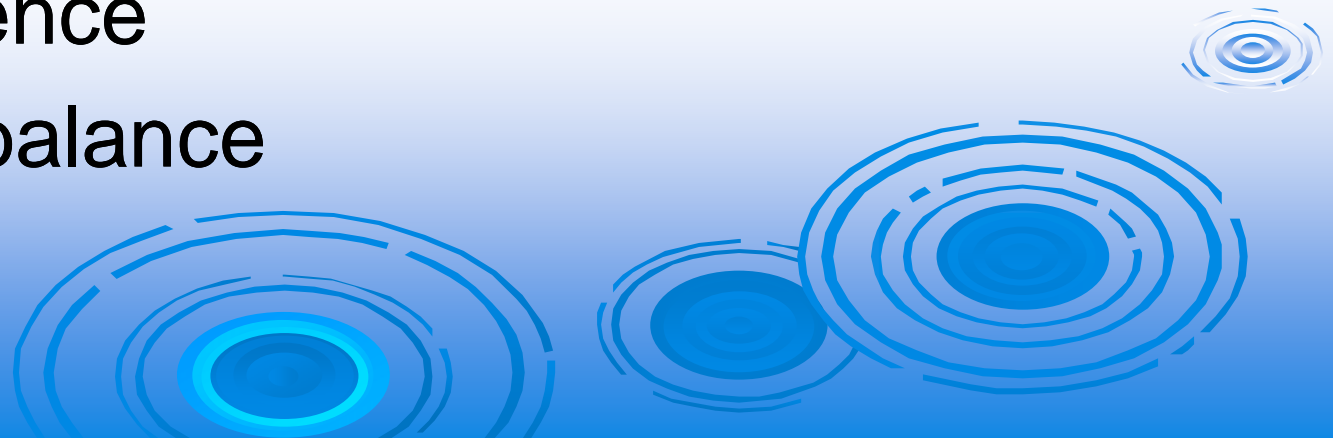
# Attitudes

- Appreciative of parents efforts and nostalgic for simpler society of their childhood
- Critical of consumerist society
- Sense of responsibility and 'rights based' entitlement – aim to support selves but expect the State to help those in need of help
- Commonly feel poorly prepared financially
- Determined to maintain autonomy and choices
- Concerned about quality of care and global eco-political issues



# Values identified

- Autonomy
- Choice
- Equity
- Reciprocity
- Responsibility
- Independence
- Work-life balance



# Initial conclusions

These boomers:

Have high expectations for their own active and healthy ageing

Don't expect to stop contributing but plan to do so on their own terms

Are interested in new forms of work, flexible lifestyles and supportive living arrangements

Have a strong work ethic but desire work/life balance



# Initial conclusions 2

- Many articulated and appeared to have internalised common discourses about boomers
- Some ingredients for collective action are present but no clear set of common demands
- These boomers feel a moral responsibility to support older and younger generations – contrary to portrayals of them as selfish
- Their 'rights' based expectations could lead to conflict where there is significant social policy change



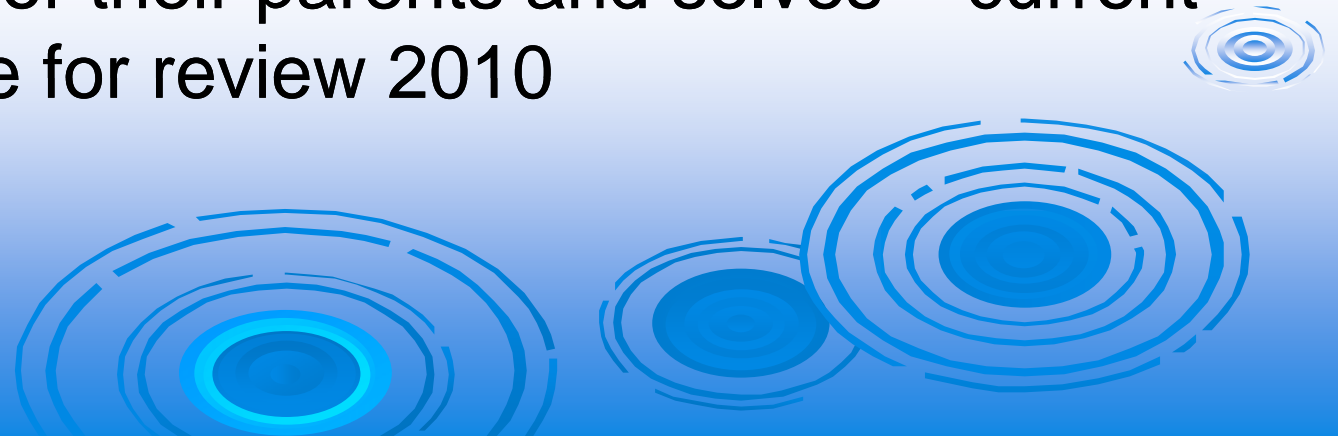
# Initial conclusions 3

- Boomer support networks appear likely to be more diverse – strengths and weaknesses of networks need to be considered in policy
- There is potential for boomers to contribute through voluntary work – though the nature of that volunteering may change (e.g. eco-politics)
- Boomers may be signalling changing attitudes to consumerist society




# Policy Issues

- Flexible working conditions need to support boomers desire to work, with choices maximised
- Current retirement policy working well
- Financial planning opportunities relevant to boomers life stage and values still needed
- Health care and support – boomers are concerned for their parents and selves – current strategy due for review 2010



# Policy issues 2

- Housing – potential for eco-village development and cooperative housing, apartments and communities
  - Individualised support will be important
  - Policy will need to work with boomer's values, attitudes and circumstances
  - Policy promoting productive ageing needs to incorporate concept of work-life balance
  - Participatory policy development needed
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# Policy issues 3

- Room for further research on cohort values and expectations, including comparative research
- Need for additional indicators of social change, including how older age may be reconstructed as boomers age

