

# MATeS

Sex, fertility and contraceptive use in middle-aged and older Australian men

## **MATeS explained**

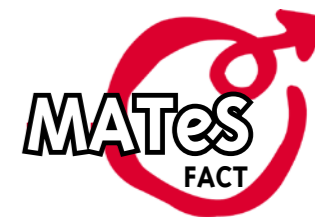
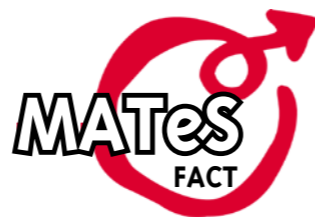
The Men in Australia, Telephone Survey (MATeS) was commissioned by Andrology Australia to collect information on self-reported prevalence rates, health behaviours, attitudes and concerns of middle-aged and older Australian men on broad aspects of men's health and well-being, including sexual and reproductive health. From a total of 7636 randomly selected households from across Australia with an eligible male (aged 40 years and over in permanent residence), 5990 men (78%) agreed to participate in a 20-minute telephone interview.

## How sexually active are Australian men?

**MATeS FACT: Overall, about 78% of men aged 40 years and older had been sexually active in the 12 months prior to the interview.**

- Of these sexually active men:
  - 93% had a regular partner
  - 4% had casual partners
  - 3% had both regular and casual partners.
- 40% of men aged over 40 years want more sex than they are currently having.
- Men over 40 years would like on average to have sex twice a week.

While sexual and reproductive health issues are almost exclusively explored in the context of women's health, or HIV/AIDS research, MATeS provides a unique perspective on the sexual behaviours of middle-aged and older Australian men.




## Are older men sexually active?

**MATeS FACT: More than one third (37%) of men aged over 70 years are still having sex.**

- About a quarter of men over 70 years want more sex than they are currently having.
- Over half of men aged over 70 years reported less interest in sex than in the previous 6 months.
- Although the frequency and desire for sex changed with age, sexual physical pleasure with a partner was the same as for younger men.

Many older men remain sexually active and continue to have physically satisfying sexual relationships. This fact needs to be considered in the planning of retirement accommodation for older people.

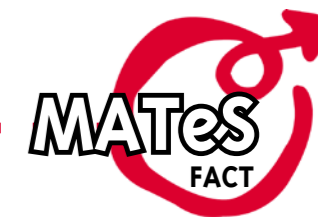
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- Sexual activity continues into older age with many men maintaining satisfactory sexual relationships.

## How common is the use of commercial sex services?

**MATeS FACT: 14% of men had used commercial sex services in their lifetime.**

- On average, men who used commercial sex services in the last 12 months, paid for sex about 4 times per year.
- Of those men using commercial sex services in the past 12 months, 14% have a regular sexual partner.

Commercial sex services may in part help men without a regular partner for sexual activity.

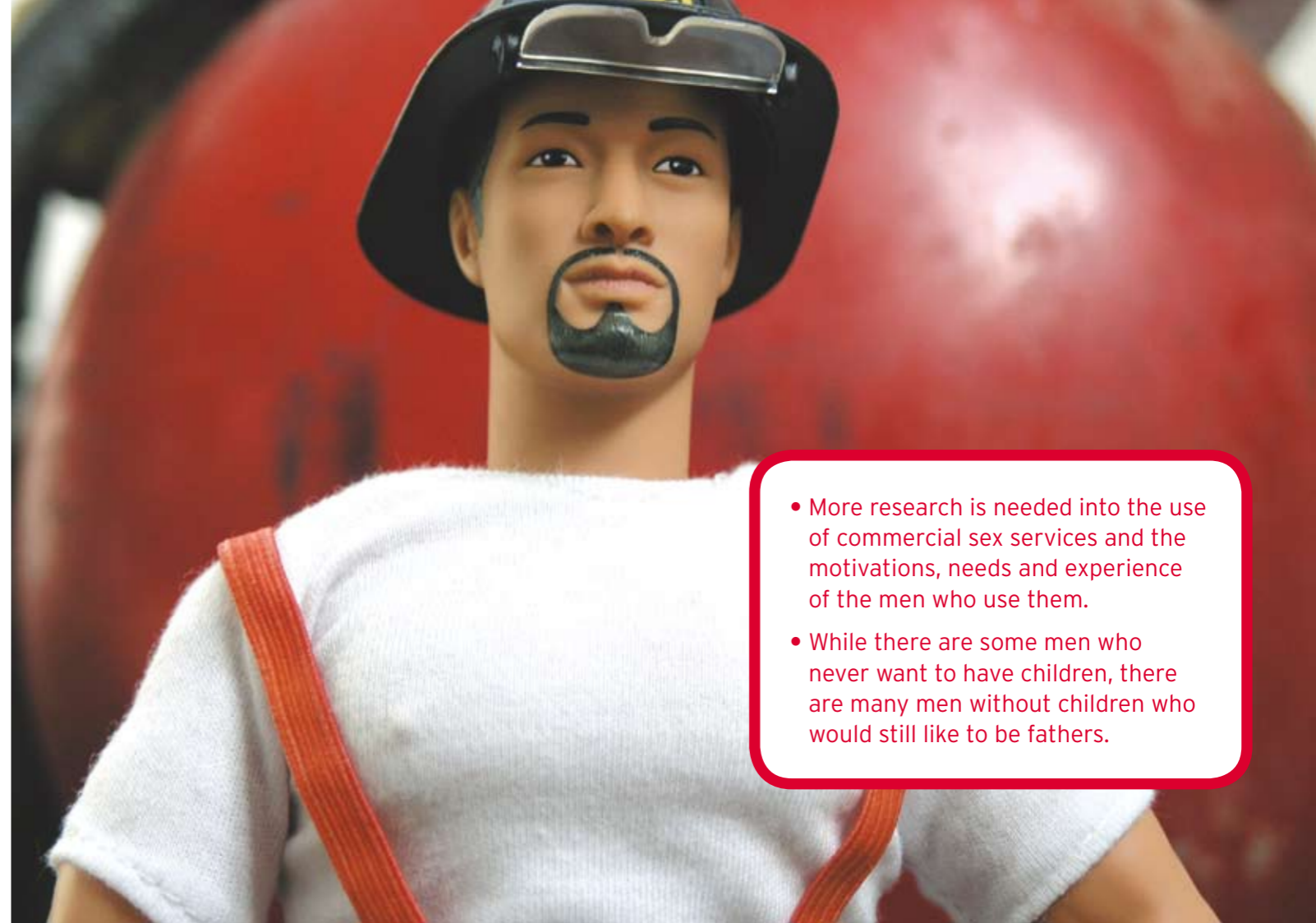
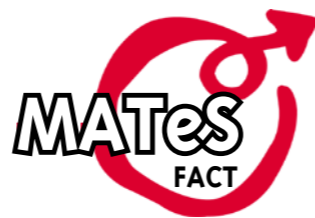


## Do Australian men want to be fathers?

**MATeS FACT: Almost 8% of all men over 40 years never wanted to have children.**

- 34% of men with no children still want to be fathers.
- Over 4% of men of all ages were concerned about being unable to father children in the future.
- Men fathered an average of 2.4 children, with the number of children higher in men over 70 years (2.8) compared with younger men (2.1).
- Men with 6 children or more were more likely to be living in regional and remote areas (61%) compared with major cities (42%).

The average number of children in families has decreased reflecting the demographic change to smaller families in the second half of the 20th century.



- More research is needed into the use of commercial sex services and the motivations, needs and experience of the men who use them.
- While there are some men who never want to have children, there are many men without children who would still like to be fathers.

## How common is infertility in Australia?

**MATeS FACT: About 12% of men aged over 40 years have never had children.**

- 9% of all men aged over 40 years had been tested for infertility, being highest in the youngest age group (12%) compared with men over 70 years (5%).
- Almost 8% of men had tried but been unable to have children. This is the first real estimate of infertility prevalence in Australia but does not indicate with which partner this problem lies.

The higher prevalence of infertility testing in younger men is most likely due to greater awareness, availability and utilisation of fertility services rather than an increase in infertility.



## Do men practice safe sex?

**MATeS FACT: About 40% of men over 40 years having casual sex do not use condoms.**

- Men in remote areas were less likely to use condoms in casual sexual relationships (50%) compared to men in major cities (65%).
- Men with a higher education level (above secondary level) were more likely to use condoms in casual sexual relationships (66%) compared to men with lower education levels (43%).
- Men in the older age groups were less likely to use condoms in casual relationships.
- Of the men that had used condoms (about 70%), half reported that they interfered with sexual enjoyment.

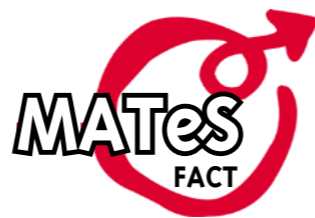
The need for condom use should be considered at all ages, whether it is for contraception or STI prevention.

## Is vasectomy a popular form of contraception?

**MATeS FACT: One in four Australian men aged over 40 years has had a vasectomy.**

- Older men 70+ years were less likely to have had a vasectomy (7%) than younger men aged 40 - 49 years (31%).
- Men in remote areas (19%) were less likely to have had a vasectomy compared to men in major cities and regional locations (25%).
- While 9% of men with a vasectomy regretted having had the procedure, only about 1% of vasectomised men had a vasectomy reversal.

Australia has one of the highest vasectomy rates in developed countries showing a willingness of Australian men to take responsibility for family planning.



- This is the first study to estimate the rate of involuntary infertility in Australia, which has implications for health policy and education.
- Emphasis on safe sex practices is being ignored by men who are at risk of STI infection from casual partners.
- Quality educational material needs to be provided to men before they undergo a vasectomy.



**With a stereotypic image of older people being sexually inactive, improved research, education and policy is needed to ensure that age-related barriers for older men to obtain information and treatment for sexual and reproductive health issues are removed.**

This national telephone survey was supported and undertaken as part of the objectives of Andrology Australia. Andrology Australia recognises the financial support provided by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. The study was undertaken in collaboration with Prince Henry's Institute of Medical Research (Vic), the ANZAC Research Institute (NSW), The University of Sydney (NSW), Monash Institute of Medical Research (Vic), Monash University (Vic), La Trobe University (Vic) and The University of Adelaide (SA).

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Survey findings on which this summary is based have been published in:

Holden CA, McLachlan RI, Pitts M, Cumming R, Wittert G, Agius P, Handelsman DJ and de Kretser DM. Sexual activity, fertility and contraceptive use in middle-aged and older men: Men in Australia, Telephone Survey. Human Reproduction 2005; 20: 3429-3434

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