

Could I please request that my name is withheld from publication. I am writing with my father in mind, and I don't want him to be identified or feel embarrassed.

Following are my observations of the challenges my father faces as an older migrant in Australia, and what I believe could be done to support him and other older people to enjoy a better quality of life.

At the time of writing, my father is a proud, active and independent 82-year-old migrant, with decent language skills and enviable physical health. He considers himself Australian, with strong cultural ties to his birth country. The story of how he left his home and family quite suddenly at age 16, to arrive as a refugee in Australia, is astonishing to me.

His independence and control over his own life is everything to him. He genuinely fears the idea of spending his last years in a care facility, to the point where he has told me he will take his own life if it comes to that.

However, everyday life is becoming more difficult for him to manage on his own, in large part due to how we now make contact with everyday services, businesses and utilities – via email and online forms. While he has basic computer and smartphone skills, he feels extremely insecure using technology. Despite my constant and ongoing reassurance and explanations, he does not trust computers and is in constant fear his computer will be 'hacked' and he'll lose all his savings/superannuation. He refuses to pay bills online via credit card because he believes his credit card number will be overcharged, and he refuses to set up direct debit because he believes his bank account will be drained.

As a result, he is regularly forced to pay a surcharge either to receive a paper bill, or pay a bill at the post office. What would help him, is the ability to receive a paper bill for every service he requires without surcharge, without payment surcharge, and without both him and I having to jump through hoops to have a paper bill sent.

Making contact with organisations is a similar proposition; the words "simply fill out our online form" or "simply download our app" send his anxiety through the roof. For him these things are the opposite of simple. While his English is great, he's often too anxious to understand what the forms are asking, he simply wants to pick up the phone and talk to someone directly to properly explain his questions and gain a full understanding of the answers. He won't fill in an online form because these always require personal details (refer aforementioned fear of being hacked and losing everything), and he doesn't understand the concept of chatting with a bot, nor would he trust it.

He also struggles with having to log in to his account – any account – be it utilities, superannuation, banking, telecommunications/NBN, DFAT (Home Affairs), or at times his own email. He is 82, he cannot remember his password. The precursor for him to be able to log in to any account is to go through a lengthy and stressful process of establishing how to update his password.

He experiences similar challenges with mobile phones. Along with dropping them, breaking them, losing them and forgetting the passcode, with each new mobile phone comes changed functionality, the loss of contact numbers, the loss of photos and memories, the loss of apps he's previously used to contact his friends, the stress of having to work out how to set up and use a new phone, and often a different pricing structure for calls and messages.

We cannot and should not expect our older citizens, migrants or otherwise, to be able to adapt to the online way of life.

Lack of trust in technology and the inability to avoid using computers and often smartphones has contributed significantly to his reduced enjoyment of life. His anxiety around technology and the fact that technology is unavoidable in our lives, has reached the point where he now requires medication (Valium) to sleep at night, to avoid lying awake catastrophising about whether his life savings will still be there in the morning. Indeed, this is a mental health issue; however, at the age of 82 he is unwilling to even admit that mental health problems are something men suffer from, let alone seek the support that would greatly improve his enjoyment of life. What would help him, is recognition that mental health is just like physical health, and that most people would benefit from a semi-regular chat with a psychologist.

Keeping socially active during the pandemic was a great challenge for him, as he lives alone. Physically he is fully committed to his health and was able to keep active by walking to the local post office to pay a bill (and the surcharge); this also provided an important element of social contact which cannot be underestimated. He also spent significant time gardening, in his own small yard as well as the common property around the unit where he lives. Gardening for others gives him the sense of purpose and satisfaction of a job well done that he misses from his decades in the workforce. He enjoys being able to actively and effectively contribute to the gardening needs of his neighbours.

Like many older people, he does not want to be a burden on society, he simply wants to maintain his independence and control over his own life, and help others where he can; and he wants to do this in person, not online.

Many thanks both for holding this inquiry and for allowing the opportunity to submit comments for consideration.