

By the numbers - the average Australian doesn't exist ... not a single one of us is 'normal'

By Canberra Times Marc Moncrief 26 January 15

You are 37, and a woman. You have a son and a daughter, aged six and nine. You live in a three-bedroom, free-standing house. You have about \$200,000 still to pay on your mortgage. You are the statistically average Australian today.

You are 5' 4" (162 centimetres) tall, in the old measure. You weigh 71.1 kilograms. This gives you a body mass index of about 27, which is technically (sorry) overweight.

Your family, at some point, came from somewhere in Britain (most likely England). However, you and both of your parents were born in Australia.

This is how the Bureau of Statistics describes the average Australian, using the most recent numbers, many of which come from the 2011 census (the mortgage figure is more recent). This is the definition of normal. The only issue is that, after all the census papers were filled, not one actual person fit the mould.

"While the description of the average Australian may sound quite typical, the fact that no-one meets all these criteria shows that the notion of the 'average' masks considerable, and growing, diversity in Australia," the ABS said at the time.



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Multicultural Council chairman Sev Ozdowski puts it bluntly: "It's a nonsense," he said.

On Australia Day, we celebrate the things we think make this country unique. Many of these are norms, culturally emblazoned on our psyches. But it may do, this year, to consider that the data shows us that not a single one of us in this entire country is actually average: none of us is "normal".

Indeed, many would assume the average would look something like "the typical Aussie bloke". In truth, women have been the statistically dominant sex in this country since 1979.

And while the bloodline of the average may still begin in Britain, no one could walk through any major city today and deny the Australian culture draws from all the nations of the world. Migrants from more than 200 countries call Australia home. More than 300 different languages are spoken here.

"Australia is not one Australia," Dr Ozdowski says. "It is many Australias."



© AAP Image/Mick Tsikas The average Australian is a 37-year-old woman with two children.

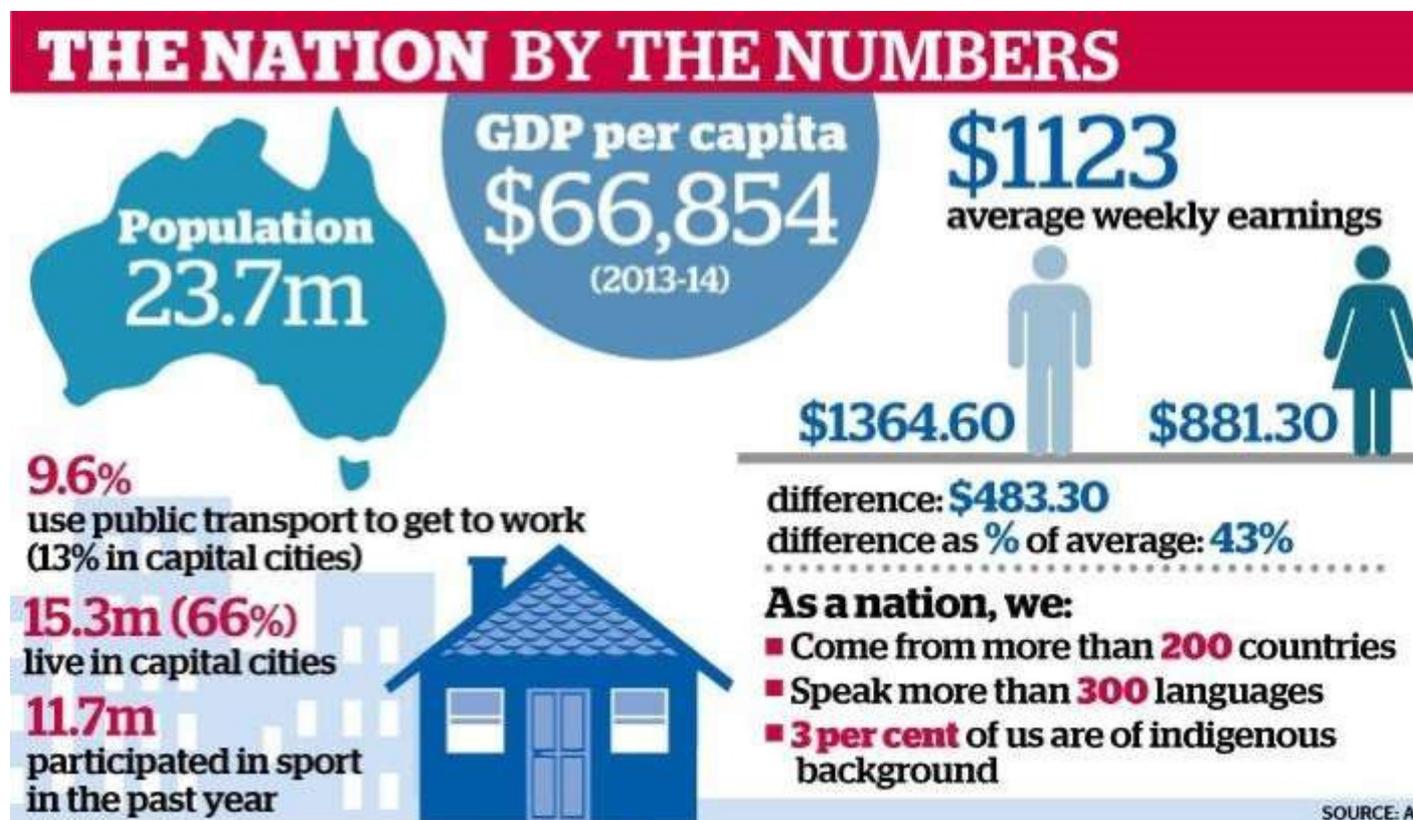
About one-third of Australians were born overseas. In 1976, more than 80 per cent of this group came from Europe, and about half of those from Britain. In the most recent census, Europe only gave us about 35 per cent of our migrants, with more than 40 per cent of all those born overseas coming from Asia.

So our imaginary average Australian has a very different set of friends than she used to have. She is also, on a global scale, rich.

On one measure used by investment bank Credit Suisse, Australia in 2014 was the richest country in the world. It has boasted the highest median "wealth per adult" of all nations for the past five years. The same report found reason for Australians to think of themselves as egalitarian. Australia was beaten only by Japan among the world's 27 major economies on a measure of equitable distribution of wealth.

According to the ABS's review, the average Australian has a certificate in business and management. The most recent income statistics show that she makes \$881.30 a week at her job in sales. That's about two-thirds as much as her completely average husband, to whom she is, nevertheless, still married.

She is also much older than she used to be.



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Two decades ago, just 11.8 per cent of Australians were over 65. That number now is close to 15 per cent. About 24 per cent of us are aged between 18 and 34, compared to 27 per cent in 1976. The average Australian in 1994 would have been 33 – about as close to her 20s as she is now to her 40s.

She has also gained weight – or at least she thinks she has. When asked our weight, we say we are, on average, about 4 kilograms heavier today than we did in 1995. This might be partly because, despite our view of ourselves as a sporting nation, we spend only about 1.5 per cent of our money – less than \$20 a week per household – on physical activity.

It may also be, in part, because we spend more than 10 hours a day looking at screens: Australia today has more than 24 million mobile phones, according to the US Central Intelligence Agency. It has not even half as many land lines.

On the other hand, we might just be more honest these days. In 1995, about a third of us underestimated our weight by 3 kilograms or more.

One thing that has not changed is that our average Australian still lives in a city. Last year, corporate advisory group McCrindle imagined Australia as a street of 100 households. During that year, they estimated, that street would see 3.5 births, four new residents, 1.4 marriages and 1.7 deaths.

They did not mention that, if it were like the majority of actual streets in Australia, it would also be unpaved.