

The folks are alright: Older Canadians tend to be happier; most want to live to 90 or beyond

On average, the 65-plus crowd says 'old age' doesn't begin until 80

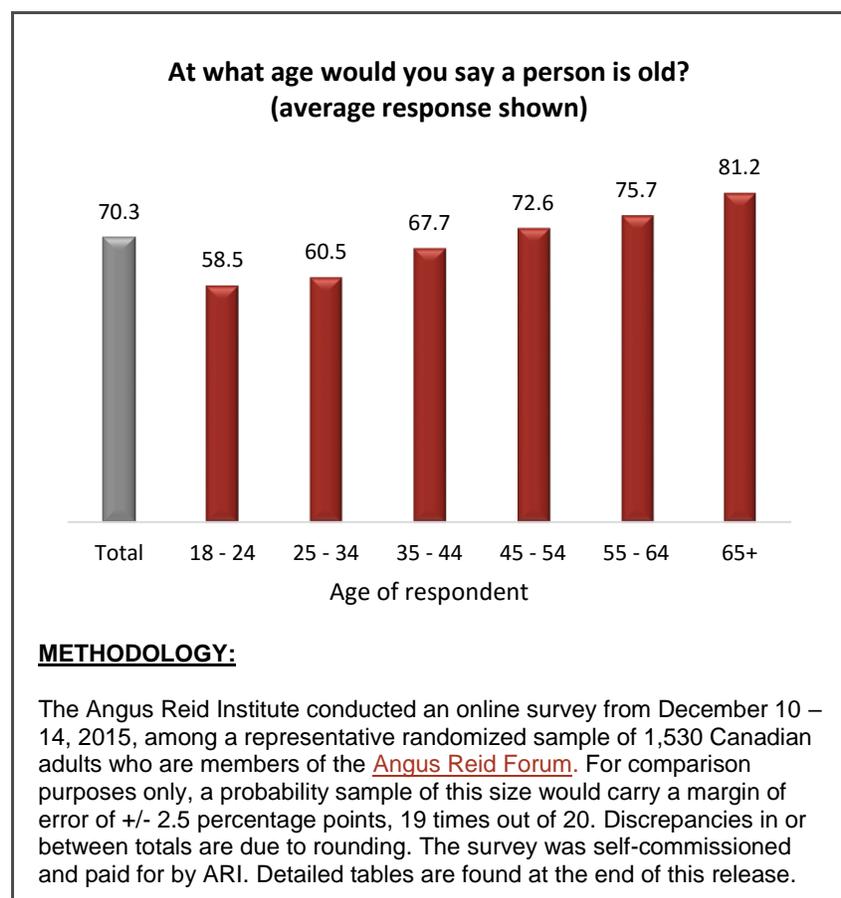
June, 6 2016 – Most Canadians believe old age is “scary,” but those who are closest to it say they have less to fear than younger generations.

A study by the Angus Reid Institute finds the golden years remain golden for older Canadians – especially those who have already reached age 65.

Members of this group say they are pleased with how their lives have turned out so far. They don't feel stressed, they do feel younger than their age, and they're contemplating living to ages their parents' generation would never have dreamed of.

Key Findings:

- The average age at which Canadians say a person is “old” is 70.3 years, but the older a person is, the higher they set the threshold for “old age”
- Correspondingly, most Canadians aged 55 or older say they don't *feel* “old.” Instead, they tend to say they feel younger than their actual age, both physically and mentally
- More than half of all Canadians (56%) agree with the statement “old age is scary,” and this finding holds true across all but the oldest age group (65+)

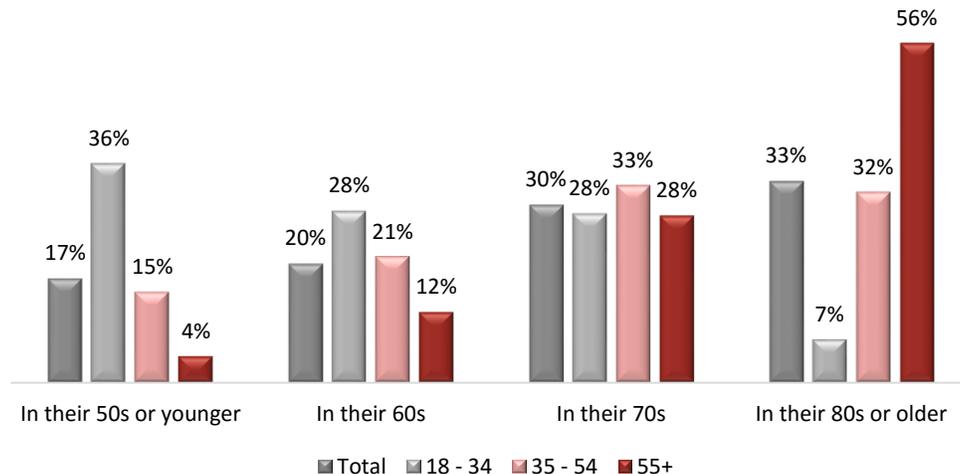


When does old age begin?

When is a person “old”? It’s an increasing number of Canadians are grappling with as the Baby Boom generation enters retirement.

The heartening news for Boomers in this survey is that Canadians don’t see them as old – yet. Opinions are grouped very differently depending on the age of respondents. More than half of Canadians aged 55 and older choose 80 or more as the age at which a person qualifies as old, while a plurality of those under 35 say someone is old when they’re in their 50’s – or even younger:

At what age would you say a person is old?



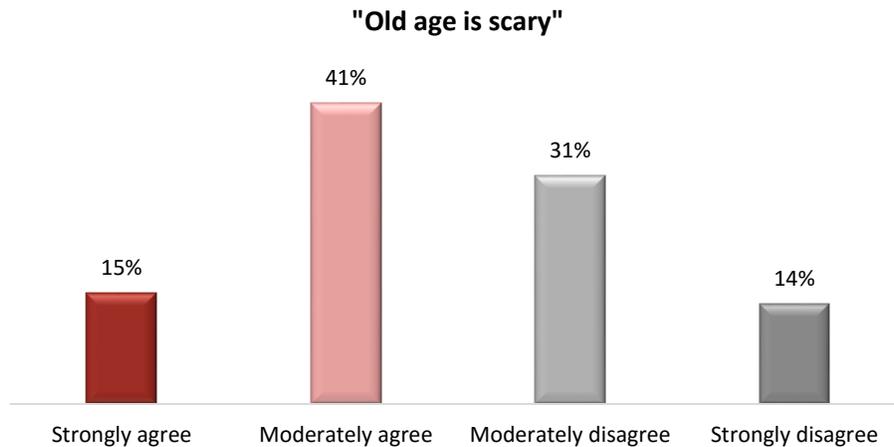
Canadians’ views on this question are similar to what researchers found [in the United States](#) in 2009 (where the average response for when old age starts was 68) and [in the U.K.](#) in 2012 (where the average response was 69).

Old age is scary?

Regardless of when they personally believe old age starts, Canadians are inclined to feel at least some trepidation about that phase of life. Slightly more than half (56%) agree with the statement “old age is scary,” though far fewer (15%) feel strongly about it:

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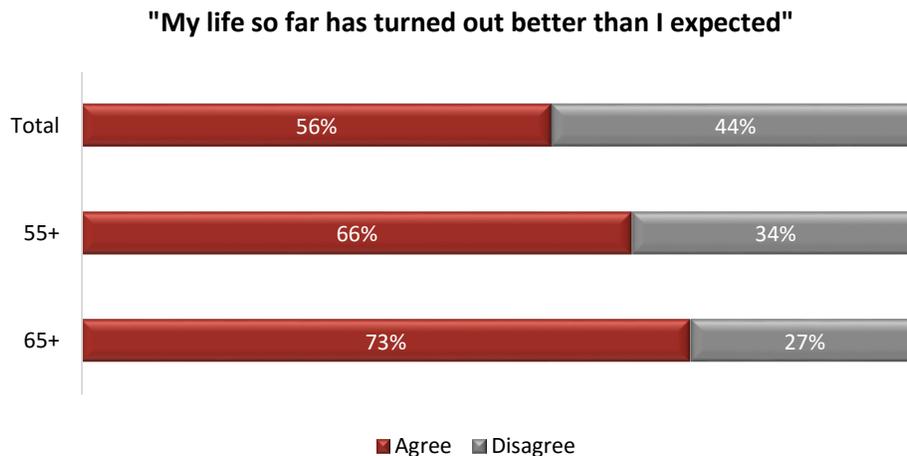
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This fear of old age can be seen across all age groups, though it is less pronounced among the oldest Canadians surveyed. Those aged 65 or older are split on the question, with a narrow majority *disagreeing* (51% versus 49% who agree).

But should it be?

Canadians' pervasive fear of old age stands in contrast to the fact that older Canadians actually feel their lives have exceeded expectations. As the graph shows, two-thirds of those aged 55 or older – and nearly three-quarters of those 65 or older – agree with the statement "My life so far has turned out better than I expected."



Given that the 65-plus age group generally sees old age beginning at 80, it's likely that these respondents don't consider themselves "old" – a fact that may explain the large numbers across age groups that see

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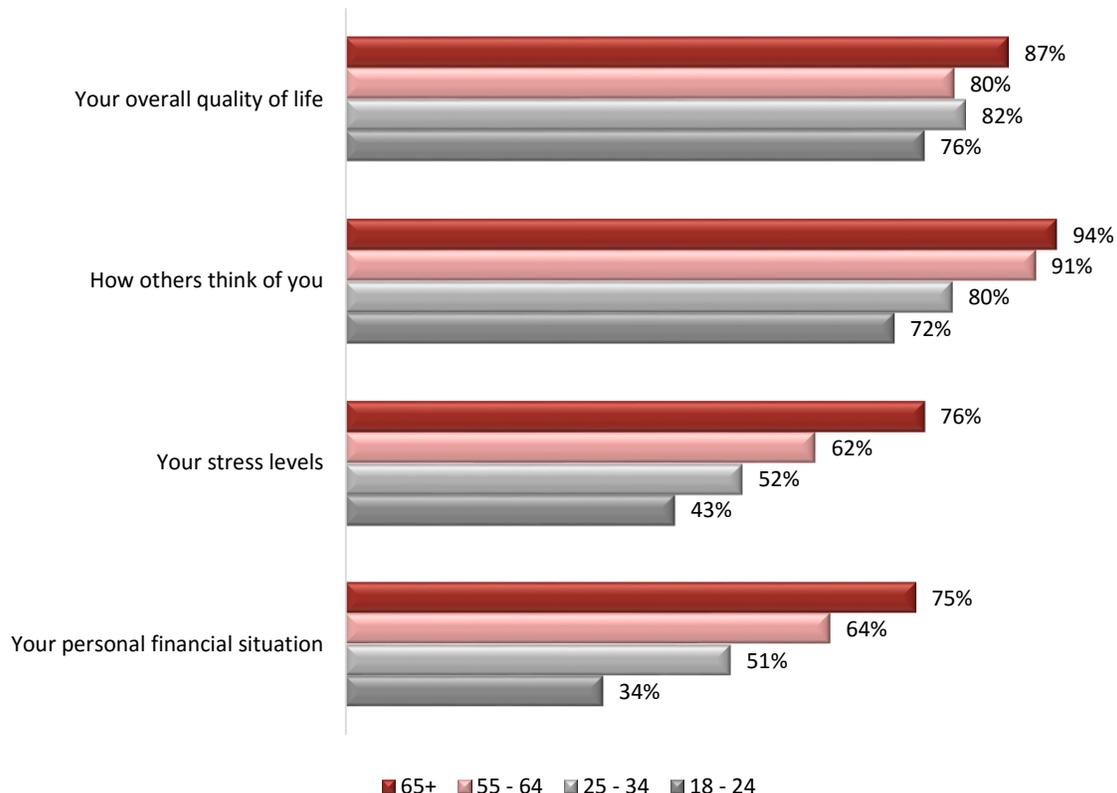
old age as “scary.” If old age is always a future that one hasn’t yet reached, it remains unknown and – arguably – fear-inducing.

For younger respondents, however, those over 65 can absolutely be called “old.” So it may be encouraging to the younger generation that the “old people” in this survey – and in [a variety of studies](#) conducted over the years – report higher levels of happiness and satisfaction with life.

Canadians aged 65 and older are slightly more likely than other age groups to describe themselves as “very happy” or “pretty happy,” and significantly less likely to say they are “not too happy” ([see comprehensive tables](#)).

Those in the oldest age group are also notably more likely to describe themselves as satisfied with a variety of aspects of life – from finances, to stress, to personal reputation, as seen in the following graph. For more on life satisfaction in Canada, see [ARI’s previous study on the topic](#), as well as [comprehensive tables](#).

Please indicate your overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction with each of the following aspects of your life today ('satisfied/very satisfied' shown):

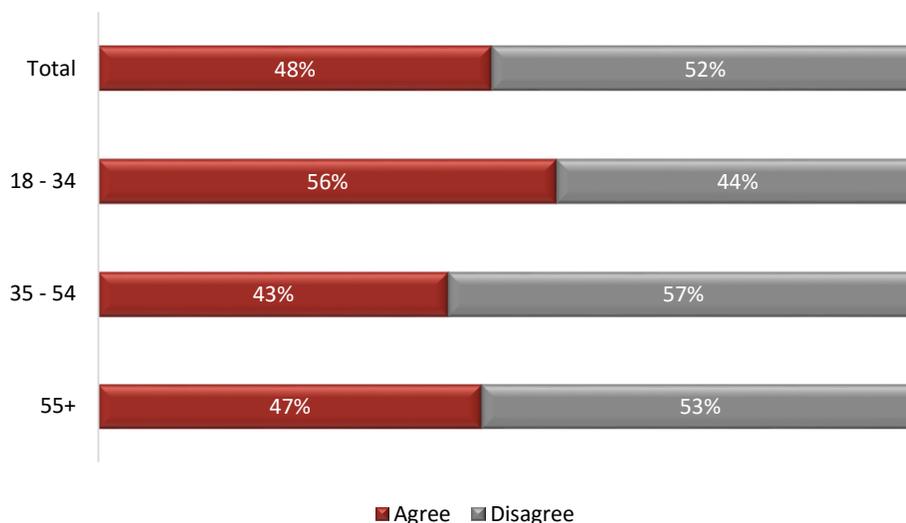


One could argue that younger Canadians should look at this data and feel hopeful that things will get better for them over time – that their lives, too, will turn out better than expected.

But that argument comes with a caveat. It's hard for young people to believe things will get better if they don't think their lives have the *potential* to turn out as well as their parents' have.

To this end, more than half of Canadians under age 35 agree with the statement "The older generation had it easier than young people today." They're the only age group in which a majority agree with this statement, as seen in the graph that follows. Only time will tell whether they are right to find old age scary, or whether their lives, too, will turn out better than expected.

"The older generation had it easier than young people today"



The Generational Relationship Gap:

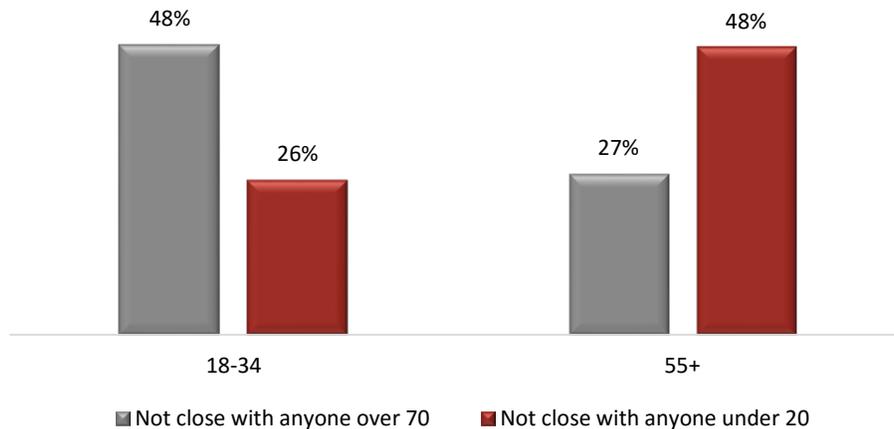
If it seems like the generations in this survey don't fully understand each other, it could be because they spend relatively little time together.

Roughly half of those under 35 report not being close with anyone over age 70, and roughly half of the 55-plus group aren't close with anyone under 20:

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Intergenerational interactions



Research [has shown](#) that intergenerational interactions benefit both the older and the younger people involved in them. At a minimum, routinely spending time with people they consider “old” could help make Canadians less afraid of getting old themselves.

How old do Canadians feel?

Perhaps, as the saying goes, age really “ain’t nothing but a number.” Most Canadians who have reached age 55 or beyond say they feel *younger* than their actual age.

The majority (72%) of this group say they feel younger than their age mentally, compared to just six per cent who say they feel older.

Asked how old they feel physically, half (50%) say they feel younger than their age, more than three times the number (16%) who say the opposite.

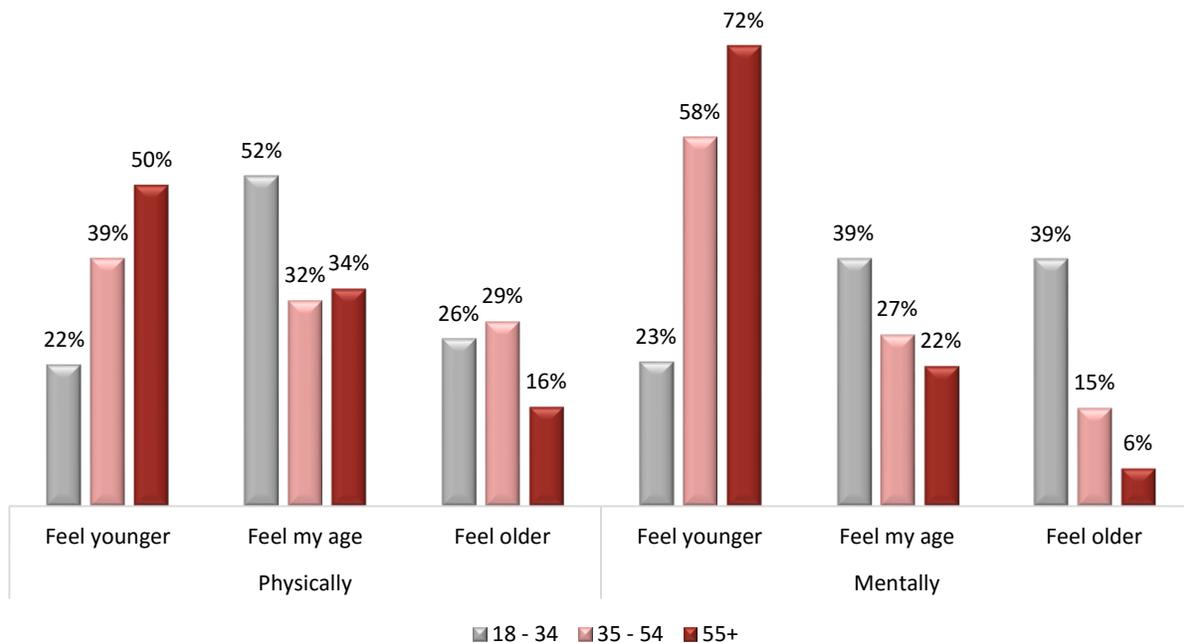
Those aged 35-54 follow a similar – but less pronounced – pattern. These respondents are also inclined to say they feel younger than their age, rather than older.

But is youth lost on the young? Those aged 18-34 are more likely to say they feel older than their age, as seen in the following graph:

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Would you say you feel younger, older, or pretty much your actual age in terms of how you feel:

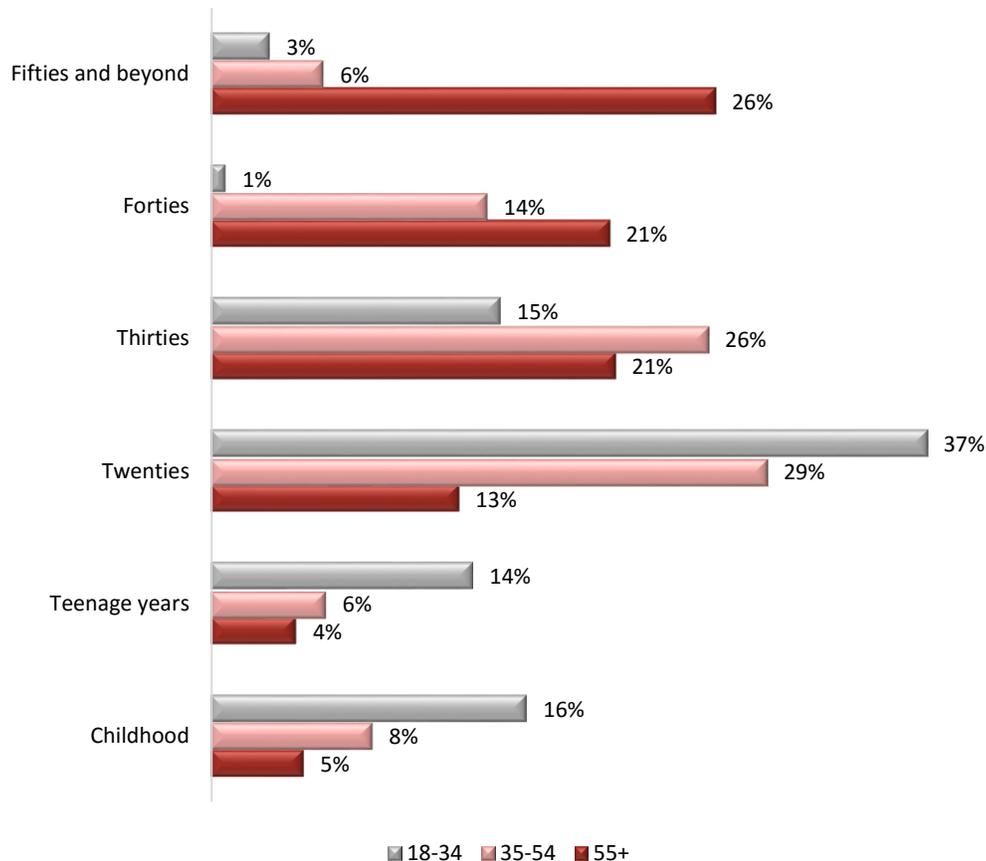


What's the best stage in life?

While older Canadians may feel younger than their age, they wouldn't necessarily want to *be* younger. Indeed, the question of what's the ideal age reveals a portrait of Canadians enjoying their lives in the present. Each age group tends to choose something close to its current age as the ideal one.

Asked to choose the best stage in life, more than one-in-four respondents aged 55 or older choose "fifties and beyond." That makes this the most popular choice among older Canadians, as seen in the graph that follows:

If you had to choose, what would you say is the best stage in life?



Satisfaction with one's current age is particularly noticeable among the youngest and oldest cohorts. Those aged 34-54, however, appear somewhat less fulfilled. Given that these are generally the years of raising children, making house payments and delicately balancing work and life, it is perhaps no surprise that nearly one-third are pining for their long-gone twenties, far more so than those on the cusp their "golden years" do.

How old would Canadians like to be?

When asked how long they'd like to live, older Canadians tend to choose a higher number than younger Canadians. Responses to this question follow the same pattern as responses on when "old age" begins.

Those over 55 are more likely than other age groups to say they'd like to be 90 or even older (63% do so, compared to less than 55% of other age groups, [see comprehensive tables](#)).

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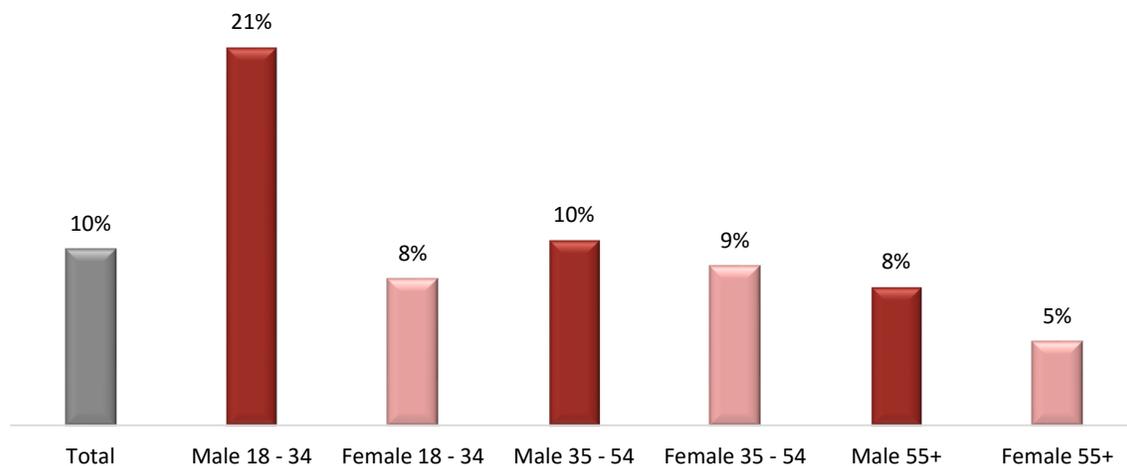
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That said, there is a limit to this pattern. Older Canadians are actually *less likely* than other groups to say they'd like to live to be 110 or older. (Note that respondents were asked to consider that there are "no guarantees about how healthy" they would be if they lived to the specified age.)

Just 6 per cent of the 55-plus group choose 110 or older, compared to one-in-ten (10%) in the middle age group and 15 per cent of younger Canadians.

Young men are especially interested in living forever, as seen in the following graph:

**If you could choose, what age would you want to live to?
(Per cent choosing "110 or older" shown)**



*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

For comprehensive results by age, gender, region, income, and other demographics, [click here](#).