



Club Wellbeing

Identity Later in Life



Who are you, when the roles fall away?

For most of our lives, identity is built around what we do. We are our job, our role in the family, our place in the community.

Then things change. We retire. Children grow up and leave. A partner passes away. Health shifts. Roles we held for decades quietly disappear.

And sometimes, not always loudly, but persistently, a question surfaces:

If I'm not who I used to be, who am I now?

This is one of the most profound and least talked-about challenges of later life. It is not a crisis of character. It is a completely normal response to real change.

Why Identity Matters to Wellbeing

Our sense of identity is not just philosophical, it has direct effects on our health.

When we have a clear sense of who we are and what we are here for, our brain releases dopamine, the neurochemical of motivation, reward, and forward momentum.

When that sense of identity is uncertain or lost, dopamine drops. So does energy, motivation, and the desire to connect with others.

A stable, positive identity in later life is one of the strongest predictors of:

- Longer life expectancy
- Better physical health outcomes
- Lower rates of depression and anxiety
- Stronger social connections
- Greater resilience in the face of loss and change



***This is not about staying busy.
It is about staying connected to a sense of meaning and self.***

The Many Layers of Who We Are

Identity is not one thing, it is a collection of layers. And in later life, several of those layers can shift at once.

Layer of Identity	Examples	What happens When It Changes
Role identity	Worker, carer, parent, professional	Retirement, children leaving home, end of caregiving
Social identity	Club member, volunteer, community figure	Moving, illness, loss of friends, club changes
Physical identity	Active person, driver, independent adult	Health decline, mobility changes, losing the car keys
Relational identity	Partner, husband, wife, friend	Bereavement, divorce, estrangement
Purpose identity	Someone who contributes, who is needed	Feeling sidelined, undervalued, or 'past it'

Building a Strong Identity in Later Life

Identity in later life is not about recapturing who you were. It is about discovering who you are becoming.

Research on ageing and wellbeing points consistently to a few key ingredients:

Anchor to Values

Roles change. Values don't.

Ask yourself: What have I always cared about?

Kindness? Service? Family? Fairness?

Community?

These are the bedrock of identity - more stable than any job title or role.

Embrace New Roles

Mentor. Elder. Storyteller. Connector. Volunteer.

Later life offers roles that younger people simply cannot fill. These are not consolation prizes - they are genuinely valuable contributions.

Stay Curious

People who continue to learn, a language, a skill, a subject, maintain a stronger sense of self and show significantly slower cognitive decline.

Curiosity is an identity. *'I am someone who keeps learning'* is a powerful statement at any age.

Own Your Story

The life you have lived is not behind you, it is part of who you are right now.

Sharing stories, passing on wisdom, and being recognised as someone with experience to offer are all powerful identity anchors.



Why Lions Clubs Matter - More Than You May Realise

Lions membership offers something that is genuinely rare and genuinely powerful:

A stable identity anchor. Whatever else changes in a member's life, being a Lion remains constant. The values, the badge, the sense of belonging - these persist.

A place of contribution. Feeling needed and useful is one of the most powerful drivers of wellbeing in later life. Service gives that.

A community of peers. Shared experience and shared purpose create a sense of being known - which is at the heart of positive identity.

Clubs that actively celebrate their members, their histories, their contributions, their wisdom, are doing something profoundly important for wellbeing.

Simply being seen and valued by your community is one of the most powerful identity-sustaining forces available to us.

A Moment to Reflect

Which parts of your identity feel most solid right now?

Which parts have shifted in recent years - and how has that felt?

What values have stayed consistent throughout your life, regardless of your roles?

You are more than what you did for a living. More than your roles. More than your losses.



Who you are becoming is still worth discovering.

Start the conversation at your club

This wellbeing series includes a free Club Facilitation Guide with a ready-to-use conversation guide for Club meetings. Download at alwf.org.au/tmtc

Thriving Members. Thriving Clubs.

An Australian Lions Wellbeing Foundation Initiative alwf.org.au/tmtc

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Wellbeing Series:

Social Connection | Anxiety |
Tricky Conversations |
Identity | Motivation | Sleep |
Movement | Nutrition |

