

ASFA Research note: Current super balances across Australia

- There is substantial variation in average superannuation balances among Australia’s major cities and towns.
- Key reasons for this include differences in demographics – in particular, the cumulative impact of inter and intra-state migration – but also differences in incomes that in part reflect the composition of economic activity and occupations.

This note provides updated estimates of average super balances for Australia’s major cities and towns.

Average super balances

There is substantial variation in average super balances across Australia. Figure 1 (see last two pages) shows the average super balance for cities and towns with a population of at least 25,000 people (at least 50,000 people for New South Wales).

Among the major cities/towns identified (excluding capital cities), the highest average super balances are recorded in Newcastle in New South Wales, and Victor Harbor-Goolwa in South Australia (both around \$199,000), while Kalgoorlie-Boulder in Western Australia’s Goldfields-Esperance region has the lowest (around \$109,000).

Among the capital cities of Australia’s states and territories, Canberra has the highest average super balance (around \$224,000), while Darwin has the lowest (around \$152,000). Aside from these two extremes, the average balances for the remaining six capital cities are within a relatively narrow range of \$160,000 to \$180,000 – although there is also considerable geographical variation *within* capital cities, particularly in Sydney and Melbourne (see Table 1, Page 2).

When comparing average super balances, there is a host of factors that can explain variations across Australia. Two of the major factors are demographics (specifically, the distribution of the population across age cohorts), and income from wages and salaries.

The impact of demographics

Age distributions can differ markedly across Australia. This reflects the cumulative impact of inter and intra-state migration, and (to a lesser extent) international migration, and differences in birth rates.

This is illustrated by Chart 1, which shows the age profiles (for people aged 20 and older) for the major cities/towns with the youngest and oldest adult populations. For cities and towns with a population of at least 25,000 people (at least 50,000 people for New South Wales);

- those with the youngest adult populations are Alice Springs, Darwin and Kalgoorlie-Boulder (dotted lines)
- those with the oldest adult populations are Victor Harbor-Goolwa, Maryborough and Hervey Bay (solid lines).

The relationship between age profile and super balance is complex.

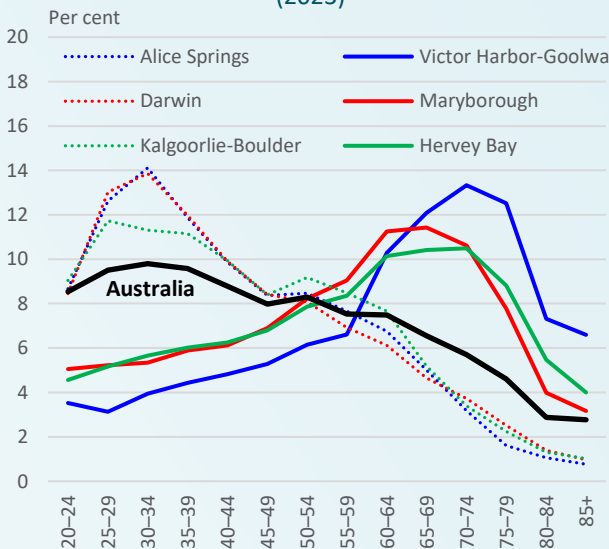
For Australia as a whole, Chart 2 shows the median super balance for each 5-year age cohort (for people who have a super balance).

In terms of the working age population, older workers will (all else being equal) tend to have higher super balances. In general, at a particular point in time, older workers will have been in the workforce for longer, will have made super contributions over longer periods, and will have accumulated higher balances (generally peaking at the end of workers’ careers).

In contrast, for retirees, it is generally the case that older retirees will have lower super balances than younger retirees – as, at a particular point in time, older retirees will have drawn down more of their retirement savings than younger retirees. Note that the data in Chart 2 exclude retirees who have exhausted their retirement savings (and so would have a zero super balance).

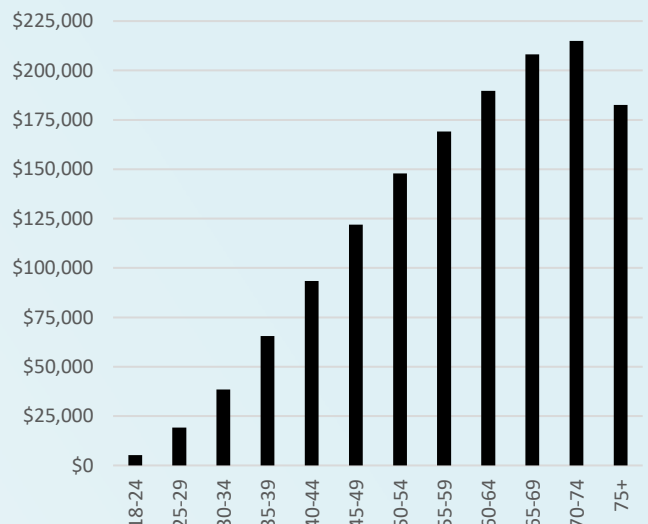
With respect to Chart 2, data limitations mean that it is not possible to

Chart 1: Estimated adult age profiles, for cities/towns with the youngest and oldest adult populations (2023)



Source: ABS and ASFA calculations.

Chart 2: Median super balance, by age cohort (June 2023)



Source: ATO and ASFA calculations.

show median super balances by 5-year age cohort beyond the age of 74. While this precludes a direct comparison of balances for older Australians with the trend for working-age balances, the chart does show that for the entire 75+ cohort, the median balance is far lower than for the preceding age cohort (70 to 74).

With reference to the data in Figure 1, the major city/town with lowest average super balance (Kalgoorlie-Boulder), also has one of the youngest adult populations (see Chart 1). In contrast, the major city/town with highest average super balance (Victor Harbor-Goolwa), also has one of the oldest adult populations.

It is worth noting that in the decades ahead, the distribution of super balances across age cohorts (such as shown in Chart 2) will shift up. The rate for compulsory super contributions (as a per cent of wages/salaries) has risen from 3% at the start of compulsory super in 1992 to 12% on 1 July 2025 (the final legislated increase). Workers who enter the workforce today will be contributing at higher rates for longer periods, compared with previous generations of workers – which will be reflected in higher super balances.

The impact of income from work

Average incomes from work vary across Australia. Chart 3 shows that the average annual income from work (wages and salaries), from lowest to highest, for cities and towns with a population of at least 25,000 people (at least 50,000 people for New South Wales).

From Chart 3, average annual income from work ranges from around \$60,000 for Mildura in regional Victoria, to around \$92,000 for Canberra (note that the average wage/salary data in Chart 3 has been normalised by age).

One determinant of the geographical distribution of income across Australia’s major cities and towns is the composition of economic activity and occupations. For example, in some areas of Australia, relatively high average incomes are associated with the relative dominance of the mining sector and mining-related industries – such as

Perth in Western Australia, Mackay in Queensland, and Newcastle in NSW. Of course, as noted above, the lived experience of many Australians is that they will reside and work in multiple regions across Australia during their lives.

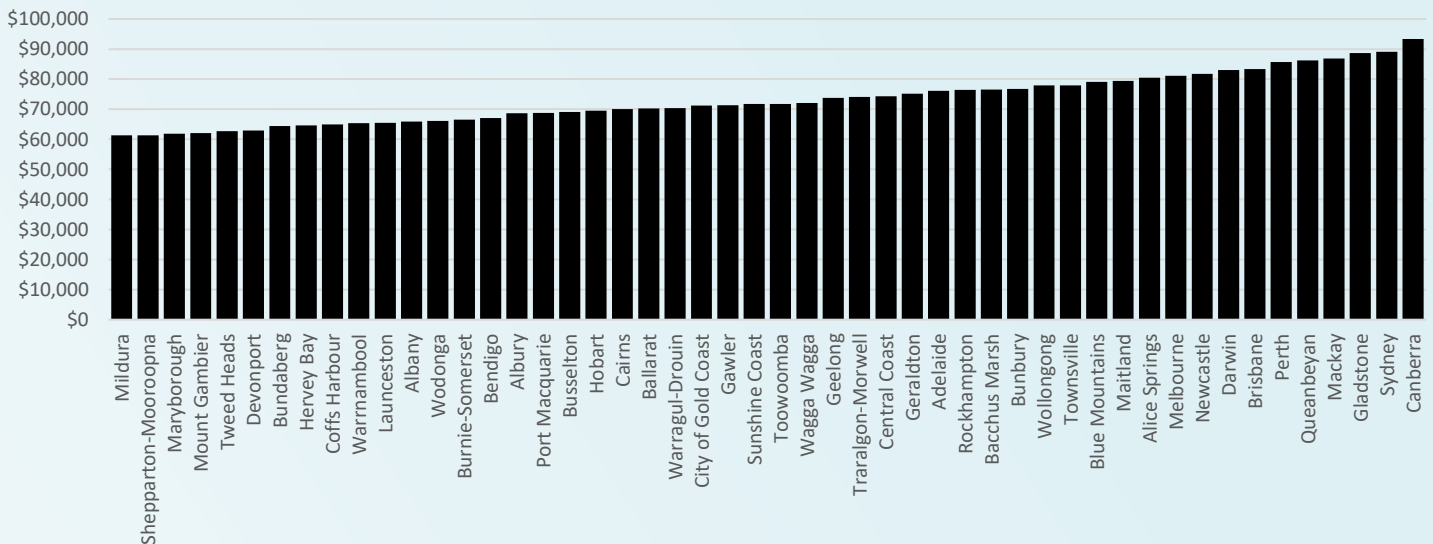
It is worth noting that the geographical variation of income is even more pronounced *within* Australia’s capital cities. Within capital cities, the key determinant of the geographical distribution of income is the relative cost of housing (that is, more expensive housing requires higher incomes), rather than the location of specific economic activities and occupations.

With respect to the effect of income on super balances, all else being equal, higher wages and salaries mean high super contributions and higher accumulated balances.

Table 1: Federal electorates – highest and lowest average super balances (June 2023)		
Sydney	Wentworth	\$378,000
	Blaxland	\$75,000
Melbourne	Kooyong	\$369,000
	Lalor	\$81,000
Brisbane	Ryan	\$272,000
	Forde	\$99,000
Perth	Curtin	\$296,000
	Burt	\$95,000
Adelaide	Sturt	\$224,000
	Spence	\$93,000
Hobart	Clark	\$178,000
	Franklin (Hobart area)	\$168,000

Source: ATO and ASFA calculations.

Chart 3: Average wages/salaries for Australia’s major cities and towns (end of 2024)*



*Normalised by age
Source: ATO, ABS and ASFA calculations.

Figure 1: Average super balance, major cities and towns (June 2023)

New South Wales



Sydney	168,923	Tweed Heads	156,153
Newcastle	198,579	Coffs Harbour	160,376
Central Coast	156,567	Wagga Wagga	166,617
Wollongong	188,439	Albury	171,874
Maitland	159,334	Port Macquarie	182,082
Blue Mountains	187,881	Queanbeyan	191,653

Victoria



Melbourne	167,468	Shepparton-Mooroopna	149,192
Geelong	161,879	Warrnambool	172,193
Ballarat	162,881	Traralgon-Morwell	174,885
Bendigo	162,611	Warragul-Drouin	157,922
Wodonga	142,136	Bacchus Marsh	154,024
Mildura	120,295		

Queensland



Brisbane	178,475	Mackay	162,180
City of Gold Coast	146,612	Rockhampton	157,975
Sunshine Coast	198,281	Hervey Bay	154,587
Townsville	175,867	Bundaberg	149,015
Cairns	152,018	Gladstone	162,692
Toowoomba	171,708	Maryborough	146,450

Western Australia



Perth	165,031
Bunbury	147,765
Geraldton	140,262
Albany	152,542
Kalgoorlie-Boulder	109,268
Busselton	162,948

South Australia



Adelaide	174,550
Gawler	155,971
Mount Gambier	140,712
Victor Harbor-Goolwa	199,072

Tasmania



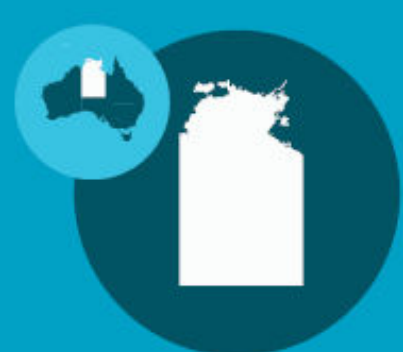
Hobart	173,487
Launceston	151,474
Devonport	131,683
Burnie-Somerset	134,302

ACT



Canberra	223,585
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Darwin	152,366
Alice Springs	118,217