# MONEY MATTERS.

Advice. Life. Investments. Superannuation and Retirement.

Edition 1, 2021


## Life insurance: Why everyone needs to think about coverage

Balancing act: Why risk and return are both needed for investment success

Small but mighty: Small caps offer outsized potential

How society is tackling ageism

Markets end year with strong rally


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# Life insurance: Why everyone needs to think about coverage

**No matter what your age, life insurance can play a crucial role protecting you and your loved ones.**

You don't buy life insurance because you are going to die but because those that you love are going to live. Or so the proverb goes.

Life insurance provides a vital safety net, protecting your family if the worst were to happen.

But the life insurance landscape in Australia is changing. New regulations and the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic has shaken up the industry.

The new year is the perfect time to review all aspects of your life insurance to ensure you have appropriate life insurance, the coverage matches your life stage, and it is delivered via the right structure.

## Younger people: don't neglect life insurance

The average life expectancy of Australians sits at 82.5 years in 2017. For people aged under 25, life insurance is often not something you consider. And why would you?

You likely have no dependants, are likely to be healthy and often take a dip in the fountain of youth.

Yet until this year, many young Australians were paying life insurance premiums through their superannuation accounts. Sweeping regulatory changes from 1 April 2020 now require people aged under 25 to actively opt-in to default life insurance. This has removed cover from many younger fund members.

This doesn't mean life insurance isn't appropriate for younger people. Young people may have debts such as a car loan or credit card debt. In the case of death or a serious injury, without adequate insurance, their family may be left with the bill.

Premiums for young people are also usually far lower given the lower Probability of a claim being filed. Investing in insurance early can give peace of mind for a low price and potentially improve credit scores, which is important when one is deciding to buy a house.

## Middle age: a prime time to be covered

Having adequate life insurance cover is essential when you settle down with a family and have significant debts such as a mortgage to pay off.

It is crucial to assess the options to ensure you are covered for all types of circumstances when you enter potentially life's peak period of debt.

But navigating the seemingly endless pages of policy documentation is confusing at the best of times, let alone when grieving the loss of a loved one.

Seeing a good financial adviser can help ensure you get the right policy. An adviser can also help you if you need to make a claim, making the process smoother for your family.

A review by corporate regulator ASIC found term life, TPD, trauma, and income protection claims were declined least often when an adviser was involved (7% of claims), followed by group insurance (through super) (8%) and non-advised channels (such as online) (12%)[1].

An individual policy negotiated by your adviser also means you won't be lumped into a group of people who have vastly different circumstances, opening yourself up to the

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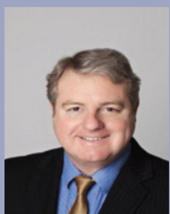
We hope you enjoy our latest edition of Money Matters.

Please contact our office if you would like to discuss anything in this edition.


Greg Roberts

Damien Roberts

possibility of paying more than you need or not getting the best cover.

## Retirees: a time to re-consider life insurance

If the kids have left the nest and the house and car are paid off, then your life insurance needs may be lower.

However, in recent decades, this scenario has become increasingly unlikely. Australians are living longer than ever and a range of liabilities are often extending well past traditional retirement age.

A recent report found that older borrowers' average mortgage debt to income ratio tripled from 71% to 211% between 1987 and 2015, reflecting a severe increase in repayment risk[2].

The research found the real mortgage debt of older borrowers blew out by 600%, while real house price and income growth lagged, tripling and doubling respectively over the period.

The Australian Human Rights Commission also showed the percentage of Australians aged 65 and over in the labour force doubled between 2000 and 2015 – and 20% of people over 70 are still working.

So if you are in the ever-increasing position of many older Australians who carry the burden of debt or have dependents well into their twilight years, then you may want to maintain your life insurance coverage.

## 'Putting Members Interests First': A positive change for young people

Around five million people now have the chance to save an estimated $3 billion in life insurance premiums thanks to new legislation.

The Putting Members' Interests First (PMIF) scheme, which began 1 April, 2020, requires people under the age of 25 or with a super balance below $6,000 to opt-in rather than opt-out of life insurance cover.

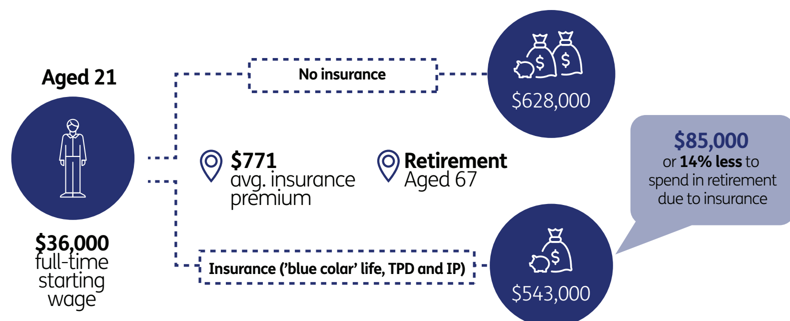
This is a positive change, as young people and low-income earners are often not even aware they have default life insurance in their super.

"On average, members aged under 30 appear to have received significantly lower value than older members over the six-year period," ASIC found in a recent survey of the default life insurance in MySuper products[2].

While contributing to super can help build a comfortable retirement nest egg over the long-term, default insurance premiums can also erode its value.

**Insurance premiums can materially lower the retirement savings of lower income workers**

Super problem: Insurance = 2.5 years' lost pay




Source: Productivity Commission – Superannuation: Assessing Efficiency and Competitiveness

Around one-quarter of Australians with a super account hold multiple accounts, according to the ATO. The result is excessive fees, often including default life insurance.

A financial adviser can help ensure that a life insurance policy is tailored to an individual's needs, whether young or old. An adviser can also help navigate the claims process. This is crucial because claims are typically accompanied by significant stress when a loved one dies or is injured.

Are you concerned about your life insurance coverage? Your adviser can help. Contact our office today.

1. 16-347MR ASIC issues industry review of life insurance claims | ASIC - Australian Securities and Investments Commission. (2020, December 17). Retrieved from https://asic.gov.au/about-asic/news-centre/find-a-media-release/2016-releases/16-347mr-asic-issues-industry-review-of-life-insurance-claims
2. REP 675 Default insurance in superannuation: Member value for money | ASIC - Australian Securities and Investments Commission. (2020, December 16). Retrieved from https://asic.gov.au/regulatory-resources/find-a-document/reports/rep-675-default-insurance-in-superannuation-member-value-for-money

# Balancing act: Why risk and return are both needed for investment success

**The coronavirus pandemic shocked the world and sent portfolios into a sharp tailspin. A new survey reveals just what investors have learnt.**

The last year has tested the resolve of even the most seasoned investors.

The economy fell off a cliff in March 2020 following the first wave of the pandemic, wiping off more than a third of its value.

Subsequent lockdowns, second waves, and the nation's first recession in 30 years sent portfolios reeling amid a rocky outcrop of volatility.

However, risk is a necessary part of generating long-term healthy returns. The market's strong rebound in the second half of 2020 underlined why it's rarely a good idea to sell in a downturn.

Investors are instead focusing on diversification, risk management and the sustainability of returns, according to the latest ASX Australian Investor Survey[1].

The January 2021 survey showed that 19% of investors said they would cut their losses and move to cash or more secure investments in response to a sudden 20%-plus fall in their investment balance. However, about 12% said they would invest more to take advantage of lower prices.

Yet when investors experienced a 20%-plus fall in asset prices during the first three months of 2020, only 3% decreased their allocation to Australian shares, while 17% invested all their spare cash in the market.

The results show a level of sophistication among Australian investors who were unwavering in their strategies and displayed resilience during a time of panic.

## Retirees manage the downturn

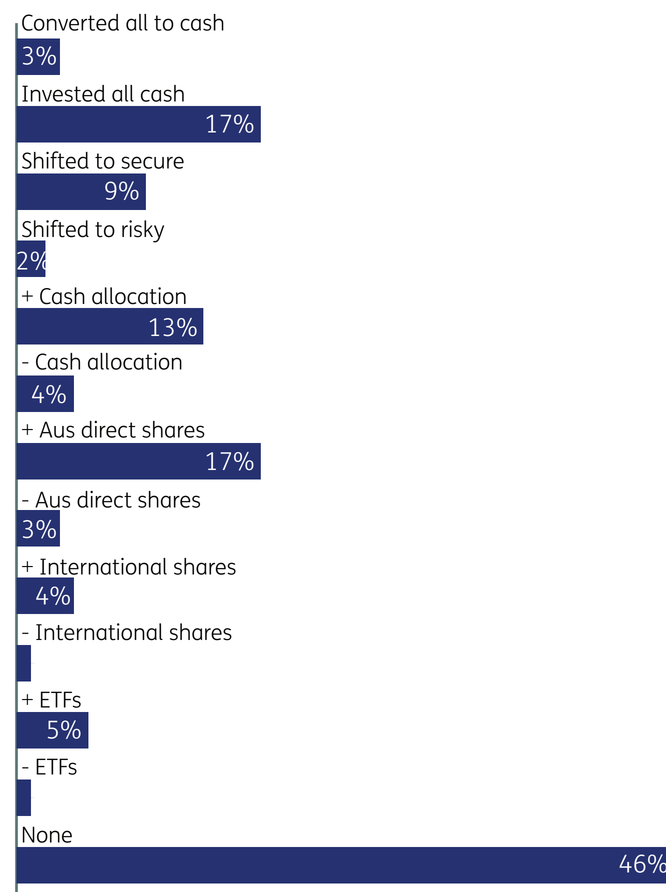
Retirees are more exposed to market downturns, yet they have managed the emotional impact of the March crash particularly well.

According to research firm Investment Trends (which conducted the ASX report), in the months between May and August, almost two-thirds (63%) of investors had not made any portfolio changes.

"Younger investors are most likely to have made significant shifts while older ones were more inclined to stick with their existing strategy," according to Investment Trends.

Older Australians that did make new investments also used most (if not all) of their cash to increase their exposure to the market, capitalising on falling prices.

Overall, 17% of investors increased their allocation to Australian direct shares, with just 3% saying they had sold down their shareholdings.




Source: Australian Investor Study https://www2.asx.com.au/blog/australian-investor-study

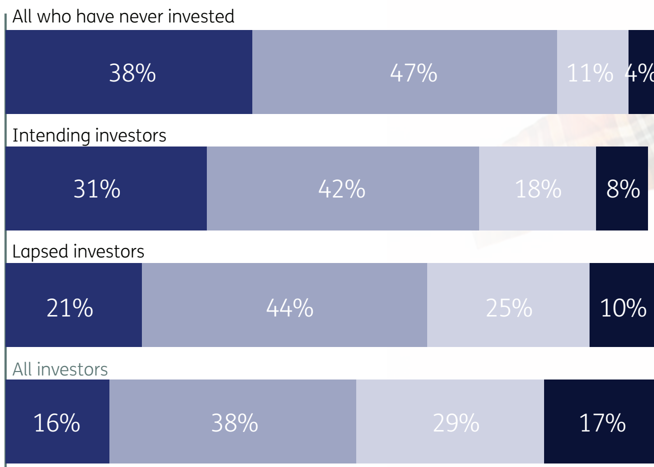
## A new perspective on risk

The pandemic has changed the attitudes of Australian investors towards risk management.

They're becoming more aware that higher potential returns come with a greater risk of volatility and capital losses.

Asked to name their top three considerations when making investment decisions, survey respondents were most likely to consider potential return (65%), followed by potential risk (48%) and their personal circumstances (40%).

The survey shows a greater appreciation about investing for the long-term. Australians are less likely to lock in losses when markets are down, preferring to ride out the storm until markets recover.




- I prefer guarranteed returns
- I prefer stable, reliable returns
- I'd accept moderate variability in returns
- I'd accept higher variability with the potential for higher returns

Some figures may not total 100% due to rounding or multiple responses being allowed

Source: How would you describe your attitude to financial and investment risk? (All respondents), ASX Australian Investor Study 2020

## Investors recognise financial advice is valuable

### Views of advice

**63%** of Australians are open to receiving financial advice

**27%** of investors used an adviser, broker or wealth manager in the last 12 months

**17%** are more likely to seek advice after COVID-19

**84%** found the advice recieved from their adviser during COVID-19 was helpful

The last year has seen an increasingly complex investment environment.

Yet only 27% of Australian investors have used a financial adviser in the past 12 months, down from 39% in 2017.

However, they also understand the value of advice in the wake of the pandemic. Almost two-thirds (63%) of Australians say they are open to receiving financial help.

A total of 84% of investors say their adviser helped them during COVID-19, proving that when the going gets tough, savvy investors turn to the professionals.

## Diversification remains a sound strategy

The importance of diversification, where risk is managed by mixing a wide variety of investments within a portfolio, is perhaps not fully appreciated.

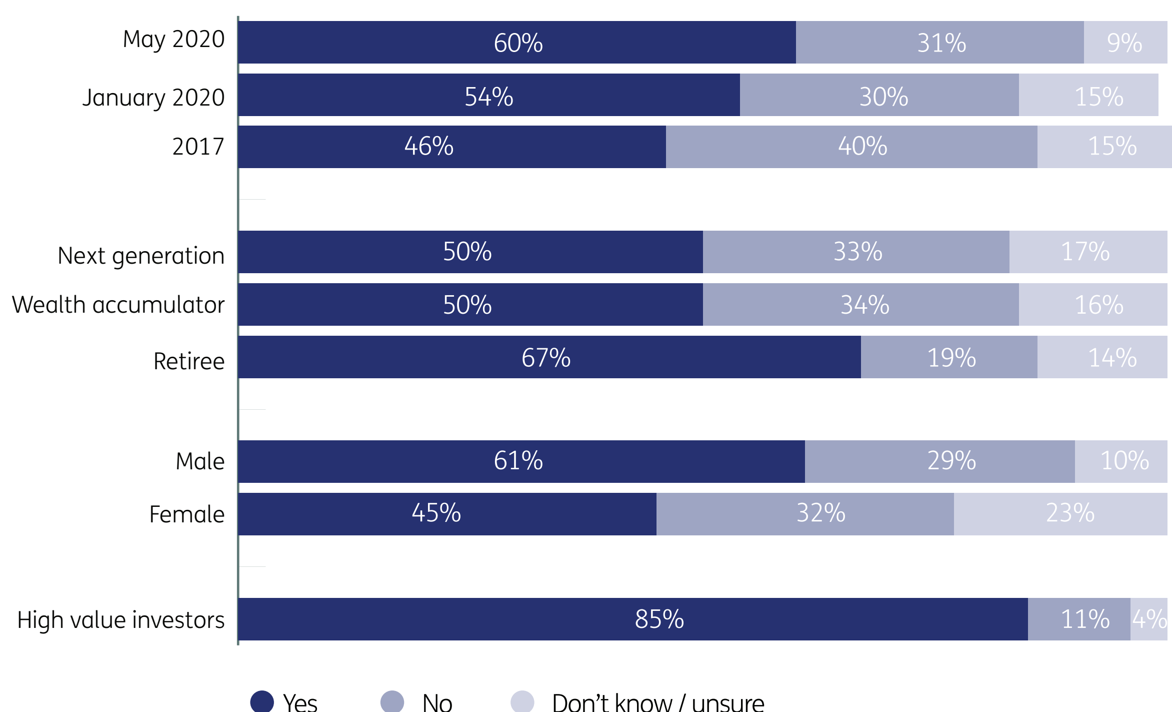
Only around three in ten say that diversification is a top consideration when investing.

Those who believe they are well diversified hold an average of 2.6 investment asset classes, compared with 1.6 among those who say they are not diversified.

The survey also found clear links between diversification, experience, and portfolio size, with older investors and those with larger portfolios most likely to rate their investments as diversified.

However, the Investment Trends Report suggested younger investors are particularly willing to learn from the crisis, with nearly two-thirds of investors under the age of 25 placing greater emphasis on the risk-reduction strategy after COVID-19.

**Diversification by investor type. Do you have a diversified investment portfolio? (investors)**




Source: ASX Australian Investor Study 2020

One in three said hedging strategies [to protect against market falls] were now a higher priority than before. One in five were more focused on liquidity and defensive assets.

The study warned that while a number of investors may be achieving genuine diversification through a multi-asset-class managed fund, LIC or ETF, others are likely to be less diversified than they believe.

With COVID-19 not slowing down and interest rates hitting historic lows, it has become more important than ever to implement risk management strategies.

And with 81% of retirees planning to make changes to their portfolios in the next year, it may be prudent to talk to your adviser to ensure your strategy is positioned to achieve your goals.

If you have any concerns about your portfolio's diversification or want to discuss risk management, your adviser can help you. Call our office today to speak with your adviser.

1 Australian Investor Study. (2020, December 17). Retrieved from https://www2.asx.com.au/blog/australian-investor-study

# How society is tackling ageism

**Getting older brings wisdom and experience, yet older people regularly suffer discrimination. A new coalition against ageism is fighting back.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated society's deep-seated ageist attitudes towards older people.

Former federal government minister and Red Cross CEO Robert Tickner said it is illegal to discriminate based on age, yet almost one-third (30%) of Australian employers refuse to employ people aged over 50.

"That is a shocking statistic – and this is why we need to change," Tickner, who is now co-chair of the national, coalition-led advocacy group, EveryAGE Counts, said at a recent webinar[1].

TED Talk USA keynote speaker, author and ageism activist, Ashton Applewhite, said older people can often be the most ageist of all thanks to a lifetime of being bombarded by negative aging messages.

"We have internalised ageism, and it becomes part of our identity. The systemic discrimination corrupts our sense of self and our place in the world."

"Discrimination is the problem, not aging. It is not being a woman that makes life harder for women – it's sexism. It is not loving a man that makes life harder for gay guys – it's homophobia. And it is not the passage of time that makes getting older so much harder than it has to be – it is ageism."

## COVID-19 exacerbates society's ageism

Applewhite said the early messaging around COVID-19 encouraged people not to worry because the virus targeted the old and the ill.

"What would the unemployment rate, the economic indicators, the infection and mortality rate look like if we had known from the beginning that young and healthy people were vulnerable to the disease?

"The answer: very different – as the director-general of the World Health Organisation himself acknowledged early in the spring."

Walkley Award-winning author and social commentator Jane Caro said the attitudes of many people around the COVID virus had revealed the level of discrimination older Australians experience.

"I was quite astonished by some people, whom I thought were quite respectable pundits in Australia, commenting about 68-year-olds being ready to sacrifice themselves on the altar of the economy, for the good of the young," she said at the webinar.

Older Australians have also borne the brunt of the recession following the pandemic.

A recent Australian National University research paper found that older working Australians had been hit hardest by the pandemic, suffering a greater fall in working hours than any other age group[2].

Between February and October, the average Australian lost 67 hours of work ($2,380 in earnings) because of the recession, stripping $47 billion from the economy.

Against this benchmark, workers aged over 65 lost an additional 140 hours of work, while younger workers aged between 18-24 lost 29 fewer hours than the national average.

Despite the majority of JobSeeker recipients being older (the most significant increase has been among older women), according to Parliamentary Budget Office figures, the government's new JobMaker subsidy assists people under the age of 35.

## How to fight the two types of ageism

Caro said ageism shares a fundamental similarity with sexism: they can be split into hostile and benign types. Hostile discrimination is often blunt and vulgar, but it is rooted in years of benign discrimination, which is more subtle, yet patronising.

"An example is when anyone over a certain age achieves something, and everybody gushes all over them as if it's quite extraordinary that an older person might be able to run a marathon or swim in the sea... the problem is it implies 'gosh, that's unusual'."

The EveryAGE Counts campaign, established by The Benevolent Society, has already brought together more than 40 high-profile organisations and thousands of individuals in a coalition to change negative attitudes about ageism.

Applewhite said unlearning these unconscious beliefs is a challenge.

"But we can't challenge bias unless we're aware of it," she said.

"The first hardest and most uncomfortable step is to look at our own attitudes towards our own age and aging. The good news is that once you start seeing your own age bias and how you participate in this, you start seeing ageism in the culture around you."

Are you concerned about your future? Your adviser can help you. Contact our office to speak with your adviser.

1 Ashton Applewhite and Jane Caro AM share insights on ageism. (2020, December 16). Retrieved from https://www.everyagecounts.org.au/beyond_2020_recording

2 Tracking outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic (October2020) –Reconvergence (2020, December 16). Retrieved from https://csrm.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2020/11/Tracking_wellbeing_outcomes_during_the_COVID-19_pandemic_October_2020_PDF.pdf.

# Small but mighty: Small caps offer outsized potential

**The small-cap market could be hiding the next giant, but it takes skill to pick the winners from the losers.**

Small Australian companies offer investors potentially outsized returns for those willing to find the diamonds amongst the fool's gold.

But with great reward comes even greater risk, and small caps tend to make or break portfolios.

Still, small-cap fund managers often outperform large-cap managers over the long term.

## Why small caps?

Small caps refer to stocks with a comparatively small market capitalisation, between $250 million and $2 billion. Stocks with a market cap above $2 billion are called large caps and include well-known blue-chip stocks such as the big banks.

Small caps make up an important but neglected part of the equities market. Under-researched by stock analysts who tend to gravitate towards large stocks, the small-cap market is often where the next generation of big companies lurk.

If you bought US$1,000 of Microsoft stock at its US$21 IPO price back in 1986, you would be a multi-millionaire today[1].

A more recent Australian example is the small-cap stock, Kogan. The online electronics retailer increased its stock price by more than 500% between March and October this year[2].

Michelle Lopez, Deputy Head of Australian Equities at asset management company Aberdeen, recently said that between 2004 and 2019, the Australian small-cap market displayed more alpha potential than its large-cap counterpart[3].

"It's a pattern that's been observed in the US and other markets globally. The more volatile the market returns are, the greater the opportunity for an investor to add value," she said in a webinar.

But it's a double-edged sword.

"With increased volatility also comes greater risk of negative returns," Lopez said.

## Avoid the losers

More than half of all stocks in the benchmark ASX Small Ordinaries Index posted negative returns between 2013 and 2018, with 31% losing half their value.

For context, only 20% of the top 100 companies posted negative returns, and only 2% of them lost half their value[3].

"You can blow a lot of money taking punts on small caps, and this downside bias is something to consider and be wary of."

Yet most active small-cap Australian equity managers have significantly outperformed the index over the past decade, according to research house Morningstar.

Some 57% of small-cap managers beat the Small Ordinaries in 2019 outdoing large-cap managers where only 39% beat their respective index, according to the Spiva Australia Scorecard.

In fact, the top-performing small-cap fund manager over the past decade, Hyperion, had annualised returns of 14.31% smashing the benchmark's 4.57%[4].

## Why small-cap fund managers can outperform

Several factors can be said to drive small-cap fund manager outperformance.

They practice diversification – a risk management strategy that mixes a wide variety of investments within a portfolio. It helps combat the inherent volatility in the small-cap market.

Small-cap managers can hold anywhere from 50 to a few hundred stocks, with no one stock accounting for more than a couple of percentage points of the total value.

They also employ strict stock-picking processes based on fundamental drivers.

"There are several factors that I consider when investing in a company. These include looking at the company's financials, ownership structure, business strategy, management and ESG."

ESG – or environmental, social and governance factors – refers to three central factors that will affect returns and the longevity of the company.

"I believe companies that adhere to good ESG practices are more sustainable and therefore offer a degree of future-proofing," Lopez said.

## The COVID environment

The Australian small-cap market has significantly outperformed its large cap counterpart since the pandemic decimated markets in March 2020.

This has come as no surprise for those following the historical patterns of how small caps perform after bear markets (defined as a 20% market drop).

Following the last five Australian bear markets, small-caps have outperformed large-caps in the following the six months, according to Bloomberg research.

However, there is an inherent risk of trying to get in early as small caps typically crash more drastically during the bear market.

One of the reasons for the small-cap outperformance has been the strong domestic recovery and Australia's deft handling of the pandemic in the second half of the year.

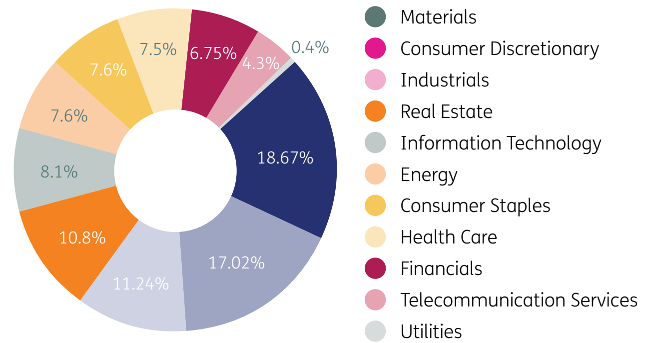
Smaller Australian companies, which do not need to rely as much on sprawling international supply chains and the trends of foreign markets, benefited from the positive local environment.

The small-cap market also outperformed the large-cap market, which is heavily skewed towards the financial sector. Banks and insurers copped the brunt of the pandemic crash with the S&P/ASX 200 Financials index declining by more than 26% over the six months after its high point on February 2021.

On the other hand, the Small Ordinaries index is more diversified, with the resurgent materials (18.67%) and consumer discretionary (17.02%) industries strongly represented[3].

Even at the end of March, the small-cap index had four times the representation in the technology sector and three times the exposure of gold stocks – both sectors that thrived in pandemic conditions – compared to the large-cap index[1].

**Chart of the diversified Small Ordinaries index**




Source: https://www.smallordslist.com/

The decision to invest in small-cap stocks should be approached with caution. It is a highly volatile part of the market that takes time and research to find a diamond in the rough.

However, the diamonds are most likely there for those who are willing to dig, and small caps can add some spice to a conservative portfolio. Diversification is a key risk mitigation strategy when it comes to small caps, but always remember to evaluate each stock on its merit.

Better yet, look for a small-cap fund manager that suits your portfolio, or speak to your adviser.

Is it time to review your investment portfolio? Contact our office today to speak with your adviser.

1. Microsoft Investor Relations - FAQs. (2020). Retrieved 2 December 2020, from https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/Investor/FAQ.aspx#:~:text=When%20was%20Microsoft's%20initial%20public,1986%20at%20%2421.00%20per%20share.
2. KGN share price and company information for ASX:KGN. (2020). Retrieved 2 December 2020, from https://www2.asx.com.au/markets/company/KGN
3. Identify small cap stocks that will last the distance. (2019). Retrieved 2 December 2020, from https://www.netwealth.com.au/web/resources/insights/identify-small-cap-stocks-that-will-last-the-distance/?utm_source=SilverpopMailing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Micro-cap%20companies%20and%20their%20investment%20potential_Direct_2020-10%20(1)&spMailingID=23983333&spUserID=NjkwNzU5MDQzODQ3S0&spJobID=1841376285&spReportId=MTg0MTM3NjI4NQS2
4 NGUYEN, Y. (2020). History repeats itself, as small caps outperform. Retrieved 2 December 2020, from https://www.betashares.com.au/insights/history-repeats-itself-as-small-caps-outperform/

# Markets end year with strong rally

**Investors ended 2020 on a positive note as markets surged despite ongoing fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.**

Investment markets ended 2020 on a high as the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines began and strong central bank monetary stimulus drove investor optimism.

Australian equities, emerging market equities, listed hedged infrastructure, and real estate investment trusts recorded double-digit gains in the December quarter. Meanwhile, global equities gained 5.7%, capping off a remarkable rebound from the March 2020 lows when the coronavirus pandemic first struck.

Governments and central banks have continued to prop up economies through stimulus measures and record low interest rates throughout a period of sustained low inflation.

In the US, the impending Biden administration and the recent Democrat senate win have further stoked the US market, with the Dow Jones Index and the S&P 500 both rising by more than 12% since early-November.

US Big Tech stocks performed well in 2020 due to stay-at-home restrictions, but the Democrats' win in the Senate could signal more stringent regulations.

Investors have also been banking on a successful rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine across the country and ongoing stimulus measures. However, the early stages of the rollout have been slow.

China weathered the pandemic better than most ending with an economic growth rate of 2% in 2020. The IMF predicts that many of China's wealthiest neighbours are unlikely to reach pre-pandemic levels until 2022.

China's return to economic normalcy should provide attractive opportunities in emerging markets more broadly. However, the ongoing risk of virus flare-ups, geopolitical tension with the US and Australia, and the government's recent crackdown on certain Chinese companies, suggest some caution should be taken.

Closer to home, Australia has emerged from its pandemic-induced recession relatively unscathed. GDP is predicted to rise by 2% in the December quarter, reducing the annual contraction to a better-than-expected 3.8%.

A proposed trans-Tasman bubble is also expected to wake tourism from a lockdown-induced slumber, although another COVID-19 breakout in NSW over Christmas has already curtailed some travel.

While the recession has technically ended, the recovery is set to be slow. To counteract the lag, the Morrison government has committed to deficit spending until unemployment hits 6%, which remains unlikely this year.

Tax cuts, JobMaker credits and business investment incentives pumped up the economy heading into the new year. However, JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments are scheduled to end in March, which may put pressure on the economy.

The low interest rate environment has helped the residential real estate market to continue gaining ground. Australian residential property values finished 3% higher with regional housing rising by 6.9%. All capital cities experienced growth in residential property values over the December quarter on the back of strong fiscal and monetary policy, and an influx of workers working from home.

If you are concerned about current market conditions, please contact your adviser, who can help at any time.

**Kalamunda office:**

Suite 9, 11 Barber Street, Kalamunda WA 6076

T: 08 9293 3855

E: contactus@kpfp.com.au

www.kpfinancialplanning.com.au

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