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financiallyspeaking

Economic outlook

How did interest rates get so low?

We are operating in a world where interest rates are now very low both overseas and here in Australia. Key drivers include:

- The state of the economy – rates get cut during a recession or economic downturn to encourage borrowing.
- Very low rates of growth – the RBA has been cutting rates since 2019 to encourage borrowing by reducing its cost in the hope of growing business investment and consumer spending across the economy.
- High debt levels – economic growth has been supported by taking on large amounts of debt. Central banks cannot raise rates excessively without sparking a financial crisis from borrowers defaulting.

Given this backdrop, deflation is a larger risk. Deflation refers to a situation where the prices of goods and services are falling over time. This means the amount of goods and services your dollar can buy will increase over time. As a result, consumers tend to consume less today and lock in weaker demand for the economy. It also punishes borrowers who benefit from inflation over time especially if their debts are of a fixed rate in nature. If your mortgage has a fixed rate and there is inflation, typically your wage rises to offset the costs of inflation.

In this issue

- Economic outlook
- The Cycle of investor emotions
- How to invest in the things you believe in
- Strategies for long term investing
- Investment options in retirement explained

The cost of that mortgage for the period it is fixed will fall each year as your wage increases even if the increase is just related to inflation.

How do you shelter your assets in the current climate?

In a world where deflation is a greater risk, there are assets that have, historically, done well in this kind of scenario. The major one is government bonds. It is important to note as well that the return on any investment you hold will, hopefully, keep up with any rises in your standard of living costs.

For bonds the total return for a bond will be its yield minus inflation or deflation over the period it is held. If we assume a bond yield of 2% and inflation/deflation of 2%, the return would be:

Bond yield	2%	Bond yield	2%
– deflation	-(-2%)	– inflation	-(-2%)
= Total return	4%	= Total return	0%

While in an inflationary period the purchasing power of your bond is static, during deflation it actually adds further value. This illustration above highlights how useful bonds can be in a deflationary setting compared to other alternatives.

What risks lie in the future and using gold as a diversifier

Unlike the global financial crisis, the coronavirus pandemic has been marked by the sheer scale of government spending taking us to the equivalent of World War II deficits in a matter of months. This raises the prospect of an economic recovery and inflation sooner than we might have expected if the stimulus spending had been of a similar scale to past downturns. In addition, there are several geopolitical risks lurking on the horizon such as poor US-China relations that could threaten rising inflation.

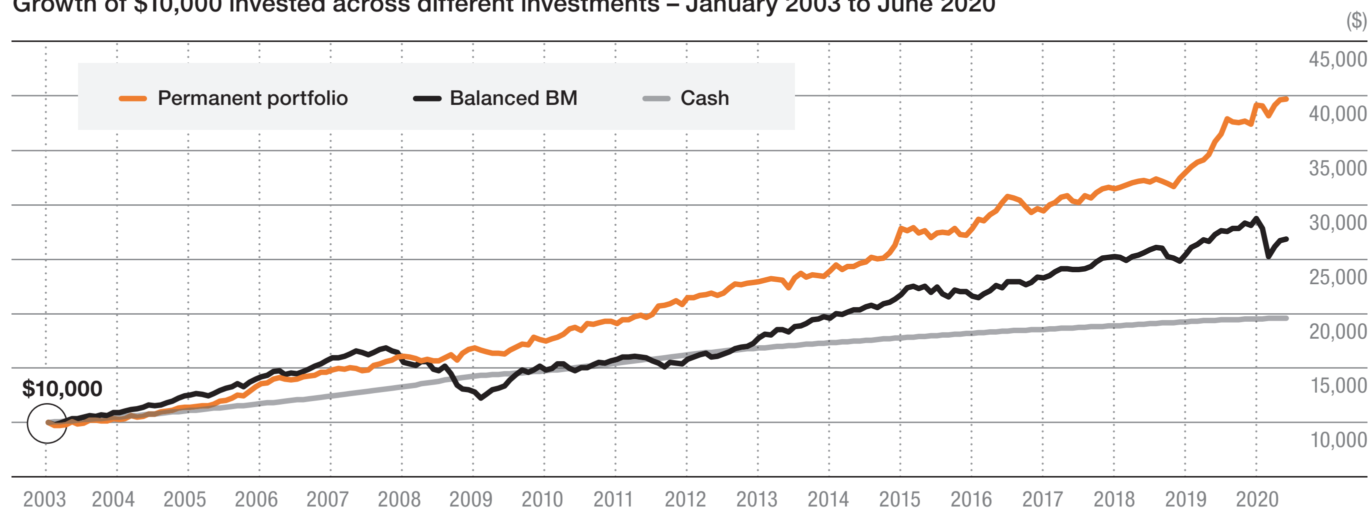
Gold is a potential solution to these risks because it:

- Acts as a safe haven in times of crisis, often rallying when geopolitical tensions rise
- Act as an inflation hedge. Gold has a limited supply and has historically held its value particularly in periods where ordinary currencies are eroded by inflation.
- Act as a diversifier. Gold has performed well in moving differently to either share or bond prices while also appreciating over time. This has helped reduce overall portfolio risk.

Gold was one of the few assets that protected a portfolio during the 1970s, a decade marred by high inflation and high unemployment. An illustration is the Permanent Portfolio which holds a 25% allocation in each of four asset classes, namely cash, gold, long-term bonds and shares. The chart below shows how such an allocation would have performed over the past 15 years relative to a 50% growth asset benchmark and cash. As you can see it outperformed, helped substantially by limited losses during the 2008-2009 global financial crisis and a steadily falling long term bond yield.

Gold is not without its risks, however, it is a volatile asset class and the value of gold can fluctuate substantially. In addition, it has historically gone through long periods of losing value before beginning to recover. In US dollar terms for instance, gold peaked at US$631 in February 1980. It then proceeded to fall 58% over the next 21 years, hitting a low of US$264 in April 2001. It did not fully recover to its 1980 peak until September 2006. That is a period of over 25 years until it broke even. For context, shares have not seen a similar “walking in the desert” moment. Since January 1958, the longest it has ever taken for the Australian share market to regain its value on a price basis has been approximately 12 years (from October 2007 to July 2019). If you reinvested dividends received it was even less (approximately seven years). This gives you a sense of how much pain there has been in holding gold for prolonged periods. Hence it potentially needs to be combined with other assets in a diversified portfolio.

Growth of $10,000 invested across different investments – January 2003 to June 2020



Source: IOOF Research

How is gold best used as an investment?

While gold has value as a diversifier it can test your convictions with long periods of under performance as a 'buy and hold' investment. This is why some financial advisers may suggest you limit the exposure to gold and combine it with other asset classes.

Some suggestions are as follows:

1. **Hold gold through a trend-following manager or global macro manager. These funds are constantly positioning the portfolio for assets with more favourable trends or outlooks depending on changes in financial markets and the economy. They are also risk-conscious, losing considerably less than share markets on average at the times when they sell off.**
2. **Hold gold directly via a listed managed fund known as an ETF as part of a diversified portfolio and combine it with long term sovereign bonds or cash to limit its volatility.**

Either option is available using products that a financial adviser might be able to recommend to you. This approach considers long-term combinations of assets to achieve protection against inflation while managing the risk of volatile returns.

A financial adviser may consider risks such as deflation and inflation when constructing your overall asset allocation to make your investments as robust as possible to different kinds of risks and maximise the chances of you reaching your investment goals over time. If you would like to know more please speak with your financial adviser to discuss how it can specifically relate to your situation.

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Source: IOOF

The cycle of investor emotions

It is human nature to overreact. When things are going well, we feel that nothing can stop us. And when things go bad, we look to take drastic action. Since emotions pose a threat to our financial health, it is important that we are aware of them.

When financial markets experience an upward or downward spike it can be difficult to not get caught up in the hype. From attention-grabbing news headlines to predictions from industry economists – it seems everyone has a different opinion on what markets will do next, and the best action to take. But when it comes to your investments, the best strategy is to remain focused on the long term, and not be swayed by emotions.

Initially as investors, we all start with optimism. We commonly expect things to go our way and tend to expect a reward for the risk of investing.

As our expectations are met, we get excited about the possibility of even greater returns, and the excitement becomes thrilling as the returns exceed our expectations. We are at the top of the cycle when we experience euphoria. But it is at this point that we also experience maximum financial risk. When we believe everything that we touch turns to gold, we fool ourselves into believing that we can beat the market, that we cannot make mistakes, that excessive returns are commonplace, and that we can tolerate higher levels of risk.

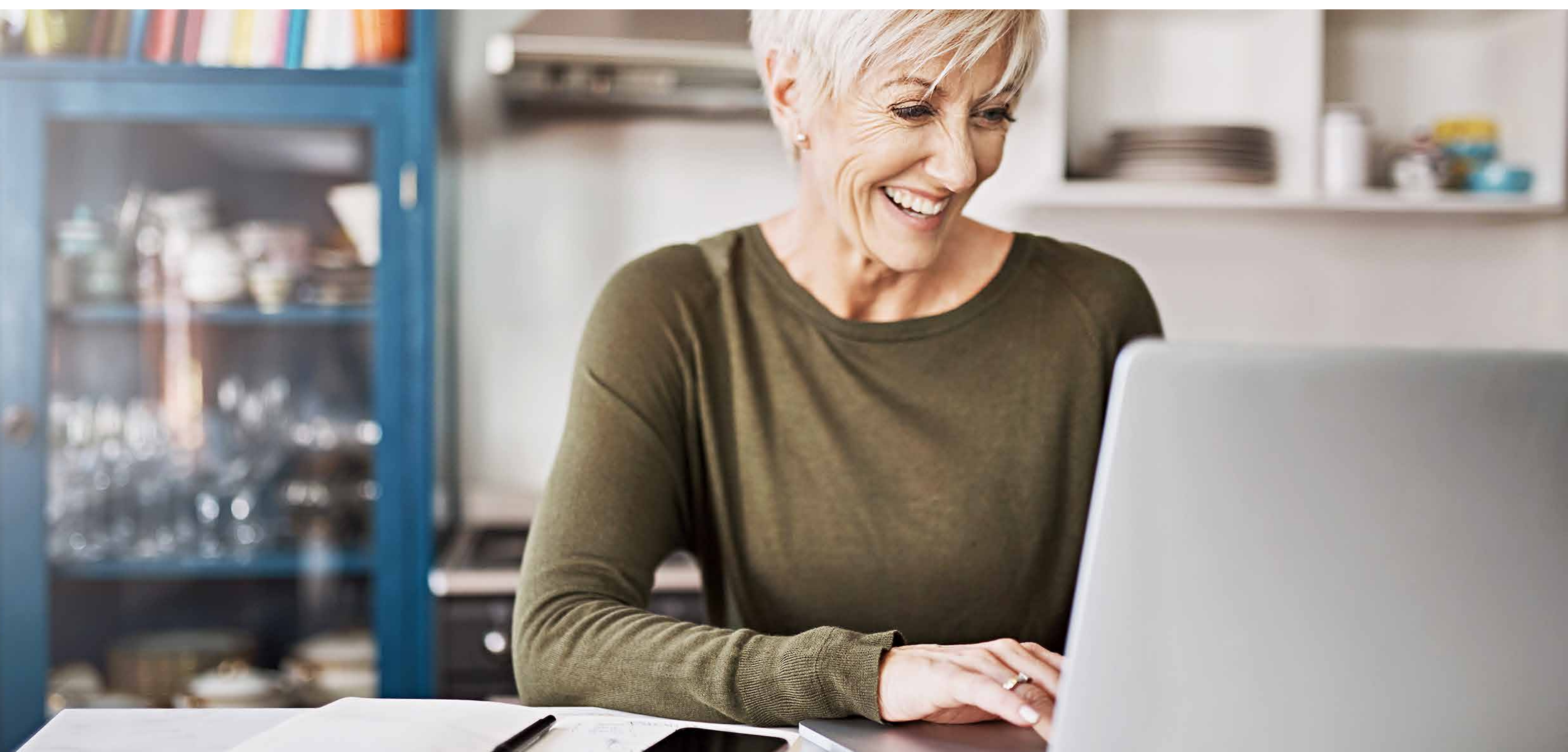
This euphoria was experienced by many investors at the start of 2020, prior to the Covid-19 outbreak and subsequent economic fallout. Global stock markets were at all-time highs as a result of the longest bull market in history, and many investors expected this trend to continue.

The second phase of the cycle begins when the market stops meeting our new lofty expectations and begins to turn. At first, we anxiously watch the market for any signs of direction. Anxiety turns to denial and then to fear as the value of our investments decline. We start to act defensively and may think about switching out of riskier assets to more defensive investments such as bonds.

In the third phase of the cycle, the realities of a bear market come to the fore and we become desperate. Many of us panic and withdraw from the market altogether – afraid of further losses. Those who persevere become despondent and we wonder whether markets are ever going to recover, and whether we should be invested in them at all.

Ironically, at these times, we commonly fail to recognize that we are actually at the point of maximum financial opportunity.

"Ironically, the time when the markets look their worst is usually the point of maximum financial opportunity."



The five most common behavioural pitfalls are:

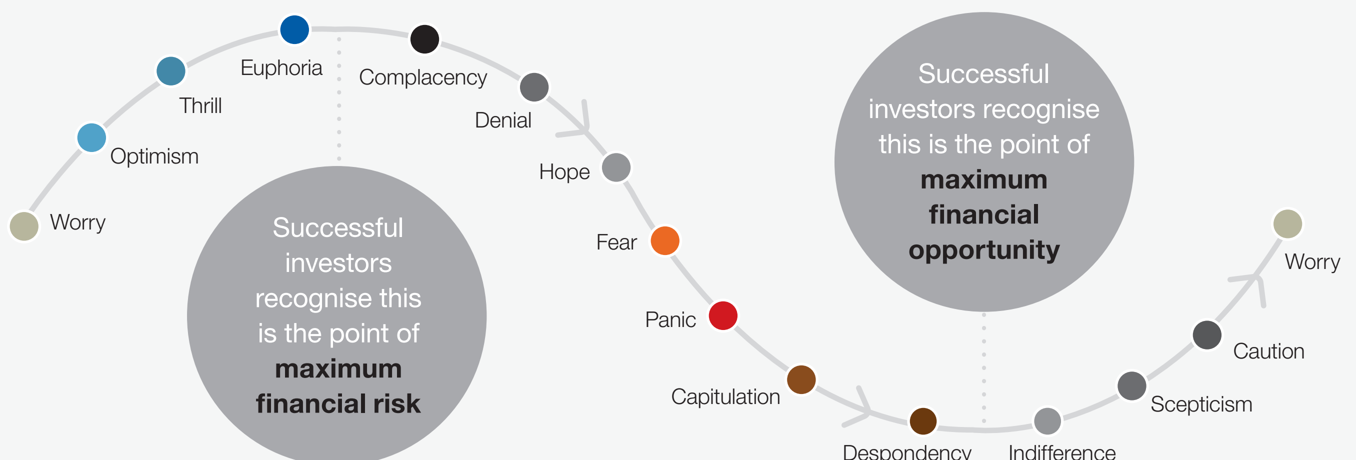
1. Overconfidence
When investors overrate their ability to select winning shares or investment managers.

2. Loss aversion
Research indicates that a loss causes about twice as much pain as a gain causes pleasure. During periods of market volatility investors experience the sense of loss more acutely.

3. Chasing past performance
We see this time and time again, but unfortunately, individual investors who are abandoning a well-diversified portfolio for bonds, or even cash, may be jeopardising their future financial security.

4. Timing the market
Research shows that no-one can accurately time the market.

5. Failure to rebalance
The risk/return characteristics of an investor's portfolio should be independent of what's happening in the market and this means selling high and buying low.



The temptation to fall into one of these traps can be resisted by developing and committing to a well-defined, long-term investment policy. This is the best way to protect yourself from your emotions.

Source: Russell Investments

How to invest in the things you believe in

An increasing number of investors are now looking to invest sustainably. With multiple sustainable investment strategies it's not always easy to immediately distinguish the differences between them. It is up to the investor to choose the approach that best suits their financial and sustainability goals, so we have compiled some information on common sustainable investing strategies to assist investors with understanding their choices.

ESG (environmental, social and governance) integration

ESG integration is a general approach to investing that incorporates environmental, social and governance (ESG) considerations alongside traditional financial analysis.

- Broadly speaking, environmental factors include issues such as climate change, deforestation, biodiversity and waste management.
- Social factors include issues such as labour standards, nutrition and health and safety.
- Governance includes issues such as company strategy, remuneration policies and board independence or diversity.

ESG integration is about understanding the most significant ESG factors that an investment is exposed to and making sure that you're compensated for any associated risk.

Sustainable investing

Although sustainable investing involves ESG integration, it takes things further by focusing on the most sustainable companies that lead their sector when it comes to ESG practices.

Both the ESG integration and sustainable investing approaches are about engaging with company management to make sure the firm is being run in the best possible way. This can mean challenging a company on its sustainability practices to encourage improvements where necessary.

Screened investing

Screening is when you decide to invest, or not to invest, based on specific criteria.

Let's say you only want to invest in companies that promote workplace diversity. Your criteria might be substantial representation of women and minorities in management-level positions, and/or the existence of diversity and inclusion policies.

You (or your fund manager) will use these factors to deliberately exclude investments that don't meet these criteria (negative screening). Or they might purposefully include those that do (positive screening).

Ethical investing

Ethical investing is an example of where screening is commonly used. Investors screen out investments that they deem unethical because they don't fit in with their ethics or values (it's also called values-based investing).

People commonly exclude so-called “sin stocks” such as alcohol, gambling, weapons manufacturing, tobacco or adult entertainment companies because they view these activities as immoral.

Impact investing

Impact investing is about putting your money to work in a way that has a specific, measurable and positive benefit to society or the environment.

This isn't to be confused with a charitable donation though. You also want to generate a return on your investment, as well as promote social good.

Let's say you're passionate about education in Africa. You can put your money into a fund that invests in companies or projects that are working towards delivering quality education in African communities. Or you can invest directly in these companies or projects yourself.

Impact investing is more common in private markets (i.e. not the stock market). Recipients tend to be small companies with clear social goals that otherwise may not have access to capital.

Thematic investing

This is about investing according to your chosen investment theme. Maybe your theme is 'health and wellness'. In this case you'll only want to consider funds that invest in healthy food brands or those companies focused on developing new vaccines.

Or perhaps your theme is 'green investing'. If so, you'll only invest in companies and technologies that you consider good for the environment (alternative energy generators or energy-saving technology manufacturers, for example).

The above is not an exhaustive list of the sustainable strategies available out there. But it should serve as a good starting point to help you understand the differences between some of the common approaches.

For more information please speak with your financial adviser.

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Source: Schroders

Strategies for long-term investing

Given the inherent volatility of markets, it's useful to remind ourselves of strategies we can utilise to meet investment goals. The fundamentals of portfolio construction can help position portfolios appropriately in times of crisis and volatility.

Exploit a long-run time horizon

Investors with a long horizon don't need short-term liquidity, giving them an edge during market sell-offs. As markets fall, long-term investors have often generated excellent returns by buying quality distressed assets across major asset classes.

Additionally, if the market rewards illiquid assets with a higher risk premium, it makes sense to over-allocate to such assets, as it's unlikely that they'll need to sell during bouts of volatility. During financial and economic turmoil, investment horizons tend to shorten due to immediate cashflow needs or because of psychological factors. The last thing that any investor wants to do is sell an asset into a volatile and illiquid market.

The free lunch

Diversification is the rare free lunch available to investors: it can reduce portfolio volatility without reducing its return. A key challenge to achieving diversification is reducing the dominance of equity risk in a balanced portfolio. Even if diversification tends to fail in crises (as correlations spike across asset classes), it can still be useful in the long run. This matters more for long-term investors who face less liquidation pressure during market drawdowns.

Most portfolios have positive exposures to the equity market and to economic growth. This risk is difficult to diversify away, making those assets with a negative correlation to equities a valuable addition.

Diversification however has limitations (one of which is the tendency for correlations to approach one during crises) and a strong risk management framework and avoidance of large drawdowns is key in generating good long-run compounded returns.

Risk-free is return-free

Risk-free assets like cash and government bonds no longer generate a positive inflation-adjusted yield and are return-free. Long-run investors can position for 'the portfolio rebalancing effect' that is likely to dominate investment flows in the next decade.

Expected portfolio returns can be improved by increasing the weight of the most volatile asset class. The classic approach is to raise the weight of 'high-risk, high-return' equities and reduce the weight of 'low-risk, low-return' assets such as cash and government bonds. Taking more risk in this way, and getting rewarded for it, is an easy way to boost long-run returns for investors.

Minimising costs can come at a cost

Passive investing minimises trading costs. However, some costs are worth paying. For example, buying an index fund costs more than investing in a bank deposit, but the risk premium should make the cost worthwhile in the long run. In general, investors should allocate more to active products the less they believe in market efficiency. Minimising costs is not always smart; being cost-effective and avoiding wasteful expense is.

The importance of being selective

Market outperformance – through the compounding of returns – can help investors achieve their financial goals. Excess returns can be an important driver of wealth creation, and actively managed funds offer the opportunity to outperform the market. Even seemingly small amounts of excess return can lead to significantly better outcomes.

Over the intermediate term, asset performance is often driven largely by cyclical factors tied to the state of the economy, such as corporate earnings, interest rates, and inflation. The business cycle, which encompasses the cyclical fluctuations in an economy over many months or a few years, can therefore be a critical determinant of market returns.

As volatility is ever-present in capital markets, protection in the form of safe-haven assets and portfolio diversification will be increasingly important for investors. However, today returns from defensive assets will likely be far less than historic averages. Due to central bank action, riskier asset classes like equities appear likely to attract increasing inflows over the coming decade. The traditional methods of portfolio construction – a long-run horizon, diversification, cost-control, and active investing – remain the best approach to generating sustainable long-run returns.

For more information please speak with your financial adviser.

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Source: Fidelity

Investment options in retirement explained

Getting the balance right between a safe spending rate and having enough income to enjoy retirement takes some careful planning. Investing for a reasonable return is one approach to helping your savings go the distance.

What is your risk appetite?

There's a rule of thumb when it comes to investment risk. Generally speaking, the higher the expected return, the higher the risk involved. But taking on investments with the least possible risk can make it difficult to earn investment returns that keep up with inflation and any rises in living costs.

On the other hand, taking on too much risk could lead to steep falls in the value of your investments. This can have an even bigger impact when you're retired, because you can't expect to replace these losses from your salary or other types of income. Plus, you're relying on your 'nest egg' to provide at least some of your income. When you lose a portion of those savings to risky investments, you have less to spend for the rest of retirement and less to earn returns on over the long term.

Understanding the investments available to you, and their risks, will be crucial to looking forward with confidence in your retirement.

What is an asset class?

An asset class is a group of investments with similar characteristics and laws. They're typically grouped into two broad categories, defensive and growth. Defensive assets offer less opportunity for growth, and generally provide you with income stability and security for your original investment and income. Growth assets carry more risk, and generally provide you with more potential to grow your investment over time.

Here are some of the assets in each category that you might come across when exploring your investment options:

Defensive assets

Defensive assets include investments like cash, term deposits, fixed interest securities, and annuities.

Cash is considered the safest form your money can take but it typically generates the lowest returns. However, it can be good to have some cash in a bank account because of the safety it provides and because you can access it right away when you need it.

Term deposits are held for a set period of time with a bank, building society or credit union. The rate of return is fixed, and you can be certain of your income, but you should be prepared to have your capital locked away for the full term. Whilst term deposits offer this security, there is a trade-off. When markets perform strongly, your rate of return will remain fixed and you won't benefit from higher returns.

Fixed interest securities, such as bonds, involve you usually loaning money to a company or entity. You receive regular interest payments and can expect to get back the original sum invested at the end of the term, known as the 'maturity'. The underlying value of the fixed interest security can change with interest rate movements.

Annuities can also be viewed as a type of fixed interest investment. You invest a lump sum with an annuity provider and receive regular payments for either a fixed period or for the rest of your life depending on the type of annuity you choose. As with term deposits, your payment rate will remain fixed. So whilst you won't be affected by share market falls, you also won't benefit from higher returns when share markets perform strongly.

Growth assets

Growth assets include investments like property, shares and equities.

Property can provide you with rental income and potential for capital gains. In Australia property prices have generally performed well over the long term. However, property prices are notoriously difficult to predict due to the number of variables that impact them.

Investing in shares means buying a share of ownership in a company, usually on a stock exchange. The value of the shares are generally linked to a company's value and as a shareholder, you can be paid a share of profits as a dividend. Shares are generally considered to be a higher risk asset class as their value tends to be more volatile. You can control the amount of risk you take on by investing in share portfolios that invest in companies that have delivered consistent returns over the long term.

Investment strategies for retirement

Everyone has different investment goals. However, a common objective for many people investing for their retirement is striking a balance between maximising available cash flow and protecting the remaining savings.

The importance of diversification

Diversification is a golden rule of investing. Spreading investments across different asset classes can strike a balance between security (defensive assets), and higher investment returns (growth assets). This can reduce your overall investment risk and the impact of significant market downturns, or poor returns from a particular business or sector.

Contact your financial adviser to determine whether an annuity is right for you.

Your risk appetite will determine which investment strategy is right for you, and according to the Government website MoneySmart[1] may fall into one of the following four types:

1 MoneySmart expected returns based on actuarial advice received in May 2018. Actual results can vary significantly.

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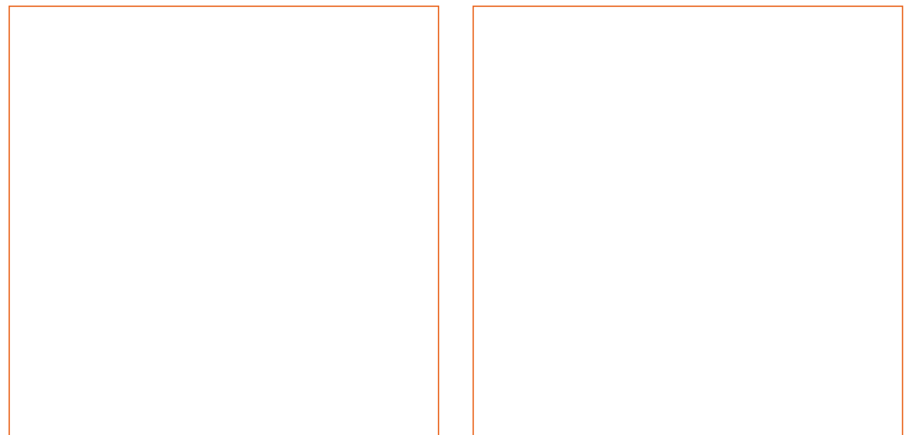

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