

NEW RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS AGE DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKFORCE

New research into the treatment of older workers shows that many mature-age employees report experiencing discrimination in the workforce due to their age, and believe they are not receiving the same opportunities provided to other workers.

[Experience, Knowledge and Commitment: Valuing Older Workers](#) examines the employment challenges facing people over 50. The research found there are more instances of older employees having been laid off compared to their younger colleagues, while a stigma remains around their competency with technology and openness to change.

Older women in non-managerial roles, working part-time or on a casual basis, are more likely to report experiences of aged-based discrimination.

The research is part of a joint initiative by the Council on the Ageing (COTA) NSW and Challenger and is aimed at addressing the underemployment of people over 50. Importantly, the research considers the issue from the perspective of both Australian employers and employees.

“Australia’s mature-aged workforce is skilled and able – and older people are healthier than at any other time in history,” said Meagan Lawson, Chief Executive Officer of COTA NSW. “But due to stigma and discrimination, there are fewer employment opportunities for people aged over 50.”

Key takeaways from the research include:

- Many employers are unaware of age discrimination in the workforce but are willing to do something about it once it’s been identified.
- Businesses need support to understand how they are tracking, and the steps they can take to improve employment of mature workers.
- Older workers believe a change in attitude by employers would help them financially and emotionally.
- There’s a great diversity within mature aged workers.

Ageing of the workforce is a critical challenge for the economy. In 1976 there were seven working people for every non-working person. In 2016 that had fallen to four to one, and according to the [NSW Intergenerational Report](#), it will be two to one by 2056.

The benefits to individuals and the community go well beyond finance. Workforce participation is [linked to better health outcomes](#) and other positive well-being indicators. But the research shows many mature age workers feel they don’t get a fair go, with excuses ranging from over-qualification and younger managers feeling threatened, to poor cultural fit and bad for the corporate image.

“There is significant value to individuals, the community and the economy in supporting older people to work as long as they wish,” Challenger Chief Executive Officer Richard Howes said. “Increasing workforce participation for older Australians will not only help improve overall wellbeing but also contributes to financial security for a better retirement.”

Half the employers surveyed for the research thought they were doing enough to support older workers. While most employers have general workplace bullying, discrimination and equal opportunities policies in place, only a minority had specific policies that covered age discrimination in detail.

“Older workers should be more valued for the expertise, skills and experience they bring to the workplace, and building awareness around the issue of age discrimination with employers and employees of all ages is a key opportunity,” Ms Lawson said.

COTA NSW and Challenger are developing a toolkit to help employers implement age friendly practices. It includes improved education for managers to address unconscious bias and improve hiring practices, as well as programs to help promote flexible working arrangements and anti-age discrimination policies.

The toolkit will be available later in the year and will include initiatives: to forge stronger connections between workers of all ages within an organisation and; how to better train mature age jobseekers.

“While not all older workers are the same, some uniform initial steps should be taken to address the issue of age bias,” Ms Lawson said. “There needs to be better education and training, more rigorous internal policies and structures, greater cross pollination among workers, and better access to job opportunities for older workers.”

The report is available at www.cotansw.com.au

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About COTA NSW

As the peak body for older people in NSW, COTA NSW are the authoritative advocate for the rights and needs of older people. Drawing on their extensive community consultation, they work with politicians, policy makers, allied organisations, service providers and the media to ensure that the interests and concerns of people over 50 in NSW are heard and prioritised.

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