

MEDIA RELEASE

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Survey shows ageism alive and well among Australian employers

Government survey findings showing almost a third of Australian employers break the law by setting an age limit for job applicants demonstrates how much effort is still required to fight ageism in the workforce.

The newly released Employing Older Workers report from the Australian Human Rights Commission found that two thirds of those 30 percent plus of employers who say they have a maximum age they are willing to recruit to, will not employ people over 50. This is despite two thirds of all respondents also acknowledging that the loss of older workers has led to a loss of skills and corporate knowledge in their company.

“At age 50 many workers are still optimising what they have to offer employers after several decades of honing skills” said Ian Yates, Chief Executive of COTA Australia, the leading national advocate for older Australians.

Mr. Yates said that while the report showed the situation has improved since 2014, when almost 71 per cent of employers said they had age restrictions, the findings are still an indictment of far too many employers.

“While there has been an improvement over the last four years, it’s scandalous that 1 in 3 employers discriminate on the basis of age, which is not only ageist and prejudiced, **it’s illegal**,” Mr. Yates said.

“The report shows that employers recognise the value of the experience older workers bring (76 per cent) and the professional knowledge they possess (68 per cent), and more respondents across all categories said there was no difference between the generations at work, with a 14 per cent increase in people indicating no difference between older and younger workers on technology skills and abilities.

“Despite this, tens of thousands of mature, well qualified Australians are still being ruled out on the basis of their age, before they even have the chance to demonstrate they have the skills, experience and ability to the job – and this is all illegal under the Age Discrimination Act – **who is letting them off the hook?**

“It means that people Australians over 50 are either being forced onto Newstart unemployment benefit or going into poverty as they erode their lifetime savings, because the system is stacked against them.

It also means that as a nation we are missing out on the untold skills, experience and knowledge of 34 per cent of the population.”

Mr Yates said the report reinforced the imperative for the government to further beef up the programs it announced in the May Budget to increase workplace participation for older Australians. Otherwise there is a fair chance bureaucratic inertia will mean they are never implemented.

“On these figures Prime Minister Scott Morrison will be struggling to find an employer to take him on if he loses the next Federal election – the odds are they won’t want him because he’s over 50,” Mr Yates said.

“Australia’s population is ageing, which means we are living longer, we are healthier for longer and we can contribute to the workforce longer. However too many employers write us off in our prime.

“Governments have acknowledged the value older Australians can provide to the workforce, and the economic value of increasing workforce participation amongst older Australians.

“We need programs that incentivize employment of older workers, support their retraining and encourage flexible career development, and a government that is also prepared to punish employers who act illegally against Federal law and international conventions.

“Let’s not pussy foot around – it’s illegal to discriminate against employees on the basis of their age but the government is letting a third of Australia’s employers do it without sanction – and we suspect some of those employers are government agencies. It’s time to stop the rot and change the culture.”

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