

MEDIA RELEASE

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Older Australians locked out of the workforce rely on Covid-19 JobSeeker supplement

Council on the Ageing (COTA) Australia today addressed the Senate Community Affairs Committee highlighting evidence from the Retirement Incomes Review showing 50% of jobseekers are involuntarily unemployed, as the Committee considers the withdrawal of the Covid-19 JobSeeker supplement.

COTA reaffirmed its support for the Raise the Rate campaign led by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) calling for a permanent increase in the JobSeeker payment to an adequate amount that will help support Australians to find work.

COTA Australia Chief Executive, Ian Yates, says the Government's own Retirement Income Review released last week acknowledged that retiring before the pension age has a profound impact on savings and retirement incomes.

"Ageism in the workforce has locked tens of thousands of older Australians out of gainful employment," says Mr Yates. "We are now in the midst of a high pandemic that has significantly reduced the number of vacant positions and driven unemployment higher.

"We should have a social support system in place that reflects these harsh realities. Many tens of thousands of Australians old and young will be unable to find work for some time. Even before the pandemic, most Australians receiving unemployment benefits were on the payment for over a year.

"We have urged the Senate yet again to recommend abolition of the Liquid Assets Waiting Period, a call supported by the Henry Review, which forces any single person with \$5,500 in savings to wait 13 weeks before receiving a payment. This is essentially forcing them into poverty.

"For older unemployed people, this dangerously reduces their lifetime savings, compromising their quality of life in retirement.

"Whilst the work is done to find a better way to support private renters, Commonwealth Rental Assistance should also be increased by 40% to assist job seekers in the private rental market. Older renters are some of the most vulnerable in our society, a situation which the government should adequately address in the long term.

"We urge the Senate Community Affairs Committee to prioritise the dignity of all Australians seeking work and ensure that JobSeeker and other allowances are sufficient to keep Australians out of poverty and maintain their health and safety while they overcome the many barriers to finding employment."

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