

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT  
SUBMISSION TO  
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE  
FOR  
EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS:  
INQUIRY INTO ISSUES SPECIFIC TO OLDER WORKERS  
SEEKING EMPLOYMENT, OR ESTABLISHING A BUSINESS,  
FOLLOWING UNEMPLOYMENT

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The South Australian Government forwards this submission for consideration by the House of Representatives Standing Committee for Employment, Education and Workplace Relations inquiry into issues specific to older workers seeking employment, or establishing a business, following unemployment.

The submission focuses on the broad issues relating to mature age unemployed people seeking work rather than specifically on those establishing a business.

Despite the evidence of lower than average recorded unemployment rates for the mature aged workforce (those aged 45 years and over), it is clear that job seekers aged 45 years and over face a range of barriers when attempting to re-enter the workforce; sufficient barriers in fact, for mature age job seekers to be legitimately classified as a disadvantaged group within the labour market.

The issues highlighted in this submission as requiring careful consideration by the House of Representatives Standing Committee, include mismatch of skills possessed by and sought from the older unemployed, duration of unemployment, employer attitudes to older job seekers and the employment expectations of the mature age unemployed.

Government has an opportunity and indeed a responsibility to address the level of disadvantage currently experienced by mature aged people without employment. This is apparent from an equal employment opportunity perspective and also from a broader obligation to protect and provide for the community. Policy options discussed in this paper include investment in the education and training of mature age job seekers, the development of early intervention strategies, encouraging employers to recognise the value of older workers and ensuring that job seekers have realistic expectations of the labour market.

Some of these policy options have been addressed by the South Australian Government in its recent 1999 Employment Statement; *all* of these policy options would benefit from Commonwealth Government consideration.

## INTRODUCTION

**The purpose of the submission** The South Australian Government, primarily through the Department of Education, Training and Employment has observed, for some time, an emerging trend of labour market disadvantage for mature age job seekers, that is those aged 45 years and over. The State Government therefore welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Commonwealth Government's House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations inquiry into issues relating to mature age unemployment.

**SA Govt. Perspective** As the Government provider of education, training and employment services, the Department of Education, Training and Employment targets its education, training and employment creation efforts to both the broader community and those groups identified as requiring additional assistance or suffering inequality of access.

Prior to discussing social, economic and industrial issues associated with mature age job seekers, it is important to establish the operating parameters for the Department with respect to employment and business start-up assistance. This discussion of the current role of the Department with respect to mature age employment assistance will provide a context for the general discussion of issues and the policy options for Commonwealth and State Governments.

The Department of Education, Training and Employment currently delivers a range of programs designed to generate employment in South Australia. This is achieved through providing support to businesses looking to expand and new companies starting up; by complementing economic and industry development activities undertaken by other Departments; and by assisting with the appropriate supply of labour for businesses throughout the State. The Department also recognises its community obligation to assist those disadvantaged in the labour market through activities such as pre-employment training and job matching services.

The Department's employment activities are generally delivered through a network of Regional Development Boards and organisations contracted for specific projects. A partnership approach is adopted in most cases, which involves joint funding and delivery of projects with public, private and community sector organisations.

**SA Govt. Employment activities** The South Australian Government recently introduced several mature age employment assistance programs as part of its 1999-2000 budget. These programs, worth more than \$5 million over 3 years, are outlined below:

- The Mature Age Employer Incentive Scheme will assist employers, through the provision of a financial incentive, to employ persons aged 40 years and over. The scheme, which offers an incentive of up to \$2,000, is expected to facilitate the placement of 2,000 job seekers over the next three years.
- The Mature Age Labour Market Forums will provide information and advice on employment issues specific to the needs of mature age people.
- A Mature Age Employer Awareness Campaign will promote the advantages of employing mature workers. The program will also provide information on

incentives available to employers recruiting mature age workers.

- Mature Age Skills Development Training Grants will be made available to support mature age job seekers to undertake training. Training will focus on industries experiencing strong growth and/or skill shortage occupations.

Additionally, several existing Departmental programs assist job seekers aged 40 years and over, although by and large eligibility criteria generally provide access to all age groups. These include:

- KICKSTART - a flexible employment and business development program that facilitates business growth and the meeting of labour needs
- Self Starter - a small business start-up program offering business management training, grants and mentoring
- Special Employment Initiatives - projects address specific employment issues and have identified employment outcomes
- Pilot Projects - organisations are funded to deliver innovative employment programs
- Regional Labour Exchange Program - employers' seasonal labour needs are met through local labour exchanges

The Department also funds the DOME (Don't Overlook Mature Expertise) Association for the delivery of training and achievement of employment outcomes for job seekers aged 40 years and over.

Having established the perspective of the Department of Education, Training and Employment as the State Government's focal point for employment assistance, we can now look at the trends of mature age employment in South Australia and Australia with a view to identifying key issues for this cohort.

## STATISTICAL TRENDS

**What are the facts of mature age unemployment?**

The first question that emerges when examining mature age unemployment and the need for assistance in the labour market is 'Why is it an issue now?'. Has the experience of mature age job seekers changed substantially in recent years or has an ongoing issue simply gained increased exposure as a result of it being recognised by government, academics and the media as something that needs to be addressed? Unsurprisingly, the answer is probably both.

A further issue for consideration is whether all mature age job seekers are experiencing the same difficulties in finding work or whether there are subsets of the larger cohort that perform relatively better or poorer. Furthermore, is gender a key variable in determining a mature age person's success in the labour market? Current and historical data for Australia and South Australia indicate similar trends in mature age unemployment rates. However, the fact that the South Australian population has a relatively greater proportion of persons in the 45 years and over age group than the national average, and has a population which is ageing more rapidly, suggests that these issues and their impact are magnified somewhat in South Australia. The latest figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) indicate that while 34% of the Australian population is aged 45 years and over, the

South Australian proportion is 36.7%<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, this disparity is expected to widen as the population ages. Projections from the ABS indicate that the mean age for the Australian population of 34.3 years in 1998 will rise to 38.6 years in 2011 and 46.2 years in 205 1; while the equivalent South Australian figures are projected to rise from 35.9 years to 41.2 years and finally 51.2 years<sup>2</sup>.

**Unemployment rates** At first glance, the unemployment statistics for mature age job seekers may indicate that there is no reason for great concern over this group's performance in the labour market. Table 1 shows that the unemployment rate for the mature age (45 years and over) population is consistently around 3 percentage points lower than the rate for the overall population. Further examination does however reveal that although the South Australian mature age population is performing comparatively better than the all-age population, the State's over 45s tend to suffer slightly higher rates of unemployment than the national age cohort. Table 2 demonstrates this, particularly over the past 5 years.

It should also be acknowledged, as indicated earlier, that some mature aged jobseekers tend to suffer greater spells of unemployment than younger age groups. The incidence of long term unemployment tends to be higher than the average amongst those sections of the workforce with a high dependence on restructuring industries and low transferability of skills to other areas of the economy. Due to their relatively high concentration in the traditional manufacturing industries, persons aged 45 and over are vulnerable to long term unemployment. These issues are discussed further below.

**Table 1: South Australian unemployment rates for over 45s and all ages**

	Mature Age (45+) Rate	All Age Rate
March 1980	2.6%	7.3%
March 1985	5.8%	9.1%
March 1990	4.7%	6.9%
March 1995	7.4%	10.3%
March 1999	6.1%	9.1%

Source: Compiled from original data from PC Ausstats, 1980-1999

<sup>1</sup> ABS, PC Ausstats, March 1999

<sup>2</sup> ABS data supplied by the South Australian Office for the Ageing

**Table 2: South Australian & Australian unemployment rates for over 45s**

	South Australia	Australia
March 1980	2.6%	2.9%
March 1985	5.8%	5.2%
March 1990	4.7%	4.2%
March 1995	7.4%	6.2%
March 1999	6.1%	5.1%

Source: Compiled from original data from PC Ausstats, 1980-1999

**Gender differences** The male/female breakdown shows minor differences for the over 45 age group in comparison with the main body of the labour force, that is the 25-44 age cohort. The male 45-54 age group performs reasonably well in terms of recorded unemployment rates; in fact this group has consistently posted the lowest unemployment rate of all age cohorts. Those men over age 55 however, have not been so successful in the labour market, particularly since the recession in the early 1990s. Since this time, the unemployment rate for over 55s has generally been higher than the 25-44 age group by one or two percentage points. The South Australian Government expects that the recently announced package of mature age assistance programs, particularly the Skills Development Training Grants, will be of particular benefit to men over 55.

The statistical picture for mature age women is more encouraging than for their male counterparts. All mature age categories of women demonstrate a significantly lower unemployment rate than the 25-44 age group. This has been the case for the last 20 years and there is nothing to suggest this will change.

Although the above data provides one statistical measure of potential labour force disadvantage experienced by mature age workers and job seekers, namely headline unemployment rates, it is necessary to examine other measures before making any judgements of the relevant success of the over 45s in the job market.

**Participation rates** The Australian labour force participation rate (for full time and part time employment combined for men aged 45 years and over has declined in the last 20 years. Although one subset of the over 45 age group has not performed exactly like another, the situation for men aged 45 to 54, which shows a fall from 92.1% in November 1978 to 87.6% in November 1998<sup>3</sup> is reasonably indicative of the trend. This trend is not common to mature age women. In fact, the labour force participation rate for women aged over 45 years has steadily increased over the past 20 years. As an example, the participation rate for women aged 45-54

<sup>3</sup> ABS, Labour Force, Australia, Cat. No. 6203.0

increased from 46.8% to 70.2% from November 1978 to November 1998<sup>4</sup>.

**Duration of unemployment**

Statistics on duration of unemployment of mature age job seekers are particularly revealing in terms of providing insight into any disadvantage this group may be experiencing in the labour market. In South Australia the average duration of unemployment for those aged 45 and over is 149 weeks, compared with 74 weeks for all age unemployed<sup>5</sup>. The duration increases with age, with 45-54 year olds experiencing on average 99.4 weeks, 55-59 year olds 147.8 weeks and 60-64 year olds 200.6 weeks.

The State Government has acknowledged this problem and believes that it is best addressed by early intervention strategies. The mature age programs announced as part of the 1999 Employment Statement target assistance to the recently retrenched under the belief that it is particularly critical for mature people to gain soon after their retrenchment. Specific programs addressing this issue include the Mature Age Employer Incentive Scheme, Mature Age Labour Market Forums and Mature Age Employer Awareness Campaign.

**Hidden unemployment**

It has been suggested that although mature age unemployment rates are generally lower than the general population's, the mature age represent a disproportionately high number of the hidden unemployed. A recent study published in the Australian Bulletin of Labour<sup>6</sup> examined this hypothesis. The study looked at ABS data on discouraged job seekers, that is those who want to work but are not actively looking for a job as a result of work-related reasons. The study revealed that both mature age men and mature age women were proportionally over-represented in the discouraged worker category. This suggests that mature age unemployment rates may be under-reported in comparison to other age cohorts.

## **ISSUES**

Given the above statistical information, what can we say about the overall performance of mature age job seekers in the labour market and what social, economic and industrial issues can we identify as affecting the labour market performance of job seekers over 45?

Although the recorded level of unemployment for job seekers aged 45 and over is generally lower than the all age population, mature job seekers have a higher incidence of long-term unemployment, demonstrate a disproportionately greater decline in labour force participation rates (although this is not true for mature age women) and are over-represented in the ABS measure of the number of hidden unemployed.

Having identified the problems for mature age job seekers, it is time to assess what may be the causes of their predicament. This discussion is based in part on the body of academic work devoted to the subject and in part on the direct interaction of the Department of Education, Training and Employment with mature age job

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<sup>4</sup> ibid

<sup>5</sup> ABS, Labour Force Estimates, September 1998

<sup>6</sup> ibid



seekers and specialist employment service providers.

The latter source of information is available through discussions with the mature aged unemployed seeking assistance from the Department; from working relationships with service providers undertaking work with State Government funds; through peak level committees such as the Partnership for Jobs Forum (an employment advisory committee chaired by the Premier of South Australia); and a series of 22 consultative workshops conducted throughout the State in late 1998, which sought community comment on ways to create employment.

### *Barriers to the Employment of Mature Age Unemployed*

In attempting to re-enter the workforce, mature age unemployed face a number of barriers. These barriers, some of which are perception rather than reality-based, combine to discourage mature age job seekers from persisting with their search for employment and influence employers in their hiring and firing decisions.

#### **Mismatch of skills**

The mature age unemployed are most often the victims of structural unemployment, in that while they possess various skills, they do not possess the skills that are in demand in the economy.

There is evidence to suggest that during times of economic recession, mature age workers are the first to be retrenched. In both public and private sectors, efficiency drives or downsizing of operations tend to disproportionately impact on workers over 45 years of age. This was a feature of western economies which drew comment from the International Labour Office (ILO) in 1995. The ILO noted:

"[the] present trend whereby older workers are often pushed or pulled out of the active labour force prematurely due to labour market constraints. The decline in participation rates of older workers runs counter to demographic trends and aggravates the problem of old-age dependency and rising social expenditures.<sup>7</sup>

This issue of rising social costs as a result of more mature age people not working is a particular issue of concern to South Australia given the older age profile of the population.

The skill mismatch between mature age job seekers and potential employers is also a consequence of companies shedding mature age workers. This is particularly the case in the manufacturing industry, from which many mature age unemployed have been made redundant. Many of these workers were not only mature age, but tended to possess few qualifications and have low educational attainment and poor English-language skills. Older workers displaced from such industries have less chance of employment in the dominant and rapidly growing services sector including community services, recreation, hospitality, personal services and finance and business services.

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<sup>7</sup> International Labour Office, 1995 Year Book of Labour Statistics, Geneva, 1995

**Length of unemployment** The 1995 Senate Committee Inquiry into Long Term Unemployment received many submissions suggesting that time can work against the mature age unemployed more than any other job seeker. In order to retain their confidence, skills and marketability, it is essential that they find a job in the crucial first 6 months. The statistics highlighted previously in this submission clearly indicate that once a mature age person becomes unemployed they are extremely susceptible to becoming long-term unemployed. In South Australia, for example, recent statistics indicate that around 60% of mature age unemployed people had been unemployed for at least 12 months and of this group around 40% had been unemployed for over 2 years.<sup>8</sup>

**Employer attitudes** A number of Australian studies have found that employers are often reluctant to hire older workers. The 1995 Senate Inquiry into Long Term Unemployment found that employers valued workers according to the costs of salaries and the number of years service they believed they could receive from the employee, both of which tend to favour younger people<sup>9</sup>. Employers also believed that older unemployed were unable to learn, lacked flexibility and were unable to adapt to new working arrangements or technology. While employers believe that an older worker may bring attributes such as maturity and experience to a job, these attributes are offset by a perception that older workers lack enthusiasm and drive; and by employer beliefs that older workers are difficult to retrain.

These employer perceptions of mature age workers are reflected in statistics measuring the mature age hiring practices of Australian firms. For example, a recent Morgan and Banks Job Index survey (November 1998 - January 1999) indicated that more than 26% of Australian companies have had a decrease in the percentage of mature age workers (over 45 years of age) in their organisations over the past 5 years. The most common explanations given by employers for this statistic were that mature age workers had been replaced by younger workers or mature age workers had lost their jobs as a result of downsizing.

One recent survey of Australian workers and employers` indicated that younger employees considered themselves significantly more likely to be re-employed if they lost their present job than older employees. Furthermore, the survey demonstrated that employers had minimal interest in employing anyone over 45 **years**. One suspects that this would depend on the nature of the position and the industry, but this does offer a broad perspective of the current labour market. The above discussion touches on some general survey work conducted with respect to *employer* expectations regarding mature aged job seekers. The discussion below now turns to the issues of *employee* and *job seeker* expectations of the job market.

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<sup>8</sup> ABS, Labour Force Estimates, September 1998 - March 1999 (March 1999 figures are 56.6% and 39% respectively)

<sup>13</sup> Senate Employment, Education and Training Reference Committee, Report on the Inquiry into Long-Term Unemployment, October 1995

**Mature age expectations of the labour market**

Many older workers who have found themselves unemployed, often for the first time in their life, are exposed to a competitive labour market of which they have little understanding. Successfully planning a new career and attempting to re-enter the workforce depends on a knowledge of how the labour market works, what

employers are looking for, how to market oneself, and what potential obstacles could exist in obtaining employment. A lack of understanding of the labour market, and particularly possessing unrealistic expectations- of the opportunities that exist can therefore act as a further barrier to re-ente'ring the workforce.

Research into the job search experiences of the mature age unemployed has, however, found that women appear to find less difficulty in returning to the workforce". It was argued that this was due to women being more prepared to accept jobs at lower pay and lower status than those they have left, and also to take part-time work when full-time employment is unavailable. By contrast, it is not uncommon in surveys examining the experiences of mature age job seekers, for male respondents to acknowledge that, had they been prepared to accept a lower salary at an earlier stage, they may have more easily re-entered the workforce.

## **POLICY OPTIONS - POTENTIAL GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION**

The South Australian Government has become aware of the need to address some of the barriers facing mature age job seekers in their search for employment. This was a key issue to emerge through the Government's community consultation process, the Job Workshops, in October 1998.

As discussed earlier in this submission, the State Government announced a new package of programs in the State budget on 27 May 1999 with the aim of addressing some of the barriers faced by mature age job seekers in their search for employment.

Specifically, from 1999-2000 the Government will offer training assistance for the mature age unemployed, information forums to assist job search, financial incentives to employers who hire a mature age worker and fund a mature age worker employer awareness campaign. These programs address the key issues of skills mismatch, job seeker expectation and employer attitude.

It is hoped that this submission will prove a useful resource for the Commonwealth Government as it determines its role in the provision of employment services for older job seekers.

**Mismatch of skills**

The skill mismatch preventing many mature age job seekers finding employment is one of the issues requiring a prompt response. South Australia, and Australia generally, are economies that have undergone substantial restructuring over the past decade. The globalisation of many industries, the introduction of new technologies and the emergence of new industries and extensive changes to existing ones have significantly impacted on the role of the worker in today's society. The skills required of the local workforce 10 years ago are no longer those

" Encel S & Studencki H, Job Search Experiences of Older Workers, NSW Consultative Committee of Ageing, Sydney,1995



most in demand.

Perhaps the single biggest losers out of the dramatic changes to Australian industry are those workers made redundant at the age of 45 or over. Left with outdated skills that in many cases are difficult to transfer to other industries, the mature job seeker may become a superseded unit of production. There are however, ways to address this mismatch of skills:~possessed and those in demand. Investment in education and retraining of mature age unemployed to gain the skills in demand is critical to any strategies to improve their employment prospects.

The South Australian Government realises that this issue continues to affect a great many of the approximately 16 000 unemployed people over 45 in South Australia,<sup>2</sup> and an unknown proportion of the hidden unemployed. The expanded delivery of skills training and upskilling services for mature age job seekers should be viewed as a priority as governments consider how to redress the disproportionate level of labour market disadvantage suffered by the older unemployed. This is why the South Australian Government will introduce the Mature Age Skills Development Training Grants from 1999-2000. This program will provide mature age job seekers with the opportunity to update skills and develop new talents through accessing grants of up to \$500 for training of their choice.

**Policy Option 1: The provision of mature age-specific skills training and upskilling services should be considered by the Commonwealth Government.**

**Length of unemployment**

The worryingly common trend of mature age unemployed becoming long-term unemployed (at least 12 months) and very long-term unemployed (at least 24 months) is clearly interrelated with the issue of skills mismatch. It is however, worthy of consideration as an issue in its own right.

It is critical that government develops early intervention strategies. Early intervention is a key factor in fast tracking mature age job seekers back into the workforce. The acquisition of new skills and the transfer of existing skills are most successful when these needs are addressed early in the period of unemployment.

Perhaps this issue requires a government commitment to the provision of employment and training services at the time of or soon after a redundancy occurs rather than a package of programs; an unequivocal recognition that mature age job seekers are disadvantaged in the labour market. The adoption of this philosophy will have implications for the eligibility criteria of mainstream employment assistance as well as requiring the development of new assistance mechanisms.

**Policy Option 2: Appropriate early intervention strategies should be developed by government to address the tendency of mature age unemployed people to become long-term unemployed.**

<sup>2</sup> ABS, Labour Force Estimates, September 1998

**Policy Option 3: Consideration should be given to adjusting Commonwealth Government eligibility requirements for existing programs to enable mature age job seekers access early in their period of unemployment.**

**Employer attitudes**

The previous two issues have focussed on the supply of labour. This is only half the picture. As discussed previously in this submission, employer perceptions of mature age workers perform a crucial role in the ability of mature job seekers to secure employment.

There are some well-established views on the need for government intervention in this area. The 1995 Commonwealth Government Senate Inquiry into Long-term Unemployment recommended that the education of employers be adopted as a strategy, to ensure the success of ameliorating mature age unemployment. Recommendation 7 of the Inquiry's report suggested,

"that the government fund an advertising campaign to encourage employers and the wider community to see the very real and positive contributions made to the national output by workers aged 40 and over. In particular, the advertising campaign should aim at breaking down stereotypes of older workers as being rigid for change and for learning new skills".

The South Australian Government is supportive of any campaign aiming to promote the value of mature age workers. In fact the State Government has made some initial efforts to improve employer perceptions of mature age people. The South Australian Office for the Ageing (Department of Human Services) co sponsored a seminar with this aim in December 1998; the Council of the Ageing, in cooperation with the South Australian Government, is hosting a national congress in Adelaide in November 1999, exploring 'the changing nature of work and retirement in the 21' century'; and the South Australian Equal Opportunity Commission (Department of Justice) will be delivering a Recruitment and Selection Seminar on 3 June 1999 promoting anti-discrimination practices to recruitment consultants, employer organisations and business representatives.

Additionally, the new Mature Age Employer Awareness Campaign will tackle this issue through promotional and advisory services targeted at local businesses.

There is a clear rationale for expending some financial resources on assisting mature age people into employment. By devoting resources to encouraging employers to employ mature age job seekers, be it through a marketing campaign or even direct financial incentives, this will save government money in the future. It must be remembered that to maintain any pool of unemployed people, mature age or otherwise, is to accept the financial costs of pensions, benefits, medical expenses and tax losses. Contributing funds to lowering mature age unemployment makes economic sense.

" Senate Employment, Education & Training Reference Committee, Report on the Inquiry into Long-Term Unemployment, October 1995, p55

**Policy Option 4: The Commonwealth Government should consider developing a marketing campaign promoting the value of mature age workers in accordance with the recommendation of the 1995 Senate Inquiry into Long Term Unemployment.**

**Policy Option 5: The House of Representatives Standing Committee should recommend that government further investigate other initiatives that would encourage employers to hire mature age job seekers.**

**Mature age expectations of the labour market**

In many cases of mature age unemployment the people involved have never before been unemployed. Naturally their job search skills may not be as effective as they would hope and their knowledge of the labour market beyond the immediate work environment from which they have come is likely to be minimal. This lack of job search skills and knowledge of the labour market, in combination with the fact that many mature age unemployed have little experience of being without work, can create unrealistic expectations of a person's ability to find another job.

The South Australian Government, through the Department of Employment Education and Training, recently funded an employment service provider to assist 50 regionally based mature age job seekers with job search assistance and identification of training needs and appropriate career pathways. Although this is a program delivered on a limited scale, its outcomes will inform any future initiatives of its type.

Furthermore, as discussed earlier, the State Government will fund a number of information forums in 1999-2000, which will provide advice to mature age people seeking work on job opportunities, training options and a range of job search techniques.

There is clearly an opportunity for government to provide specialist advisory services and career guidance to mature job seekers. With limited financial expenditure government could promote more efficient job search practices amongst mature age job seekers and also alleviate some of the frustration that stems from their unrealistic expectations of the job market.

**Policy Option 6: The House of Representatives Standing Committee should encourage government to consider the development of advisory services and programs to improve the level of labour market awareness of mature age job seekers.**

**Mature age job seekers v young job seekers**

As a broader issue, concerns have been raised over the negative impact that the provision of employment assistance to the mature age unemployed may have on other groups in the labour market. Although this is beyond the scope of this submission, it is an issue that should be addressed.

In particular, more analysis is required of the relationship of young job seekers and mature age job seekers returning to the workforce. This is particularly true of the

interaction between women returning to the workforce and their relationship with young workers. It is not sufficient to say, as some critics of mature age assistance have said in the past, that simply because both groups have a tendency to fill parttime and casual jobs in the service sector that the employment objectives of each are mutually exclusive. However, the matter does need further consideration, perhaps within the broader context of the substitutability of various types of labour.

Although the South Australian Government is keen to provide specialist assistance to a range of groups seeking employment, it is recognised that the impact of any such assistance on other groups should be monitored. It is important that governments balance the needs of interacting stakeholders when seeking to address issues of disadvantage and equal opportunity.

**Policy Option 7: The House of Representatives Standing Committee should encourage the Commonwealth Government to undertake or commission an investigation into the interaction of mature age and young job seekers in the Australian labour market.**

## CONCLUSION

It is critical that governments formally recognise the disadvantaged status of mature age job seekers. Once the problem has been acknowledged, government can adopt a range of policy options to alleviate the impact of both the causes and the symptoms. To not address the issues contributing to mature age unemployment is to accept the financial and social burden that accompanies a pool of older workers without jobs. This is a burden that neither the community nor the individual can afford to carry.



## SUMMARY OF POLICY OPTIONS

- Policy Option 1: The provision of mature' age-specific skills training and upskilling services should be considered by the Commonwealth Government.
- Policy Option 2: Appropriate early intervention strategies should be developed by government to address the tendency of mature age unemployed people to become long-term unemployed.
- Policy Option 3: Consideration should be given to the adjustment of Commonwealth Government eligibility requirements for existing programs to enable mature age job seekers access to services early in their period of unemployment.
- Policy Option 4: The Commonwealth Government should consider developing a marketing campaign promoting the value of mature age workers in accordance with the recommendation of the 1995 Senate Inquiry into Long Term Unemployment.
- Policy Option 5: The House of Representative Standing Committee should recommend that government further investigate other initiatives that would encourage employers to hire mature age job seekers.
- Policy Option 6: The House of Representatives Standing Committee should encourage government to consider the development of advisory services and programs to improve the level of labour market awareness of mature age job seekers.
- Policy Option 7: The House of Representatives Standing Committee should encourage the Commonwealth Government to undertake or commission an investigation into the interaction of mature age and young job seekers in the Australian labour market.