

**OLDER MEN: NEW IDEAS (OM:NI)**  
an initiative of *COTA (NSW)*

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**Inquiry into Issues Specific to Workers over 45 Years of Age Seeking Employment, or  
Establishing a Business, Following Unemployment.**

Further to your letter dated 20/7/99 I have pleasure in enclosing a copy of our submission for consideration by the Inquiry.

As requested a copy is provided on disk as well as a hard paper copy.

As indicated OM:NI would like to have representatives appear before the Inquiry to answer questions relating to the submission and to address questions from the Standing Committee members.

Yours sincerely

**Michael Keats**  
Policy Officer  
for Jack Zinn, Special Project Manager  
and Michael Keats, Project Officer

INQUIRY INTO ISSUES SPECIFIC TO WORKERS  
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**SUBMISSION BY**

**OLDER MEN: NEW IDEAS (OM:NI)**

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**COTA (NSW)**

To the House of Representatives  
Standing Committee  
on  
Employment, Education  
and  
Workplace Relations

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## **The Invitation**

The invitation to OM:NI [ a special project of COTA (NSW)] to make a submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry was received from the Inquiry Secretary on 20/7/99.

COTA (Australia), the National Organisation of State and Territory COTA's has responded separately to the Inquiry. COTA (NSW) provided significant input into the COTA (A) submission.

This submission is reflective of the specific charter and needs of OM:NI (Older men: New Ideas). For the purposes of the Inquiry OM:NI should be regarded as a separate entity from COTA (NSW) and COTA (A). The views expressed are not those of COTA (NSW) or COTA (A)

## **About ONIM**

The drive to form OM:NI, (Older Men: New Ideas), stemmed from the identified need for a specific organisation dedicated to the health and social well being of Older Men.

OM:NI, was established in 1997 as an initiative of the Council on the Ageing (NSW), a peak consumer body advising government on issues affecting older people. OM:NI was the brain child of Jack Zinn a COTA (NSW) staff member.

OM:NI is about Older Men's business. It is about health, nutrition, lifestyle, social well being and much more. It is about camaraderie. It is about participation in life. It is about fulfilment and completeness as an Older Man.

OM:NI is a grassroots organisation. It works through the establishment of Older Men's groups in local areas. It operates in conjunction with local councils and community groups to identify, structure and nurture groups.

Two OM:NI groups are well established. These are located at Paddington and Chatswood in Sydney. Further groups are planned for Sydney's West and South. Extension to rural areas and possibly interstate over time is planned.

OM:NI is receiving support as from July 1999 from a large corporate sponsor and is planning a major two day conference entitled "Older Men's Health and Well Being" to be held in Sydney, in March 2000. The official launch of the sponsorship of OM:NI is planned for later during the current International Year of Older persons.

The following issues are of major concern to Older Men.

1. Older Men's health should be viewed as an holistic concept. For Older Men the impact of social, economic, physical and environmental change in their historical roles is profound. New socio- cultural influences challenge Older Men and their formerly defined roles. This is particularly true of work.
2. Older Men's health should be understood as not just the "absence of disease" but concerned with the quality of life and the dynamic balance between body, mind and spirit. For Older Men, social isolation after retirement may result in depression, illness and suicide. Depression in Older Men is as serious an issue as it is for younger men. The statistics would seem to confirm that it is even more so. The loss of self esteem and confidence that may occur at the time of retirement or retrenchment is a key issue.

3. Strategies to improve Older Men's health need to take into account the context of Older Men's working lives. Relationships between genders and age groups as well as amongst peers affect Older Men and their health status.
4. Health care professionals should be made aware that Older Men may have sensitivities about asking for help in connection with their health. Conditioning in childhood to be a stoic makes it difficult to talk openly about personal health issues when they are older. Receptionists in doctors surgeries should be schooled to understand Older Men's reluctance to seek such help. They should avoid speaking to Older Men in a patronising manner.
5. Regular health checks should be encouraged. Health promotion programs and resources should be taken to where Older Men congregate, eg, RSL's, Bowling Clubs, Seniors Clubs, country pubs and the like.
6. While socio - economic issues have a significant bearing on health behaviour, health status and attitude to seeking health checks, the importance of health education and knowledge - as a resource for good health - must be emphasised.
7. OM:NI meetings have the capacity to encourage Older Men to share thoughts and ideas. OM:NI meetings provide a measure of emotional camaraderie which can translate into positive initiatives by individual Older Men.

## **The Importance of Work to Older Men**

Mature Age Unemployment is a corrosive and debilitating condition. It eats away at individuals' self esteem. In extreme cases it can cause marriage breakdown, suicide and premature death. Mature Age Unemployment is a major societal issue which requires urgent, positive attention by Governments, Learning Institutions, Unions, Employers and individuals themselves.

Mature male unemployment is a more life threatening condition than Mature female unemployment. However it must be said both threaten economic and social stability.

Mature male unemployment exposes the marginal emotional dignity which is afforded males in contemporary society. Historically and traditionally the male role in society was to defend and protect, provide sustenance and ensure the continuity of the species.

All these functions have been removed from the modern male role. Defence and Protection is performed by the Armed and the Corrective Services respectively. Sustenance requires a trip to the supermarket - not the slaughter of wild animals, the physical harvesting of grains or foraging. Continuity of the species is now more an issue of too many progeny - not too few. In addition the survival rate of children is assisted by medicine and technology. Demonstration of prowess is for elite athletes and celluloid images. It is not required of the average male in a family situation.

Employment is the last *raison d'etre* for the vast majority of men. It is the crucial focus for male energy, mateship and self esteem. Male unemployment at any age is bad. At a mature age premature male unemployment is a sentence of mind, body and spirit.

The loss of potential from the work force and society is immeasurable.

Sustained high levels of mature male unemployment creates tensions in society. These tensions are often manifested in self abuse, and an increase in violence and crime towards others.

## **Current International Studies**

Mature Age Employment / Unemployment is the focus of very serious international study. The recent Social Policy Research Centre Conference 21 - 23 July 1999, held in Sydney explored some facets of Mature Age Unemployment.

Key note speaker, Anne Marie Guillemard, Professor of Sociology, University of Paris V, Rene Descartes, has identified that the traditional tripartite life course model of 'education work / leisure (retirement)' is falling apart.

The labour contract is unstable. The model is now more correctly likened to a series of dispersed activities. Often this entails periods of retirement, re education and work. The model requires a great deal of flexibility and preparedness to accept lesser roles and lesser salary despite the re education process.

This removal of distinct chronological markers and the need for new approaches to education training and non work periods means society now has to consider a much more flexible approach to our life course and how it is to be funded and enjoyed.

For Older Men 55+ this is a significant challenge. For all society it raises questions which impact on health, retirement, income tax planning, social policy and national productivity.

The OECD has undertaken studies which show that world wide in the developed countries, the working life of individuals is getting shorter.

Since 1960 the working life of a worker has decreased each year. Young people in 1995 were entering the work force on average 5 years later than they did in 1960.

In 1960 an average male lived for 68 years. 50 of these years were spent in the work force. The other 18 were spent in education and retirement.

In 1995 an average male lived for 75 years. 38 of these years were spent in the work force. 37 or nearly half the life was spent in education and retirement.

By 2020 it is estimated that work will be a minor part of the average male life. This trend and the consequential changes threaten many aspects of contemporary society which we take for granted: Taxation Revenue, Retirement Funding, Social Security, Medicare and sovereign National Economies to cite a few.

The OECD also found that early exiting from the work force produced some threatening consequences:-

1. Age stereotypes are reinforced. Those over 55 are redundant and unemployable, except in protected industries and categories of self employed.
2. Early exit of those 55+ has a ricochet effect on the next youngest group of workers. They too, are considered to be "on the way out," increasingly unemployable, lack self esteem and are a group with little future and few if any career prospects.
3. This becomes an easy mechanism for firms to remove older workers by depriving them of training opportunities and promotion.
4. Ineffective age related measures in the work place have a bad effect on employment.

5. For firms this loss and disorder means a loss of experience and "know how." Whilst there may be short term benefits to the corporate bottom line, the long term effect is a work force without history or knowledge.
6. Policies to inhibit early exit from the work force have traditionally failed because of the smallness of the budget allocated for the purpose. Measures which are proven not to work include.
  - a) raising the retirement age
  - b) offering part-time employment
  - c) lack of an active policy to keep older workers engaged.
7. The international public debate is schizophrenic - there is no coherent philosophy to keep mature workers in the work force.

The exception in the OECD countries included in the survey is Japan. Japanese employment policy supports mature age workers within an agreed age range. Retiring age is a contract and Japanese companies work positively to raise the retirement age. The contract includes the alignment of part time work with make up wages and a planned move to pensions and or annuities. The cultural tradition which supports this policy and philosophy is almost unique.

The conclusions reached by Professor Guillemard are as follows.

1. That the developed economies are not coping with the ageing of the work force.
2. The existing system of defined periods of education work and retirement are out of kilter with post industrial society and its needs.
3. Reform cannot be undertaken without an understanding of the need for change.
4. There is a need for a new "labour" contract which interlinks the elements of education, working hours and pensions/ superannuation. This contract needs to be sensitive to the life course of workers - in essence governments, employers and employees need to re negotiate "work," education and "non work" over our life course, provide flexible options and create a motivated work force for all ages.
5. If collectively we fail, old age poverty and disillusionment will be widespread.

At the same conference, David Thompson, Professor in History, College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand reported on studies closer to home which reinforce the OECD message.

1. Full time work has been redefined in New Zealand. 20 hours per week is now regarded as full time.
2. "Older workers" are now workers over 45.
3. New Zealand cohort data taken at 5 year intervals shows a successive older age of entry to the work force and younger and younger age exit from the work force.
4. In New Zealand there is increasing "casualisation" of work.

Assumptions by governments and other authorities are that savings will be adequate for a lengthening life and that the tax take will be adequate. These assumptions are not supported by fact. There is a huge mismatch between the assumptions and reality.

## NSW Government Initiatives

The NSW Consultative Committee on Ageing in December 1995, published a paper, *'Job Search Experiences of Older Workers.'* The authors are Emeritus Professor, Sol Encel and Helen Studericki of the Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW.

The introduction to the paper contains important realities.

**Table 1: Unemployment by Age 1993 (%)**

Age Group	Unemployment Rate
15 - 19	23.1%
40 - 54	6.8
55 - 59	10.2
60 - 64	13.3

Source: Committee on Employment Opportunities, 1993

**Table 2: Duration of Unemployment by Age, 1993 (weeks)**

Age Group	Weeks
15 - 19	27.9
35 - 44	61.0
45 - 54	83.1
60 - 64	109.0

Source Ibid.

The report continues:

*" While the ABS supplies us with a detailed profile of the unemployed, it does little to give its a picture of the labour market experience of unemployed persons. Research of this kind is still relatively uncommon, although a few studies have now appeared. Most of them, however, are concerned with the attitudes of employers to older workers ..... **Predictably, they all note the reluctance of employers to hire people aged 45 and over** confirming the results of the ABS survey cited above."*

*The ABS survey results, which indicate the importance of age as a barrier to employment, are endorsed by the experiences of many respondents Paradoxically, those who were placed in jobs on a trial basis were accepted very readily by their new employers and proceeded to become highly valued workers.*

*"Our research confirms the view that age stereotyping, rather than the actual abilities of the person concerned, is responsible for the difficulties faced by many mature workers. Employers still need to be convinced that 'age adds value."*

The NSW Government in 1994 - 95 took a bold initiative to fund the Mature Workers Advisory Committee. The Committee's strategy is documented in a paper "Mature Workers Advisory Committee - Strategic Plan 1995 - 1997. " The Committee's strategic plan focuses on communication and information and enlisting support and commitment from outside

Government. The ultimate objective of the Committee is to hand over 'ownership' of the project to the market place.

The Principles of Action for the Committee involve employers. This is the group which is defacto discriminating against mature workers. The paper on page 4 states *inter alia*

"Employers are encouraged to manage their workplaces in ways which:

- ensure that all personnel policies and practices are fair to all no matter what their age
- provide opportunities for employees to maximise their potential, irrespective of age
- remove barriers which limit options for mature age people to participate
- establish flexible work and leave policies and practices, but which are consistent with the needs of the business
- provide access to continuing learning opportunities
- establish the opportunity for flexible retirement policies and programs
- This initiative took the re engagement of older people back into the work force to a new level. It is a great platform to launch the next initiative

### **Drawing threads together**

- 1 The internationalisation of business and the dominance of transitional corporations, and therefore work requires. a new and innovative approach to employment and post employment policies.
2. The "market forces" policy alone will not deliver to the Australian people and Australian families financial, social and economic outcomes which are acceptable. For increasingly younger "old" workers the outlook is desperate.
3. Australia needs an "investment" approach to employment and particularly mature age employment which is comprehensive, inclusive and mandatory.
4. Government policy needs to be re visited to take into account
  - the changing nature of work
  - the increasing longevity of the population
  - the acceptance that work will continue to change in nature, become more fragmented, and that most individuals will experience periods of non work which should not be allowed to impact adversely on their careers, social status, families and post work savings programs
  - the need to return to study and / or training during several episodes of a persons working life
  - the consequential variable income and tax streams which impact on economic activity and the variable contributions which individuals can make and draw down on during their life course

### **Public Hearings**

OM:NI would like the opportunity to speak to the presentation and answer any questions which the Inquiry would like to raise.