

**BACK POCKET BRIEF  
AGE STEREOTYPING PROJECT**

**MAY-2013**

**Project Funding**

The project is funded by the Federal Government in response to recommendations made by the Advisory Panel on the Economic Potential of Senior Australians.

The Panel was established by the Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer, the Hon Wayne Swan MP, and the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, the Hon Mark Butler MP, with the objective to identify and respond to the economic and social opportunities presented by an older population.

The Government response to the Panel’s recommendations on 18 April 2012 included funding of \$2.1 million over four years to the Age Discrimination Commissioner **to conduct research on age discrimination, age stereotyping and ageism more generally, to feed into a media roundtable and communication strategy.**

Project resourcing is an EL2 and an APS3 for the duration of the project. The remainder of the funding has been allocated below:

|  | 2012/13 | 2013/14 | 2014/15 | 2015/16 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Commissioned research on media portrayal over defined sample periods; community attitudes survey | 200     |         |         |         |
| Research launch & convening of media roundtable  | 10      |         |         |         |
| Travel (including consultations)   | 18      | 18      | 18      |         |
| Community education resources (including training materials and community awareness campaign)    |         | 185     | 120     | 120     |
| Monitoring and evaluation framework  | 10      |         |         | 70      |

**Project Aims**

The Commissioned research in 2012/13 is to address a critical research gap that exists in Australia by:

- Exposing the prevailing stereotypes, and invisibility, of older Australians in the media – both editorial and advertising.
- Understanding the scope and depth of age stereotyping and age discrimination in the Australian community.
- Understanding the impact of stereotyping and discriminatory attitudes on older Australians themselves.
- Developing effective strategies to address age stereotyping and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours in both the media and community.

The research will be a key input to the media roundtable discussions the Commission will hold in 2013/14 and the communication strategy and an awareness campaign planned for 2013-2016. The aims of the media roundtables and campaign are to:

- Encourage the media to portray older Australians in an accurate, balanced and diverse manner – and a way that reflects their value, capability and experience.
- Reshape attitudes in the community to support older Australians to realise their potential and maximize their contribution to workplaces and the community.

### **Project Partner - Urbis**

The Australian Human Rights Commission engaged Urbis to conduct the commissioned research into age discrimination, age stereotyping and ageism.

Urbis, an Australian research organisation established for more than 30 years, was recognised by the Australasian Evaluation Society for the Best Study of the Year in 2011 for their work for the Victorian Department of Human Services.

Urbis has applied a methodology of integrated qualitative and quantitative research to understand the creation and reinforcement of age stereotypes and age discrimination.

### **Project Activities Completed**

**Completed desk based research of national and international literature.**

**Conducted media scans of TV, radio, print and social media** to understand how older Australians are portrayed and their 'invisibility'. Findings include:

- The research confirms that older people are under-represented in the media and that this is the case across both editorial news and current affairs content and advertising.
  - People aged 65+ featured in 4.7% of the advertising content
  - People aged 65+ were mentioned in 6.6% of the editorial media content
- Expected negative stereotypes were present - associating older people with being victims of crime, having ill health and financial stress, being passive, vulnerable and frail.
- However, older people were also presented as happy and content, mostly prominently in advertising, but also in some mainstream media. (This needs to be balanced with the fact that only 4.7% of advertising portrayed older people).
- There was a stark contrast between the presentation of "ordinary older people" and "prominent older people".

**Conducted focus groups in Sydney, Melbourne & Albury** to understand the existing age stereotypes and how they are created and reinforced. Findings include:

- Across all age cohorts the concept of ageing is generally seen from a negative perspective. Ageing is most closely associated with decline, loss and reduced capacity across a broad range of social/physical aspects. There are many commonly held fears and concerns about ageing.
- Many participants, in all age cohorts, felt that older people were often portrayed in the media as a homogenous group with limited characteristics beyond stereotypical portrayals (victims and complaining). Beyond the negative portrayal, many of the older community members felt that there was simply a lack of portrayal – that older Australians were invisible within the popular media.

- Regardless of the degree of impact that the media was seen to have, almost all participants felt that there was a need to ensure that portrayals of older people were representative of the diversity that is present in the older community.

**Completed on-line survey of 2,500 across Australia** in various age groups and with SMEs to understand the impact of stereotypes and the role of media. Findings include:

- The majority of respondents (71%) felt that age discrimination was common in Australia. Perceived commonality peaked at 55–64 years, with 81% of this age cohort feeling that age discrimination was common in Australia. Those aged 25 – 34 years were least likely to feel that age discrimination was common (62%).
- Age discrimination was most likely to occur in the workplace, retail situations and social settings.
- Agreement with negative statements about ageing was relatively low. People who held predominantly negative attitudes in relation to older people were significantly less likely to feel that age discrimination is common in Australia.
- Half of business respondents (particularly smaller businesses) agreed that older employees were at greater risk of being made redundant.
- Business decision makers who indicated they would not employ individuals above a certain age (9%) were more likely to agree with all negative statements.
- Those classified as holding predominantly negative attitudes were likely to be university graduates, on higher incomes, full time employees, those with children in the household, CALD respondents, those who do not have a relationship with an older person, those living in a capital city and females. This group was also more likely to be consumers of social media.
- Media consumption differed across age cohorts with younger respondents being more likely to consume digital and social media. However at least 80% of all age cohorts consumed free-to-air TV.
- More than half of all respondents felt that media and advertising portrayals of older people was not a fair representation of the cohort.
- Respondents wanted more neutral and positive representations that break down fear-based stereotypes about ageing.

### Next Steps

The research report, which includes information from all project activities completed, is currently being finalised. The report will be titled **Fact of Fiction? Age Stereotypes of Older Australians** and will be launched on 21 June 2013 at the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Guest speakers for the launch are Ita Buttrose and Everaldo Compton. Invitees include senior executives from the media, advertising, corporates and industry bodies.

Key findings of the research include:

- The media influences negative perceptions of older people.
- Older people are underrepresented and often poorly portrayed in the media (image below).



- Those aged 18-34 years are the most negative about older people.
- Those who most need to change their perceptions about older people are least likely to listen.
- Younger people and older people define old age differently – this creates tensions.
- If businesses hold stereotypical views, they are less likely to employ older workers.
- Social media portrayals older people as vulnerable and as victims.

Planning has commenced for the **roundtable discussions** with key stakeholders from media, advertising and corporates. These discussions will be held in 2013/14. The aims of these discussions are to encourage all stakeholders to portray older Australians in an accurate, balanced and diverse manner – and a way that reflects their value, capability and experience.

Planning will commence in July 2013 for the **communication strategy and an awareness campaign** which will be implemented for three years through to 2016. The aim of this campaign is to reshape attitudes in the community to support older Australians to realise their potential and maximize their contribution to workplaces and the community.

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