

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Question No. 85

Senator Siewert asked the following question at the hearing on 16 October 2012:

Can you please provide an update on the work you have been undertaking to improve workforce access for older Australians particularly any collaboration with DEEWR or Human Services?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

In 2012 the Age Discrimination Commissioner developed a publication: *Working past our 60s. Reforming policies and laws for the older worker*. This publication has been widely distributed, including to governments ministers and relevant government departments. It has also been distributed to relevant community stakeholders and advocacy groups. The Age Discrimination Commissioner is a part-time Commissioner on the Australian Law Reform Commission's inquiry into *Age Barriers to Work in Commonwealth Laws*. This inquiry aims to uncover impediments to workforce participation and ultimately recommend ways in which workforce access can be improved.

The Age Discrimination Commissioner actively promotes the Corporate Champions initiative and all other aspects of the Experience+ initiative. This includes attendance at promotions of these initiatives and publicising them in speeches and other public addresses.

In September this year the Age Discrimination Commissioner held a national conference to promote the business case for employing older workers. At the conclusion of the conference, attendees developed a communiqué.* The actions and proposed actions of the communiqué were followed up through an evaluation of the conference, and the Commission continues to monitor the follow-up actions of conference attendees.

*** COMMUNIQUÉ**

Tuesday, 4 September 2012

Communiqué from the *Older workers and business growth forum*

At a forum opened by Treasurer, Wayne Swan, and chaired by Age Discrimination Commissioner, Susan Ryan, over 90 big business leaders and decision makers considered the Deloitte Report, *Increasing participation among older workers: The Grey Army Advances* report, prepared for the Australian Human Rights Commission by Deloitte Access Economics.

The report highlights the impact on the national economy of increasing mature-age workforce participation.

Representatives across a wide range of business sectors proposed the following actions to recruit and retain older workers:

Retention:

- Get rid of generational labelling. The Gen X Gen Y Baby-boomer labels are destructive and negative stereotypes
- Managers at all levels must support the employment and retention of older workers
- Move away from the mindset of needing ‘young and hungry’ workers. Employers should properly explore the skills and capabilities of workers, regardless of age
- All workers must confront their unconscious bias against older workers
- Think differently about the way work is organised and change the structure of the workplace to reflect this; create flexible workplaces where people can work different hours to meet the needs of family and transition to retirement
- Recognise that older customers prefer older service personnel
- Recognise and reward long service in the workplace
- Focus on succession planning – develop a key person strategy
- Share knowledge across age groups - two way mentoring
- Promote internal mobility and redeployment
- Reward innovation that better utilises older workers
- Promote volunteering and charitable activities
- Assist life planning and transition to retirement
- Focus on health and well-being in the workplace
- Take cross-sectoral approaches to keeping older people in work, for example transitioning older construction workers to retail or aged care
- Focus on experience – not labels of older worker or mature age
- Employers must understand the demographics and skills of their workforce
- Retain the workforce and skills you already have
- Train older workers into new occupations
- Introduce and support mid-later career planning beyond the annual performance review. Consider 5 year cycles of work planning
- Promote stories about older workers and what they are achieving
- Support lifelong learning, skills development and a mix of accredited and non-accredited training

- Resolve workers compensation barriers.

Recruitment:

- Encourage recruiters to include mature workers Improve job advertisements so they don't exclude older workers
- Provide support for older candidates so they can present as job ready and suitable
- Move away from accredited training requirement to look at skills sets available and prior learning.
- Recognise life long careers – flexibility, education – need to address attitudinal and practical issues.
- Pursue better linkages between education and employment
- Introduce a program of mass IT reskilling – and/or address the perception that older workers don't have the required skills.
- Elevate age discrimination to the same level as gender discrimination. Legislation should be strengthened
- Present empirical data about the benefits of older workers to encourage the recruitment of older workers
- Address the lowered confidence levels in older workers – and package their strengths
- Don't assume that all senior level employees have good job search skills
- Get rid of standard rejection letter – it is not personal and reinforces rejection.

Final messages to all employers:

- **Take these actions;**
- **Showcase the good news stories; and**
- **Analyse your workplace and take stock of your older workers.**

Media contact: Brinsley Marlay (02) 9284 9656 or 0430 366 529