The Illawarra Forum is the peak body working for community services and organisations in the Illawarra and the Shoalhaven. We support community organisations, promote expertise and innovation in community development, foster industry development and advocate for social justice.

For more than twenty years, the Illawarra Forum has taken a leadership role in the local community services sector, which is a major employment sector in the region, and currently consists of more than 300 organisations in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven areas of NSW.

As part of our leadership role, we engage with those organisations, services and individuals engaged in supporting community members aged over 65 to collect their opinion, expertise and recommendations.

ABS data indicates the Illawarra region (encompassing Wollongong, Shellharbour, Kiama and Shoalhaven) has a higher than average population of people over 65 years of age, particularly in Kiama 18.8% and Shoalhaven 21.2% (NSW 13.8%).

The Illawarra Forum works closely with numerous organisations which provide support to vulnerable people across the region including:

- Home and community care services;
- People with disability;
- Individuals and families with multiple layers of social and financial disadvantage;
- Victims of domestic violence and sexual assault;
- Youth work programs;
- Social housing and homelessness services;
- Community health services, including mental health and drug/alcohol services;
- Community legal centre services
- Community development and community capacity building programs.

The Illawarra Forum welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Issues Paper.
Policies, workplace practices, programs and incentives to assist with increasing participation of older people

Government

The Illawarra Forum believes that legislation is key to combating discrimination. While it might take some time to change peoples’ misconceptions of older Australians in the workforce, legislation changes action which in turn changes attitude.

Several studies have documented important gains in racial and gender equality as a direct result of affirmative action (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Murrell & Jones, 1996) which indicates that there could be similar results for older people.

The Government should continue to lead by example by reviewing their proportion of employees 55 years and over and ensuring they continue to be committed to retaining older staff.

“The proportion of employees 55 years and over has grown strongly over time, increasing from 5.9% of all ongoing employees at June 1998 to 14.8% at June 2012. This strong growth reflects the impact of government policies to encourage older employees to remain in the APS or return after taking early retirement”

The Illawarra Forum sees value in the ‘Power of Oldness’ campaign, and believes that it should be promoted widely to address misconceptions about older people. People need to be reminded of the skills and experience older people have to offer in the work place and be aware of the evidence that they offer a higher return on investment as they are more loyal and less likely to take sick leave.

Many employers are unaware of the supports available if they employ an older person. We recommend awareness-raising campaigns around such supports e.g. ‘Investing in Experience Tool Kit’, a practical guide to employing people over 45 years of age and ‘Corporate Champions’ which offers advice on positive age management, superannuation, occupational health and safety, career planning, training and age discrimination.

Recommendations for Government:

- Promote anti-discrimination legislation
- Conduct an affirmative action campaign
- Highlight the direct and indirect nature of discrimination i.e. direct is when a person is treated less favourably than a person of a different age and indirect is when a policy or rule is the same for everyone but has an unfair effect on people of a different age

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1 05 Ageing and Work Ability – Australian Public Service Commission
2 https://www.powerofoldness.com
• Escalate the ‘Power of Oldness’ campaign in mainstream media to address misconceptions about older people
• Raise awareness of supports available to employers who employ an older person
• Be a positive role model and highlight government policies by continuing to employ older people in the Australian Public Service.

Peak Business and Employee Groups

The Illawarra Forum recommends that peak business and employee groups collaborate and work together to promote more flexible work environments. Policies which could be adopted to support older workers could include options for working from home, end of life leave and, in recognition of extended work life, an adult gap year.

We recognise that many older workers need to take extended leave in order to care for a partner or elderly relative at the end of life. However, many older workers are afraid they will be dismissed or made redundant and could therefore have no job to return to, should the person die. Caring for an elderly relative or partner is an important role, and such unpaid caring represents a great financial benefit for the economy.

The Illawarra Forum recommends the government develop legislation to implement ‘end of life leave’. ‘End of life leave’, similar to parental leave, could entitle carers to a period of unpaid leave with guaranteed return to their position at the end of the leave.

The Illawarra Forum recommends that peak business and employee groups explore the setting of targets and quotas for older workers in businesses and organisations depending on size, type etc. We recognise this could be challenging for some sectors and industries where older people need to be re-trained. Some companies are prepared to re-train or up-skill older workers if they see an immediate return on the investment, but this support for re-training falls away sharply if the over-50s worker is seeking more extensive education - if for example, they are considering a career change within the organisation.

We encourage business and employer groups to develop partnerships with employment agencies, educational institutions, skill training programmes, and social enterprises to build a skilled workforce that includes older people.

There are many industries, the resource and hospitality sectors for example, which have been driven by necessity to attract and retain older workers. Their success demonstrates their ability to respond to supply and demand, change their culture and mind-sets, and make

- **Investing in Experience Tool Kit** - practical guide to employing people over 45 years of age
- **Corporate Champions** - program for employers of all sizes. If you are eligible, you can receive tailored support and assistance valued up to $20,000
- **Restart Wage Subsidy** - provides financial assistance to employers who employ and retain job seekers aged 50 years and over

5 **Attitudes to Older Workers - Prepared for the Financial Services Council January, 2012 - Westfield Wright Pty**
use of the older workforce. There is opportunity for peak business and employee groups to learn from the strategies they have employed to do this.

Clearly there is a role for unions to assist in culture change by launching a campaign supporting older workers e.g. End of life leave etc.

**Recommendations for peak business and employee groups:**

- Collaborate on setting fair and realistic targets in the employment of older people, with due consideration of the type and size of a businesses
- Utilise the National Employment Standards Best Practice Guide to change workplace culture to include flexible work environments.
- Work on developing partnerships with local employment agencies, educational institutions, skill training programmes, and social enterprises to build a skilled workforce that includes older people
- Learn from the strategies used by the Resources and Hospitality Industries to attract and retain older workers
- Campaign for policies to support the employment of older people including ‘end of life’ leave, adult gap year etc.
- Unions could include support for policies to support the employment of older people (‘end of life’ leave, adult gap year etc.) in an ongoing campaign e.g. the Australians Services Union’s campaign on Life & Family Friendly Workplaces

**Distinct challenges faced by different sized businesses and organisations, sectors and industries in employing older people**

Lack of workplace flexibility has been a key challenge for many sectors and industries in employing older people. For example if a person is at the point of delivery for a service, or working on a factory floor, their tasks cannot be completed from home or outside of core working hours.

It stands to reason, then, that in the services and corporate spheres, the employment of older people is lower than in other sectors such as in government (especially state and local) and the not for profit sector where better entrenched flexibility (of hours and remuneration) are the probable success factors.

Smaller organisations may lack knowledge and experience in employing and retaining older people, and may lack awareness of the support and financial resources available in doing so. Small organisations generally do not have a HR department to assist in the development or implementation of recruitment and employment policies and are often dependent on the skills and experience of one person.

**Recommendations**

- Assess if business can be done in a different way in the sectors and industries that face challenges employing older people e.g. can phones be diverted to a home
office? Can the hours of service be changed? Solutions may be found which suit both customers and workers

- Create awareness raising campaigns specifically targeting small to medium businesses to promote supports for businesses employing an older person

**Lessons and leading practices from other countries to address employment discrimination and increase workforce participation of older Australians**

There are some very interesting practices from other countries from which Australia can learn to develop access strategies for older people in the workplace.

**Recommendations:**

- Develop an ‘older person inclusion assessment tool’ similar to the one developed by the US Chamber of Commerce for inclusion of people with disability in the workplace. It covers recruitment, employment, social procurement, accessible IT, marketing etc. and could easily be adjusted as a tool to ensure the inclusion of older people.
- Government to set quotas for businesses to employ older people similar to the quotas for employment of women in Germany and for employment of people disadvantaged by Apartheid in South Africa.
- Ensure businesses portray older people positively in recruitment drives and marketing, and that materials are made available in alternative formats.
- Ensure that diversity training is promoted, resourced and funded adequately in work places and that older people are a named group in the training.

**Distinct challenges faced by older Australians (e.g. women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or LGBTI people) in relation to employment discrimination**

The Illawarra Forum notes that many older workers in special needs groups face multiple barriers to employment. It is essential that there is continued recognition of these barriers throughout the Inquiry, and that specific strategies are developed to address them in future steps.

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9 Invest in Experience Tool Kit - practical guide to employing people over 45 years of age
- Corporate Champions - program for employers of all sizes. If you are eligible, you can receive tailored support and assistance valued up to $20,000
- Restart Wage Subsidy - provides financial assistance to employers who employ and retain job seekers aged 50 years and over

10 [https://www.uschamber.com/sites/default/files/legacy/reports/Disability_final_v2.pdf](https://www.uschamber.com/sites/default/files/legacy/reports/Disability_final_v2.pdf)
12 “Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) is a racially selective programme launched by the South African government to redress the inequalities of Apartheid by giving certain previously disadvantaged groups (Blacks, Coloureds, Indians, and Chinese who arrived before 1994) of South African citizens economic privileges previously not available to them. Although race is the overriding factor, it includes measures such as Employment Preference, skills development, ownership, management, socioeconomic development, and preferential procurement. - Wikipedia
Recommendations:

- Ensure older people who come from special need groups are portrayed positively in mainstream media
- Ensure employers have access to information on how to effectively recruit and support older people who come from special need groups in recruitment drives and marketing
- Promote, resource and fund diversity training in workplaces and that ensure that older people from special needs group are recognised in the training

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the issues paper. For further information about this submission, please contact nicky@illawarraforum.org.au or 02 4256 4333

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