

THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF ENDING AGEISM

Today, Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria Chief Executive Officer, Ms Sue Hendy has called on candidates for the November 27 state election to demonstrate how they will respond to the impact of age discrimination on older Victorians, society and economy.

Ms Hendy said that the majority of age discrimination complaints received by the Human Rights Commission related to employment.

“Fifty percent of complaints received under the Age Discrimination Act in 2009 to 2010¹ were lodged because employers were told they were too old for employment with most of the complaints made by individuals over 45 years of age” Ms Hendy said.

“Largely unacknowledged and accepted, ageism is pervasive in Victoria.”

Ms Hendy said that policies also need to reflect age-discrimination harassment and bullying of older people.

“Older people are finding themselves discriminated against in their local communities, often on the receiving end of impatient, dismissive and patronising behaviour,” said Ms Hendy.

“Many older employees find themselves on the receiving end of hints, comments and jokes about retiring and menopause once they reach the age of 60, while others experience isolation from fellow employees.”

Ms Hendy said that age discrimination is costing the state’s employers thousands of dollars in recruitment and training of new staff.

“Recruitment, training, lost productivity, and short term work overload on colleagues: the costs of replacing a skilled and experienced older person ranges between 50% and 150% of a worker’s annual salary.”

“Many employers think that hiring an older person will cost their business more but ABS data actually shows that older people are five times less likely to change jobs compared with workers aged between 20-24 years old. Older people are also the least likely group to take days off due to their own illness or as a carer.”

COTA says the real cost is to the economy at a time when Victoria needs policies to increase productivity.

“The federal government’s 2010 Intergeneration Report predicts that increasing the participation of mature age workers by 5 percent in the next 40 years would increase Australia’s GDP per capita by 2.4%⁵, while also easing the pressure on the welfare system.”

“If we don’t embrace the capacity, wisdom and experience of older people, what will happen to our economy?”

COTA is urging candidates for the November state election to demonstrate how they will adopt the World Health Organisation’s Active Ageing framework to enable the participation and leadership of older people across a range of policy and planning areas.

“By identifying and implementing models of the Active Ageing approach, we can facilitate civic and community participation and continue to develop positive ageing strategies in local communities and state-wide.”

“The number of Victorians over the age of 60 is already outnumbering schoolchildren with around 19% of the population over 60 and, based on current trends, Australians between 20-64 years old are only expected to grow less than a tenth of the current pace.

“If we don’t address ageism anytime soon, Victoria’s economy is going to suffer,” Ms Hendy said.

For more information on age-friendly policy initiatives, or to join the campaign, Victorians can go to www.cotavic.org.au or call 9655 2127. Since 1951, COTA has been the voice of Australian seniors and the peak representative body of older individuals and organisations representing seniors. COTA is a non-profit organisation committed to human rights, social justice and the eradication of ageism – our mission is to mobilise older people and those who work with them, to age well in a just society.

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For all media enquiries, please contact Sanna Nyblad 03 9416 0010 or 0430 561 600
Please see **Media Backgrounder** for information on the issues seniors face.

SOURCES:

1. Australian Human Rights Commission, *Age Discrimination – Exposing the Hidden Barrier for Mature Age Workers*, 1 October 2010.
<http://www.humanrights.gov.au/age/hiddenbarrier/index.html>
2. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Labour Market and Related Payments Publication: A monthly profile*, July 2010.
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Older Australian Workers Experience Longer Spells of Insufficient Work (Media Release)*, 23 February 2010.
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mediareleasebytitle/2E6CC1E17EACAB55CA2575660016933B?OpenDocument>
4. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Labour Market and Related Payments Publication: A monthly profile*, July 2010.
5. The Australian Government Treasury, note 102, pp29-30.