

COTA Victoria Policy Position



Issue: Improving employment outcomes for older jobseekers

Adopted: February 2022

Review date: February 2023

Policy principles:

All older Victorians have the right to:

- Receive an adequate standard of income support while looking for work;
- Be supported to develop job readiness skills and find meaningful employment;
- Be supported to retrain or upskill at any age;
- Be free from age discrimination in recruitment and in the workplace;
- Continue working in paid employment for as long as they choose.

Rationale for COTA Victoria's position:

- Older people were already the largest cohort receiving the JobSeeker payment (formerly Newstart) prior to COVID-19. Many older people have been further affected by job losses and reduced hours since the emergence of the pandemic. In 2021, more than half of all people looking for work were between the ages of 45 and 64.
- As the state's population continues to age, Governments will need to increase spending on aging and health. Governments can help to offset this cost by ensuring that older people are supported to remain in the workforce for as long as possible.
- Research shows that improving employment outcomes for older Victorians can also result in:
 - Increased productivity and profitability for businesses;
 - Improved mental health, wellbeing and quality of life of older people.
- Regrettably, systemic ageism continues to prevent many older jobseekers from obtaining or retaining paid work. In fact:
 - Almost half of Australian businesses say they are reluctant to recruit older workers;
 - People over the age of 50, on average, spend twice as long looking for work;
 - Older people are often targeted for non-voluntary redundancies.
- Some older jobseekers can face additional challenges to securing paid work. For example:
 - Older people working in more physically demanding roles may need to retrain to find alternative employment options if their physical health declines as they age.

- Older people with caring responsibilities, illness or injury may require reasonable adjustments or flexible hours which some employers can be reluctant to accommodate.
 - Older women in particular can have large gaps in their employment history due to taking time out of the workforce to tend to caring responsibilities.
 - Older people who need to upskill or retrain can sometimes find it difficult to return to study.
 - Older people who lack digital confidence may need additional support.
- The Victorian Government currently funds a number of initiatives to improve employment outcomes for older jobseekers. Staff working in state government-funded skills and job centres, however, do not always have an adequate understanding of the unique needs of this cohort – particularly those who lack digital confidence. Research shows that frontline staff within these services also tend to be younger, resulting in an age mismatch that may give rise to unconscious bias.
 - In addition to improving support for older jobseekers more generally, it would be strategic to provide older jobseekers with targeted support to enable them to meet existing labour shortages in growth industries such as aged and disability care.
 - It is also imperative that older people who are looking for work receive an adequate level of income support to prevent them from falling into poverty. In 2021, the Australian government raised the base rate of the Jobseeker payment by 25 dollars a week. While this small increase was welcomed, the current rate is still insufficient for jobseekers to meet their living expenses and search for work.

Recommendations:

1. The Victorian Government continue to advocate to the Australian government for an increase to the rate of the Jobseeker payment.
2. The Victorian Government provide additional funding to Jobs Victoria and their local partners to enable them to provide localised, wrap-around supports to improve employment outcomes for older jobseekers. This must include:
 - Support to return to education
 - career guidance, mentoring and peer support
 - Assistance with resume writing, interview techniques and understanding the employment market
 - Specialised training to enhance digital literacy
 - Assistance with student and employment placements
 - Financial counselling
 - Mental health and wellbeing support
3. The Victorian Government invest in a specialised program to retrain unemployed older people who are interested in filling identified workforce gaps in growth industries, particularly aged and disability care.
4. All public and private sector entities commit to providing mandatory training on ageism to staff working in human resources and management roles.