**Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination against Older Australians and Australians with Disability**

# Submission No 42

**Name** Withheld

**Submission made by**

[x]  Australian with disability who would like to work

# Submission regarding Australians with Disability

### **Your experience**

**Have you (or the person you are submitting on behalf of) experienced employment discrimination?**

[x]  Yes

[ ]  No

[ ]  Not sure

**Did you take any action in relation to the employment discrimination you experienced?**

[x]  Yes

[ ]  No

**Please tell us more, for example, what action you took and how effective you felt it was; or why you chose not to take any action.**

**Did your experience of employment discrimination impact on your participation in the workforce? (For example, did you have to stop work, change jobs or take sick leave?)**

[ ] Yes

[ ] No

**Please tell us more**

### **Barriers**

**Do you think older Australians/Australians with disability face barriers when they look for work or are in a job?**

[ ] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**If yes, or not sure, what do you think these barriers might be?**

Due to developing a chronic illness, I have faced a career change. So I am starting over and looking to find employment in fields I have no experience in. I am in my early 40's and feel that having a chronic illness that will need accommodating while at the same time possibly need training; it will be hard to compete for jobs against younger job seekers who do not need supports. My particular needs are that if I was required to work in an office building with other staff, I would need people to refrain from wearing perfumes, colognes and other scented products to help me avoid becoming ill. It is a hard thing to ask of others. Ideally I would find an employer who would be willing to allow me to set up an office at home and work by distance. I can't access building that have been recently refurbished or built and that contain air fresheners and hand sanitisers.....these are just some of the barriers I face.

**Does employment discrimination have an impact on gaining and keeping employment for older Australians/Australians with disability?**

[ ] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Are there any practices, attitudes or laws which discourage or prevent equal participation in employment of older Australians/Australians with disability?**

[ ] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Please tell us more**

Attitudes from GP's who largely dismiss MCS as being psychosomatic. I am medically diagnosed with my condition, I have had through testing, however many people with this illness have no access to properly qualified medical help and therefore cannot be tested and diagnosed as I have. Under the Disability Discrimination Act, we are protected, but this many of us are not fully aware of our rights; or those protections can be ignored at the discretion of the people we are asking help from on the basis that they do not believe our illness is real. Sometimes we are better not to declare our predicament to avoid being ridiculed or fobbed off as being 'fussy'.

**What are the incentives and disincentives for older Australians/Australians with disability to work?**

**Incentives:**

People do not choose to have illness enter their lives. I developed this illness at a time where I was just landing on my feet after years of struggling as a sole parent. I for one have lost everything I had worked for because I have been too ill to work and while I have studied, that has been so difficult, but I am determined to start over again. I may not ever be fully well enough to work more than 8 hours a week, but I have to try as I have rent and bills to pay and young adult children to support. A bit hard to do on just Disability Support Pension.

**Disincentives:**

Having no supports in place to protect us with MCS from being made more ill. Ridicule or negative attitudes from work colleagues who feel that being asked to refrain from wearing fragrances is an imposition or an attempt to take away their choice to wear whatever they like - smokers are slowly being moved away from non-smokers and the way I see it is that fragrances should not be imposed on those who have allergies or sensitivities to them.

### **Good practice**

**Are there examples of good practice and workplace policies in employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability?**

[ ] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Please tell us of examples of good practice in employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability in work that you are aware of.**

At my university and with the support of my treating doctor, I have a Learning Action Plan that is updated every semester that asks of my lecturers, tutors and fellow students to refrain from wearing colognes, perfumes, petrochemical based deodorants, having cigarette smoke on their clothes...there is so much more that isn't included on the list, but the reduction of chemicals that results from these few things being eliminated helps me to attend classes and maintain my focus most of the time. My teachers understand the cognitive impairment associated with exposures to some chemicals and allow me to bow out of discussions when I am not feeling right. This is designed to protect me from being excluded from being able to study. the university is not perfect, however recent smoking bans on campus have helped me be able to stay on campus longer and I have obtained a degree and am now in 4th year honours because of the help I get.

### **Solutions**

**What action should be taken to address employment discrimination against older Australians/Australians with disability?**

More education on all the different kinds of disabilities that exist. Before I became ill, I thought of Equity and Diversity as somewhere that people who were physically disabled went to for help. I never knew that I could get help due to suffering a chronic illness. Workplaces maybe should all have an Equity and Diversity section alongside the Human Resources department where there is someone who specialises in helping those with specific needs.

**What should be done to enhance workforce participation of older Australians/Australians with disability?**

Unsure

**What outcomes or recommendations would you like to see from this National Inquiry?**

I would love to see workplaces be made fragrant free and where workplaces undergo refurbishments, I would love to see this being done in a way that reduces the volatile organic compounds such as formaldehyde and petrochemical based solvents being used...there are safer alternatives that can be used that will help people with MCS remain at work through these processes too.