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

# Submission No 175

**Name** Helen Hasan

**Submission made by**

[x]  Older Australian in work

[x]  Academic/social policy practitioner

☐ Other
 Please describe:

# Submission regarding Older Australians / Australians with Disability / Both

### **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?**

[ ]  Yes

[x]  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.**

The most common and persistent discrimination took the form of being ignored or routinely overlooked. I have a PhD in IT but unless I make a point of saying so it would never occur to anyone that I would even know how to use a computer. A colleague used to call me the “invisible woman”. This type of discrimination is often quite insidious and difficult to prove. It often takes the form of small things which mount up over the years so that there is not one event that is significant enough to get attention.

**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

[x] No

**Please tell us more**

It has meant that I have not been promoted when compared with others with my experience and qualifications.

### **Barriers**

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

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

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

The main one we face is that older employees are usually at the top of the pay scale and money would be saved if replaced by a younger inexperienced worker. Also it is assumed that younger workers are more up-to-date and that older people are stuck in the past. Much of the knowledge and skills that that comes with experience is difficult to quantify and thus are often not appreciated.

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

[x] 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?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Please tell us more**

I can only speak as an older women but I am often aware that I don’t “look” the senior executive type but rather people see me as an “old lady” or a grandmother type. A man my age can be over-weight, have grey hair and a craggy face and still look distinguished. Once at a function I was sitting next to a man about my age and the waiter addressed him as ‘sir’ but me as ‘miss’. Posters and book covers have men and younger women but seldom an older woman unless it is something about Aged Care. Many women my age go to a lot of effort and expense to “look” the part and then people expect them to have all the energy of a younger person. I have decided that it is not really worth the effort to appear to be something I am not. It is better to just look my age and be proud of it.

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

**Incentives:**

A feeling of value to society, having respect and something worthwhile to do. Being able to pass knowledge and skill on to others and have a positive influence on their lives. Helping to preserve some of the important cultural values that can get lost if not recognised.

Having some regular income and not relying on savings, super or a pension as there are uncertainties with these.

**Disincentives:**

The need to learn new skills, competing with younger people on their terms, taking jobs away from young people who need them.

### **Good practice**

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

[x] 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.**

Being able to drop back from full-time to part-time as suits.

Setting up mentoring schemes where old and young work together

### **Solutions**

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

Be more explicit and appreciative about what older people contribute in experience and wisdom.

Have role models in areas that are highly visible.

Being more aware of the value of diversity in age, gender, ethnicity etc

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

Making sure there are no adverse side effects on people who work flexibly or less hours. (ie they don’t lose entitlements, super etc)

Learn from our indigenous community about the role of elders in the community.

Starting early to train people in physical work to have skills in their area of expertise that are not so physical. (tradies can learn more about supervising apprentices and managing a small business so they have appropriate things to do as they age).

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

A road map recognising the different career pathways that are appropriate for older workers. Some information for managers on how to get value out of older workers.