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

# Submission No 305

**Name** Withheld

**Submission made by**

[x]  Australian with disability looking for work

# 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?**

[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.**

Radio frequency (RF) radiation exposure is a severe and devastating illness which is affecting a growing number of people. The RF exposed person is in a difficult position when applying for work. Wireless devices are now ubiquitous.

The range of wifi devices for the workplace has dramatically increased. Just a few examples of the wifi devices now available for every office are:

• Wifi Keyboards and mouse

• Wireless computer internet

• Wifi Front-desk buzzers

• Wifi Bluetooth headsets

• Cordless (DEC) phones

• Google cloud print

• Kwikset Deadbolt (WiFi enabled deadbolt locks for doors)

• PlantLink (sends your computer a message when you need to water the plants)

• Wireless temperature monitors on air conditioning and heating units

• Wifi stereo systems and overhead P.A systems

• WIFI automated curtains and blinds

• Microwave ovens

• Smart Meters

• Web cameras and motion detectors

• Wireless alarm (fire & other alarms)

• Some business precincts (such as the Melbourne CBD) now have “free” wireless throughout the area.

On top of this most employees now carry a mobile phone on their person. Some companies even require that an employee is available via mobile phone within and outside of business hours. In Australia mobile phone usage has risen dramatically. And those who only (exclusively) use a mobile phone has risen from 2.2 million Australians owned a mobile phone in December 2010, and 5.2 million owners in Dec 2014. (http://www.acma.gov.au/theACMA/engage-blogs/engage-blogs/Research-snapshots/Australians-get-mobile)

Also the level of wifi has increased dramatically. Mobile phone transmission, for example has increased from 2G to 3G to 4G in just a few short years.

Being expose to a range of different wifi emitting devices means that you are exposed to different, intermittent signals throughout the day. The CUMULATIVE effect of these radiation has NOT BEEN FOUND SAFE for humans (or animals). For the electro-sensitive person, being in this environment is an ongoing nightmare.

I have written to many organisations, councils, businesses, providers, etc regarding removing such things as ‘free wifi’ only to be ignored or receive condescending ‘standard’ reply letters quoting that their radiation is “well within ARPANZA standards”.

I have written to the Smart meter provider on numerous occasions asking them to remove or turn down my meter. They have agreed to turn down my meter 5 months ago, but so far have not done so.  I have written to a wide range of organisations such as local councils regarding ‘free wifi’ in city and country areas, **[redacted]** regarding ‘free wifi’ phone boxes, Public transport authorities regarding wifi on public transport etc. but all my letters are ignored or received condescending replies.

**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?)**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

**Please tell us more**

The discrimination is ubiquitous. If the RF exposed person goes to a job interview and disclose that s/he is electro-sensitive, then the employer does not want to know you. If you do not disclose your condition then I become increasingly brain-fogged, headachy and buzzy throughout the interview as they sit there with mobile phones on. The office in which you are being interviewed is usually in a business building which has wifi, and can be made worse by the proximity of a cordless phone, or other devices such as wireless computers. If you can’t sit through the interview without feeling ill, you know you are not going to be able to cope with working there. Although employees say they offer ‘flexible’ workplaces/spaces, I have yet met an employer who will support telecommuting on a long-term basis.

### **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?**

Accessibility

One of the major barriers is simply getting to and being in a place of employment.

 Firstly it is impossible to take public transport:

a. There are now dozens of people on the bus/train/tram using their mobile phones. The moving vehicle and the sealed doors means that the radiation from each mobile phone is significantly increased.

b. The Victorian state government has recently installed ‘free wifi’ within the city loop. This has hugely increased the radiation within the train carriages going through the loop.

 The Victorian state government has now announced that they plan to build more mobile phone towers on regional Victorian train lines. If this happens this will make an already very difficult commute to and from Melbourne on public transport, impossible.

Secondly it is impossible even to walk through Melbourne CBD without becoming ill, let alone work there now. Now that some certain areas (such as High street Northcote) and regional towns (such as Bendigo and Ballarat) now have free wifi throughout the town, this has made it significantly more difficult to be in these areas also.

 Job interviews are difficult due to the amount of radiation in the interview room (see above).

 Retraining

It is difficult to re-train into a “less RF exposed” field. One suggestion of becoming a barista in a café is laughable considering the high number of customers who carry mobile phones and that the café itself would probably have wifi. Another idea was as a gardener. However all of the training courses are fee paying (too expensive) and involve some sort of class time in a TAFE college which has WIFI throughout the building. Online courses mean further exposure to low frequency radiation which can also exacerbate RF exposure health problems.

**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**

The Health Department say that RF radiation illness is not within the Wellbeing Act. ARPANSA do nothing but hide behind their woefully inadequate ‘standards’.

The fact that RF exposure is not a recognised disability means that the employer / potential employer do not need to do anything to assist the RF exposed person in gaining/keeping work, not even considering tele-commuting.

Also the ignorance and lack of education of the general public regarding the radiation emitted by devices and its effects makes the workplace unbearable and has produced the following:

• The practices of people to have no understanding of the radiation their mobile devices are emitting. To carry these devices on their bodies at all times, and to refuse to turn them off, or on flight mode.

• The attitudes of most people to RF over-exposure is that it does not exist and anyone suffering from this illness is branded delusional or ‘crazy’.

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

**Incentives:**

The only incentive is financial, i.e. to earn an income as there is now little camaraderie or association with colleagues who all carry mobile phones. Also there is little prospect of a ‘career’ in an office environment.

**Disincentives:**

• Facing continual ridicule and criticism from co-workers who do not understand and think it is amusing to leave their phones or other devices on just to ‘see if it affects’ the RF exposed sufferer.

• Continuing to stay in an irradiated office which results in chronic, debilitating ill health that will eventually result in an early death.

### **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.**

A community centre which has no wifi (i.e. corded internet, no DEC phone etc) and no Smart meter was able to find a room down the back of the building (away from areas with many people) to put me in an office of my own. It was also close to a back door so I could exit the building quickly if someone with a ‘live’ wifi device (I.e. mobile phone/ tablet) approached.

This method, combined with frequent tele-commuting, meant that could work for up to 1 – 2 days a week for a short period of time. I was still significantly under-employed (as wish for full-time work) but at least it was some employment.

Generally example of good practice can be found in Sweden where electro-hypersensitivity is an officially fully recognized functional impairment (i.e., it is not regarded as a disease). There is an organization dedicated to RF exposed people: The Swedish Association for the Electro-Sensitive (http://www.feb.nu/). This organisation is included in the Swedish Disability Federation, HSO. HSO is the unison voice of the Swedish disability associations towards the government, the parliament and national authorities and is a cooperative body that today consists of 43 national disability organisations (where The Swedish Association for the Electro-Sensitive is 1 of these 43 organisations) with all together about 500,000 individual members. You can read more on www.hso.se (the site has an English short version).

### **Solutions**

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

1. There needs to be clear medical diagnosis for RF exposure

2. RF exposure needs to be recognised as a disability

3. The public and heads of corporations need to be educated about the dangers of RF exposure

• In Sweden, impairments are viewed from the point of the environment. No human being is impaired, there are instead shortcomings in the environment that cause the impairment (as the lack of ramps for the person in a wheelchair or rooms electro-sanitised for the person with RF exposure). This environment-related impairment view, furthermore, means that even though one does not have a scientifically-based explanation for the impairment EHS, and in contrast to disagreements in the scientific society, the person with RF over exposure shall always be met in a respectful way and with all necessary support with the goal to eliminate the impairment. This implies that the person with RF over exposure shall have the opportunity to live and work in an electro-sanitised environment.

• A person is disabled when the environment contains some sort of impediments. It means that in that moment a man or woman in a wheelchair cannot get onto the bus, a train, or into a restaurant, this person has a disability, he or she is disabled. When the bus, the train or the restaurant are adjusted for a wheelchair, the person do not suffer from his disability and are consequently not disabled. An EHS-person suffers when the environment is not properly adapted according to their personal needs. Strategies to enable a person with this disability to attend common rooms such as libraries, churches and so on, are for instance to switch off the high-frequency fluorescent lamps and instead use ordinary light bulbs. Another example is the possibility to switch off - the whole or parts of - the assistive listening systems (persons with RF over exposure are often very sensitive to assistive listening systems).

(The above information was gained from presentations made by Assoc. Professor Olle Johansson, The Experimental Dermatology Unit, Department of Neuroscience, Karolinska Institute, 171 77 Stockholm, Sweden)

Many actions can be taken by a workplace to help the RF sufferer, all of which as relatively easy and minimal cost. For example:

• Disconnect wifi routers and install corded internet to all PC’s, printers scanners etc.

• Ask employees to leave their phones/tablets in their own offices or put them on flight mode if walking around the building.

• Hold a 1 hour training course to educate employees in the correct usage of their wireless devices (i.e. safe distance from their body) and how to turn their phones on flight model.

• Use a corded telephone system, not cordless (DEC) phones or Bluetooth devices.

• Allow long term tele-commuting.

• Disconnect smart meters and install analogue meters in home and workplace(s).

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

See above, also:

Accessibility Have WIFI free carriages in trains, trams and buses. Do not have ‘free wifi’ throughout a whole city or suburban centre but limit it to certain offices.

At the workplace

Many actions can be taken to help the RF exposed sufferer, all of which as relatively easy and minimal cost. For example:

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• Ask employees to leave their phones/tablets in their own offices or put them on flight mode if walking around the building.

• Hold a 1 hour training course to educate employees in the correct usage of their wireless devices (i.e. safe distance from their body) and how to turn their phones on flight model.

• Use a corded telephone system, not cordless (DEC) phones or Bluetooth devices.

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

1. There needs to be clear medical diagnosis for RF exposure

2. RF exposure needs to be recognised as a disability

3. The public and heads of corporations need to be educated about the dangers of RF exposure

4. There needs to be much more independent scientifically rigorous research done into the effects of RF exposure on humans (and animals). The Australian government urgently needs to set up an independent task force of medical experts to thoroughly investigate the health, medical and social effects of radio frequency exposure, free of influence or funding from the corporate, telecommunications or government sectors.