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

# Submission No 310

**Name** Wendy Donald

**Submission made by**

Older Australian 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?**

Yes

No

Not sure

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

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.**

I knew that I could not prove that I was discriminated against because of age.  I knew that should I approach HR department I would have been told that there was some other reason I did not get an interview, and that is assuming they would even discuss my application with me.

**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**

I was unable to participate in the work place as I could not get a job.

### **Barriers**

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

Yes. I don't ever mention a disability (I have a rare auto immune disease that is classified as a disability).  It is enough I am an older person to stop me being treated fairly.

No

Not sure

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

Being dismissed as an applicant for a post without being fairly compared to other applicants who have equal or lesser qualifications and experience.

I'd like to say here that in 2000, shortly aftet turning 50 and with a need to re enter workforce because of divorce, I was unable to gain a single interview in my field, not even temporary or part time.  I'd speak on phone and receive an enthusiastic invitation to apply for position, then never hear another word once it was clear I must be an 'older worker'.  This was within the higher education sector, so was not private industry.

I made a big decision and left Melbourne for London, where I had family.  I put in for temporary jobs in my field (librarianship within higher education).  At no point did I ever feel my age was a problem.  I took the first job offered me (and that was within a week of my arrival).  I stayed with the university working on rolling short contracts for 6 years before taking a permanent part time job.  I could have got a full time permanent job with them at any point.  It was my choice to continue on short contracts for so long.  I didn't want to explain my disability and I felt less pressure having contract.  Had I told them about disability I am sure they would have done what ever was needed to support me.  Over the course of 8 years I applied for other jobs and usually received an interview and was offered a number of posts, although I chose to remain with my original employer.

For family reasons I returned to Melbourne in 2008.  I applied for a number of jobs and did receive one interview.  The job was not one I would have dreamt of applying for or taking in London.  It was a one year post.

This year I decided to look for further work for economic reasons.  I applied for one job in particular - within the TAFE network.  It was base level and poorly paid, part time.  I did not receive an interview, despite me carefully addressing every one of the criteria.  I was well qualified and experienced with specific skills they asked for.

After reading information about this report/enquiry about older workers discrimination, specifically the incentive for employers to take on older works with possible $10,000 reward, I approached **[redacted]**, an employment agency specialising in older workers and those with disabilities. It was **[redacted]** in Melbourne.   The told me that they were only funded to work with people under 65 years of age. So, although government is telling us we need to work longer, and although they will take away my part pension in January 2017, and although they are offering an incentive to employers to employ older workers, assistance in a difficult job market is denied to me.

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

Yes. Let's face it, age alone is the disability.  Double it was a disability and you might as well forget about even a remote chance of getting paid work.

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 I've not got to the point of discussing why certain employers don't employ those older workers with or without disbaility.  I do believe there are issues with insurance, with Super, just for starters.   Attitude is greatest barrier..

No

Not sure

**Please tell us more**

Once upon a time when I was 21 and moved to Perth, I was told married women could not be appointed to a job in Local Government.   it was just a fact.  I see the same attitude to older workers (forget the disability bit for moment).  Employers (even government employers) appear to have no commitment to older workers at all.   My cousin works at a high level in State Government and has just breathed a sigh of relief after the latest round of redundancies as she got a 3 year contract.  She really wants to work longer than that, but says she knew the review was mainly about getting rid of older workers (she is in her early 60s).

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

**Incentives:** We need to work for income.  Not having sufficient money to live on is traumatic.    Need I tell you what many reports say, that older single women are less well off, have less superannuation, and face a bleaker future than men?

**Disincentives:** No one will give us a fair go.

### **Good practice**

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

Yes

No

Not sure. Oh dear me, don't get me started on POLICIES.  The sorts of places I apply for jobs all have policies about discrimination.  The problem is they seem to think that is as far as they have to go.  Convince me otherwise!!  I see occassional articles about some big company employing older/disabiled workers.

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

I see occassional articles about some big company employing older/disabiled workers.  Sure - used to be major supermarkets employed a couple of adults with intellectual disability to bring in trolleys.  Seems to have fallen by wayside now.  Sure, Bunnings employ a few older tradies to serve in the shop and offer free advice.  I'm too polite to do it, but going into **[redacted organisation that serves people with disability]** (let's face it a lot of older people have **[redacted]** disability), I want to ask why they don't employ people who relect their client base - like an older person with a **[redacted]** disability.  The retirement housing industry don't employ older sales people to sell their products either.

### **Solutions**

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

Incentives for employers would be a start.  Yes, I know the $10,000 is being offered, but i assume only up until 65 - as the agencies who would put this in place are not funded (they claim) for any one over this age.  Quite frankly if I was employer the offer of this $10,000 would not influence me much.  It would all look like too much red tape, too many hassles about insurance and the likes.

One report I read was quoting some one from the industry of employment for older workers saying that the only way most older workers got work was through someone they knew or being self employed.  I would agree here.  I have run a not profitable business I set up for past 6 years.  I'd rather be collecting a regular salary, or even work on short contracts, but that seems like an unlikely dream.

At 68 I am on scrap heap well and truly.  At 50 i was on scrap heap here in Melbourne.  I would think that the range of qualifications I hold would mean someone would have work for me (M.A. (Arts), Grad Dip Applied Science (Museum Studies), B.Ed (Primary) Reg. Cert Library and Information Association Australia).

Right now I am taking in international students.  I cook, wash and clean for young men.  I get paid not very much and have to pay for food, energy and I need to provide support an assistance to them.

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

For a start the federal, state and local government authorities should have positive discrimination, quotas or the likes.  the only thing I think will make a difference is to drag employers kicking and screaming to the trough.

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

The outcome I would like to see is that us older workers get given a fair opportunity in the workforce.  I'd like to see those with disability (old or young) be treated with something a bit more than tokanism.

Tokanism is rife. not just in employment.  For example although something like 1.5 million Australians have a hearing disability and only 65,000 use Auslan sign language, the main way organisations claim to meet the needs of those with hearing disability is to say they use a signing interpreter.  At least the Emergency Victoria Facebook page now offer a YouTube alternative with captions for Warnings.  The one thing that helps a person with a disability in the workplace is flexibility, and this is usually a step too far for an employer to get his/her head around.