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

# Submission No 90

**Name** Jean Gordon

**Submission made by**

[x]  Older Australian looking for work

[x]  Australian with disability looking for work

# Submission regarding Older Australians and 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?**

[ ]  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.**

As a management consultant, my reputation is everything, a considerable factor in gaining both work and referrals for future work. In one instance it was made clear to me that if I took action claiming discrimination, the full weight of a global organisation would be used to demonstrate that I was unsuitable for the work in question, despite the company's enthusiasm for my application and cv prior to learning of my disability. The general belief seemed to be that it would be too difficult or too expensive to employ me. These beliefs were implicit rather than stated, denying me the opportunity to talk about how I would manage to do the work. This has happened more than once in the last four years.

**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

### **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?**

Perceptions about competence, costs and physical factors eg tiredness, when employing someone with a disability or an older Australian. There is an unwillingness to consider alternative ways of approaching the "problem" of disability, limited flexibility in work processes where often a small change can make employment possible, and an overarching view that it is all too much trouble.

**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**

Anti-discrimination laws can be difficult to access, and employers, particularly small employers, are not always aware of them. While anti-discrimination training programs and literature for employers tend to focus on semi-skilled and/or manual workers there are many well educated, middle aged and older job seekers in the market with a disability. Employers tend to consider only the most junior, lowest skilled jobs as suitable for people with a disability or older Australians and the literature usually confirms them in this view.

Many government funding schemes supporting people with disability in the workplace and the wider community do not apply once a person is 65 or over. This may severely limit the ability of these people to compete in the workforce marketplace.

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

**Incentives:**

Valued contributors to the broader community, feelings of self worth and financial and physical independence. Commitment to retraining and/or acquiring new or updated skills were those opportunities available.

Ongoing commitment to an employer who will give them a chance. Stability, lower turnover and less time lost for employers, as well as increased productivity.

**Disincentives:**

Tax treatment of superannuation and entitlements. Non-availability of government work place support schemes once an individual reaches 65.

Lack of skills and knowledge on part of DESs and HR branches on skills and experiences other than base level and unskilled jobs.

No opportunities for subsidised education and training to acquire new skills and knowledge to increase competitive edge if the job seeker already has a post-school qualification, no matter in what discipline.

### **Good practice**

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

[ ] Yes

[ ] No

[x] Not sure

### **Solutions**

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

Trial placements partially funded by government for a limited time (similar to apprenticeships).

Removal on restrictions for support post-65 years.

Increased opportunities for re-education and training in specific disciplines.

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

Trial placements partially funded by government for a limited time (similar to apprenticeships).

Removal on restrictions for support post-65 years. If we continue to act as if everything changes or stops once a person turns 65, one can hardly blame employers for believing the same.

Increased opportunities for re-education and training in specific disciplines.

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

Enhanced knowledge and skills of DES, DSS and corporate HR staff with respect to old job seekers with a disability. More engagement of main-stream recruitment agencies with people with disability and older Australians.

Funding support for further education and specialist training for people with disability and older Australians where this training is linked directly to employment opportunities. This would also mean DES and HR staff would have to improve their knowledge of the Australian, regional and district industries and the jobs needed to support them.

Improved specific information for employers on employing these categories of staff.