



THE FUTURE OF THE PROVISION OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICES BY THE COMMONWEALTH

Thank you for giving organisations such as ours the opportunity to provide input into the Government's Review of Employment Services.

As an organisation founded as a philanthropic initiative by two officers of the then Victorian Employers' Federation in 1954 to assist mature age ex-service personnel re-enter the workforce, we believe that we have lengthy and valuable experience in the issues of mature age employment.

ARPA Over 50s Association is still actively involved in mature age employment assistance. We mainly provide an employment service for a niche group, that is, those who are self-funded in their job search and therefore do not get adequate jobsearch support from the JobNetwork. Through our involvement in **workingconnections** we would like to make the following points.

From the mature age employee perspective, effective, efficient and affordable retraining is essential. Currently we believe that there is limited and inadequate support from the Job Network for self-funded job-seekers. Around half of mature age job-seekers fall into this group. Many of the mature aged unemployed that seek assistance through our **workingconnections** program suffer from two specific disadvantages. They may have no experience of applying for outside employment having been with one employer for virtually all their adult working life. They also pride themselves on never having had the indignity to seek "charity" or "social security". As a consequence, such mature age unemployed people require entirely different strategies from those of a younger generation.

Jobsearch skills training and support are required if the mature age jobseeker has been out of the workforce for a prolonged period, or has not had to apply for a position for several years. Unless outplacement is funded by the previous employer, which only happens in a small minority of cases, assistance available commercially is usually too expensive for mature age jobseekers to 'risk', given uncertain outcomes.

There are also difficulties in obtaining trade skills because of age discrimination.

From the employer perspective, it is essential that workforce regulations should not have upper age limits, for example, Workcover and Superannuation. There needs to be enabling legislation to remove current age discrimination.

Employers need skills/assistance to develop and introduce flexible employment terms and conditions, for example, to enable Transition to Retirement employment options

There are also intergenerational issues. There is a need to recognise and resolve those policies and training methods leading to discrimination against mature age employment, for example, employment policy, training policies and training methods which exclude mature age employees.

Trade unions also need to recognise that an employer needs to have capacity to introduce flexible employment conditions enabling Transition to Retirement in order to reduce skill shortages.

Response to specific points

Early interventions minimise the number of long-term welfare dependent Australians of working age (including a review of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument)

Response: Early support mechanisms: when a mature age person loses his job he often faces acute loss of identity and a sense of depression. This requires counselling support as it is a form of trauma.

Transitional programs: vocational advice and appropriate retraining.

Peer Support: support of a previously unemployed mature age person who can empathise with the job seekers situation.

Employment services are relevant to the circumstances and needs of the job seeker

Response: Vocationally appropriate training programs
Databases for relevant job opportunities for mature age job seekers

Job seekers with higher levels of disadvantage receive intensive assistance

Response: Need to break the correlation between age and lack of opportunity, This is age discrimination.

Incentives for training which will improve the employability of job seekers (including incentives for long term training and education to address labour market needs)

Response:

Employee incentives: blue collar mature age workers such as those recently retrenched by Mitsubishi need specifically targeted responses that recognise the limited transfer value of their skills. White collar workers often have tertiary (or post-school) qualifications but have skills that are no longer considered relevant. This group needs support from programs such as **workingconnections**, that this organisation runs.

Employer Incentives: Some initiatives were taken in this area by past governments that often did not lead to sufficient measurable outcomes. It is now even more necessary for

the Government to work closely with all stakeholders to produce a series of employer incentives that will lead to far more productive outcomes.

Job seekers receive appropriate training

Response: Training should be provided to mature age job seekers that recognises previous skills and education of mature age job seekers.

Performance management principles (including star ratings and business reallocation) that support sustainable outcomes and promote quality service delivery

Response: We support performance management principles to ensure satisfactory outcomes, as long as they are measuring real performance and not just statistical case load outcomes.

The minimisation of time and money spent on administration.

Response: It is important to strike a balance between necessary seed money to set up an efficient program with longer term goals and as a consequence more productive outcomes.

The most costly expenses in the previous Government's programs was the constant changes of systems to achieve outcomes. New system should only be managed by Ministers, public servants and other stakeholders with a long term commitment and not distracted by short term incentive programs and reimbursement. In other words, the shorter the time frame of the key players the higher the long term costs and the less efficient the outcomes.

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