

4. Mature Age Job Seekers

Background

Mature age job seekers are Newstart (NSA) recipients who are over 50 years and under Age Pension age.⁹

- AWT provided mature age job seekers with additional help to look for work. From July 2002, mature age job seekers were able to undertake Job Search Training immediately they came onto payment. Additional support was also provided through Training Accounts which were designed to help mature age job seekers who participate in Intensive Support Job Search Training or Intensive Support Customised Assistance to improve their employment prospects through the provision of training.
- From September 2002, mature age job seekers were, on a voluntary basis, able to access assistance through Personal Advisers to improve their chances of getting paid work. Personal Advisers aimed to help mature age job seekers develop a participation plan that could include accessing employment services, or undertaking activities such as training, study, rehabilitation or voluntary work to help build or maintain their skills. From September 2003, it became compulsory for mature age job seekers to attend an annual participation planning interview with a Personal Adviser.
- From September 2003, Newstart Mature Age and Partner Allowances were closed to new entrants.
- More flexible participation requirements were also introduced for mature age job seekers who were required to undertake job search. While the focus remained on looking for work, the range of eligible activities was expanded to better accommodate the capacity and needs of mature aged job seekers. These activities included education or training, Job Network programs, rehabilitation, disability employment services, Personal Support Program, Transition to Work, voluntary or community work, financial planning, counselling and job search.

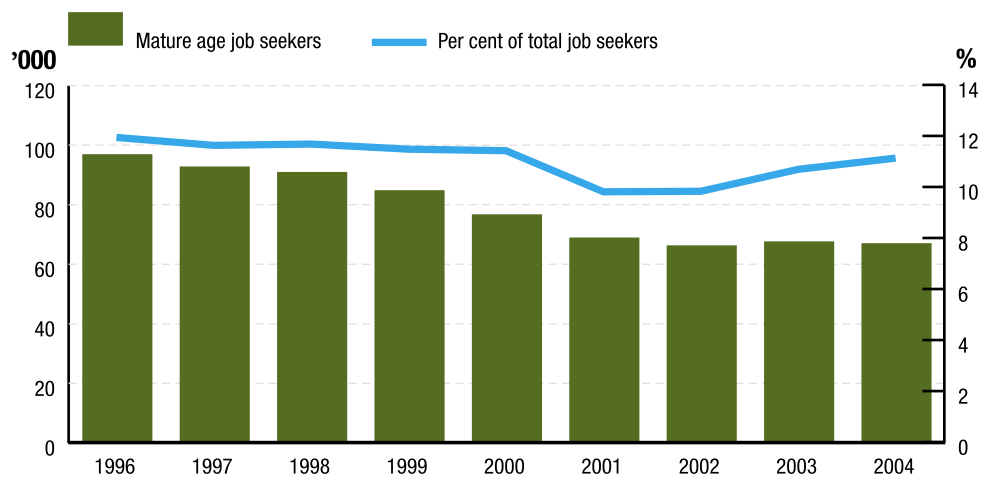
⁹ The Age Pension for women has been increasing over recent years.

Income Support Reliance

The population of mature age job seekers has decreased over time and steadied at around 65 000 since the introduction of AWT. However, the number of mature age job seekers as a percentage of total job seekers has been increasing (Chart 18).

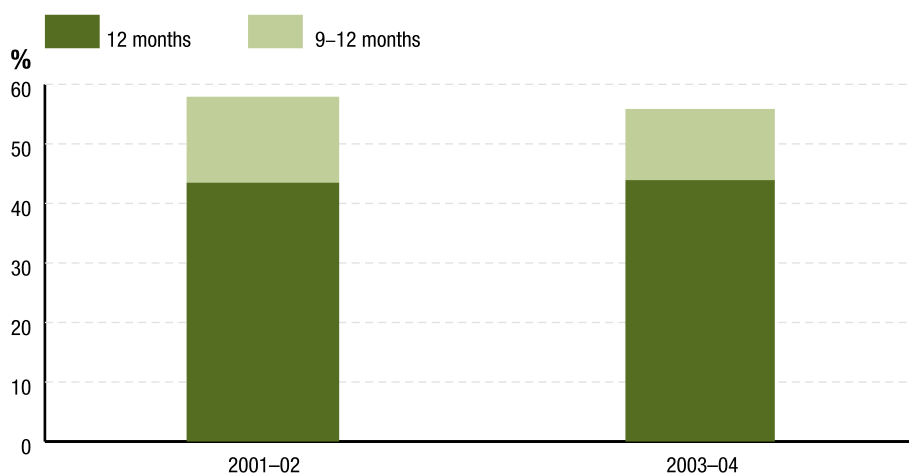
Since the introduction of AWT, reliance on income support among mature age job seekers has not changed. The percentage of mature age job seekers who were on income support for the entire year remained unchanged at 44 per cent for both 2001–02 and 2003–04 (Chart 19).

Chart 18: Mature age job seekers — population, June 1996 to June 2004



Source: Labour Market and Related Payments, DEWR publications.

Chart 19: Mature age job seekers — income support receipt, 2001–02 and 2003–04



Source: Centrelink administrative data

There was also very little change in exits from income support, with a slight increase from 25 per cent in 2001–02 to 26 per cent in 2003–04 (Chart 20).

Chart 20: Mature age job seekers — exits from income support, 2001–02 and 2003–04



Source: Centrelink administrative data

Note: Exits do not include recipients who exited due to death or reaching Age Pension Age.

Participation

Just over 37 per cent of mature age job seekers participated in paid work in 2001–02 (Table 5). This rose to 38 per cent in 2003–04. Of those with earnings, there was a small increase over

the period in the share recording a higher level of fortnightly earnings (\$400 or more). As for people with disabilities and parents, it is not possible to determine to what extent this was attributable to increased hours of work or the general increase in wages over this period.

Table 5: Mature age job seekers — per cent in paid work while on income support, 2001–02 and 2003–04

% reporting	2001–02	2003–04
Fortnightly earnings from paid work	37	38
Of those with earnings:		
Distribution of fortnightly earnings ^(a):		
Less than \$100	9	7
\$100 to \$399	36	32
\$400 and over	55	61

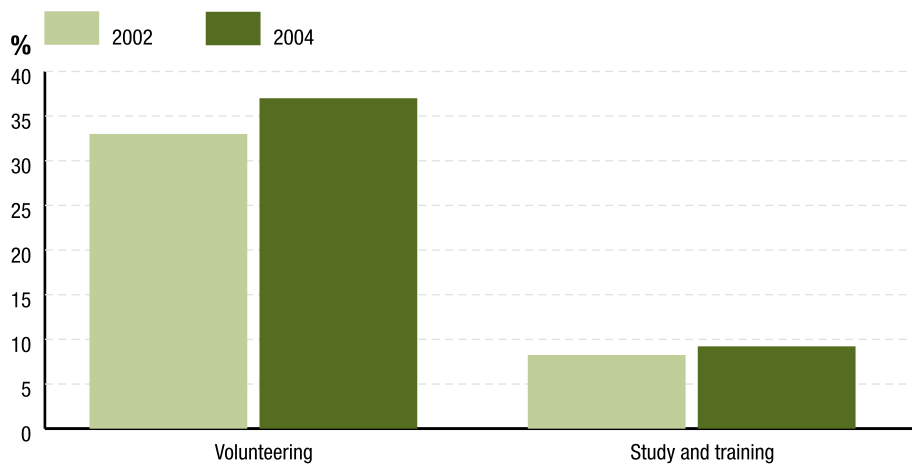
Source: Centrelink administrative data

(a) Not indexed for inflation

Although there was a only a very small increase in participation in paid work by mature age job seekers, there was a constant rate of participation in other activities such as volunteering and study and training. AWT General Customer Survey results indicate that about one third of mature age job seekers

were participating in volunteering activities in October 2002 and October 2004 (Chart 21). Also, the share of mature age job seekers undertaking study and training activities was around 9 per cent in both periods (Chart 21). Both these activities can be a first step to pathways to paid employment.

Chart 21: Mature age job seekers — volunteering and study and training, 2002 and 2004



Source: Australians Working Together General Customer Survey, Wave 1, October 2002 and Wave 2, October 2004.

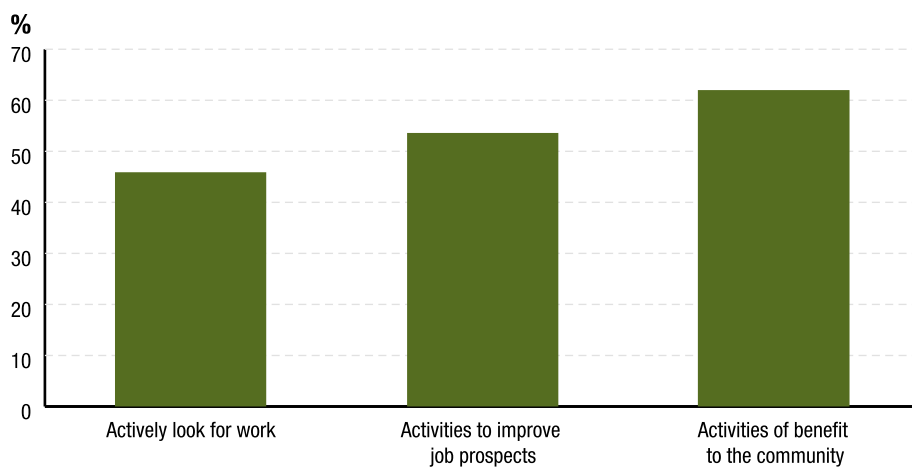
Positive results were evident for mature age jobseekers who received training using the AWT Training Account. Between April 2003 and March 2004, there were 16 245 recorded expenditures on Training Accounts for mature age job seekers who had commenced Job Network assistance. Post Program Monitoring data shows that, of those who received training using the Training Account, 28 per cent were employed and 14 per cent were undertaking education or training within 3 months after leaving assistance.

In the Personal Adviser evaluation survey mature age job seekers reported that they valued the personalised assistance they received from the Personal Adviser. However, the intervention had little impact on changing attitudes towards work for those mature age job seekers who perceived themselves as semi-retired. Mature age people without recent workforce experience and/or with long term

medical incapacities appeared less likely than other mature age job seekers to benefit from contact with a Personal Adviser.

Findings from the Customer and Community Attitudes Survey indicate a generally favourable community attitude to requiring mature age job seekers to participate in activities to improve their job prospects and benefit the broader community (Chart 22).

Chart 22: Community support for participation requirements for mature age job seekers, 2004



Source: Customer and Community Attitudes Survey, 2004

Conclusion

As with parents and people with disabilities, there is little evidence of any increase in the level of participation in paid work or other participation activities by mature age job seekers following the introduction of AWT. Results also show no change in their level of reliance on income support. Indeed, mature age job seekers as a share of all job seekers actually rose over the period suggesting that more may need to be done

for mature age job seekers to increase their level of participation.

Encouragingly, survey evidence shows that there is strong support among the wider community for increased participation requirements for mature age job seekers to help them get back into the workforce.