

Ending Ageism in Work



EveryAGE Counts Policy Directions

EveryAGE Counts is a broad-based coalition campaign to end ageism towards older Australians. It is a long-term commitment. We aim to shift narrow and negative generalisations about older age and older people, and the damaging impacts that flow from them, towards more realistic, fairer and healthier perspectives on ageing and later life.

To do this it is crucial we have our own policy positions to guide our work. We need to be clear about where and what the problems are and what changes we want to see in particular areas of life. Our policy positions help to guide our own work in the campaign – especially our advocacy and communications – but just as crucially, identify the priority areas of government policy in particular that we wish to influence.

Our priorities policy areas in the early stages of our campaign are:

- **political leadership**
- **work**
- **health**
- **aged care**
- **housing**
- **digital inclusion**
- **economic security**
- **media representation.**

Our policy stance will evolve as the campaign unfolds and we turn our attention to specific expressions of ageism, and as we engage with opportunities within political cycles, such as elections, legislative programs and government inquiries.

Our policies will develop through the engagement and input of individuals, communities and civil society organisations; as a grassroots, social movement for change strengthens; and as the research and evidence base on ageism and the opportunities presented by an older population expands and deepens.

EveryAGE Counts is committed to the active involvement of diverse older Australians in all aspects of our campaign.

Our Policy to End Ageism in Work

Why this matters

The human right to work (and to fair working conditions), supported in national legislation and Australia's international treaty commitments, does not diminish with age. Australians have the right to participate in work for as long as they choose.

Ageism and age discrimination undermine this right and deny older people economic security and the personal benefits of work —dignity, independence, a sense of purpose and social connectedness. It also places great personal strain on the individuals involved and their families. This is especially stark for those people over 55 who lose their job and are seeking re-employment.

While older employees have lower rates of unemployment than younger workers, when they lose their job, on average, it takes them much longer to get a new job¹. Many spend this time trying to exist on unemployment benefits (previously known as Newstart Allowance and now called JobSeeker Payment), depleting savings and personal confidence.

Importantly, ageism is bad for business too, limiting access to an entire pool of skill and talent simply based on chronological age. In addition, it strains government budgets to support long-term unemployed, older job seekers and people retiring earlier with lower levels of personal savings and superannuation than might have otherwise been the case.

As people live longer many will choose or need to work longer, and as our population ages our economy and society will increasingly rely on an older workforce. Employment culture, structure and practices must adjust to accept, include and welcome people at older ages than in the past, as legitimately belonging in the workforce.

A number of important recent government and academic reports, most notably the 2016 Willing to Work report from the Australian Human Rights Commission, provide a wealth of insights on what needs to be done to remove the barriers to employment for older people.

At the same time, extending the working lives for many of those who have been employed in physically and/or psychologically demanding jobs is neither feasible nor fair. There may also be health or wellbeing reasons why some people are unable or unwilling to work into later life.

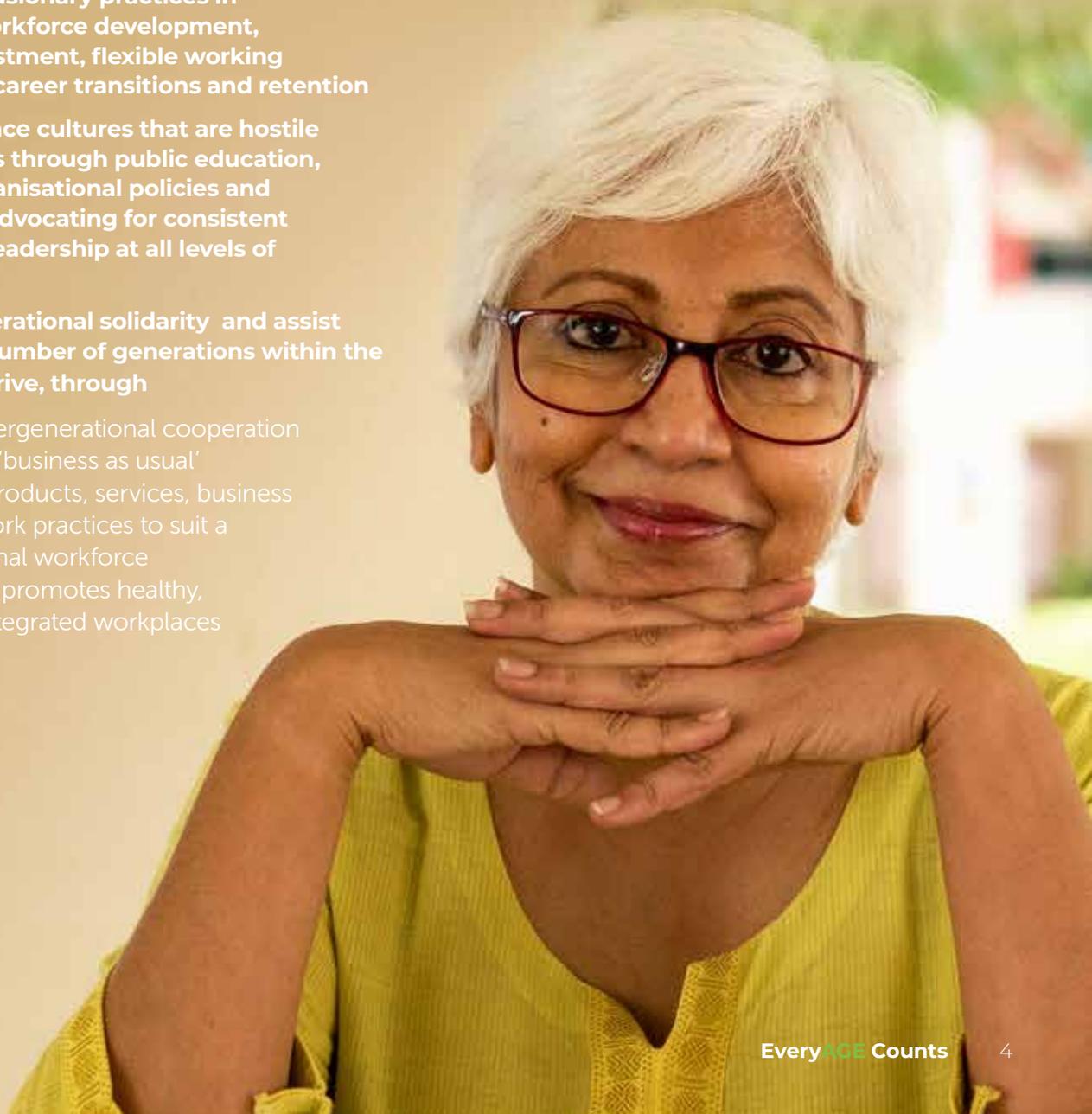
Tackling ageism towards older people in employment is aimed at removing artificial age barriers for the growing numbers of older people who expect to, want to, and are capable of working. Opposition to ageism, however, is not an excuse to force people to work beyond the age they are capable of doing so. People across a broad age range will transition to changed working arrangements, reduced working hours, pro bono work, volunteer work, or no work, according to their individual needs.

¹ In November 2015, the average duration of unemployment for mature-age people was 68 weeks, compared with 30 weeks for 15–24 year olds and 49 weeks for 25–54 year olds. Source: AHRC, Willing to Work Report, 2016 p37 (quoting ABS Labour Force statistics)

What needs to happen?

EveryAGE Counts will collaborate with, support and encourage governments, employers, unions and employees to:

- **remove discriminatory barriers facing older employees and job-seekers**
- **support strong age discrimination laws and processes**
- **increase research and the evidence base and innovative measures built around the opportunities and benefits associated with an ageing society and longer lives, not just the challenges**
- **implement inclusionary practices in recruitment, workforce development, workplace adjustment, flexible working arrangements, career transitions and retention**
- **change workplace cultures that are hostile to older workers through public education, influencing organisational policies and practices, and advocating for consistent and sustained leadership at all levels of organisations**
- **foster intergenerational solidarity and assist the expanded number of generations within the workforce to thrive, through**
 - embedding intergenerational cooperation and sharing as 'business as usual'
 - innovation in products, services, business models and work practices to suit a multigenerational workforce
 - leadership that promotes healthy, diverse, age-integrated workplaces
- **respond to the link between health and workforce participation and the need to address healthy ageing across the entire life course, with an emphasis on prevention and reduction of chronic conditions**
- **support mass participation in genuine life-long learning and the maintenance of personal work capabilities, through advocating for strengthening of**
 - educational strategies, structures and processes
 - individual and workplace learning habits, and
 - social norms and expectations.



Priorities for action

1. Public and workplace education and information campaigns

- **challenging myths, stereotypes and negative attitudes about older people in the workforce**
- **increasing awareness of ageism and aged based discrimination and their impacts, and the options for recourse.**

2. Sustained federal government investment in More Choices for a Longer Life Package to

- **Evaluate and amplify successful strategies (including from the forthcoming career transition initiatives)**
- **Incorporate learnings and valuable strategies from relevant Test, Try, Learn projects**
- **Target trials of integrated policy initiatives in regional, rural and remote areas responding to specific challenges in local economies**
- **Design employment initiatives to address cohort needs such as for women at risk of homelessness.**

3. Establishment of a network of shared value partnerships² with a focus on ending ageism towards older employees.

4. Establishment of a Work and Ageing Clearinghouse to

- **Collect and share data and research**
- **Disseminate success stories, better practice examples and resources.**

² Shared value is defined as policies and practices that enhance the competitiveness of companies while improving social and environmental conditions in the regions where they operate. It is a business strategy focused on companies creating measurable economic benefit by identifying and addressing social problems that intersect with their business. www.sharedvalue.org.au

EveryAGE Counts Campaign

Ageism against older people is stereotyping, discrimination and mistreatment based solely upon age. It comes from negative attitudes and beliefs about what it means to be older and impacts on older people's confidence, quality of life, job prospects, health and control over life decisions.

Ageism has loomed larger in policy and practice as Australians live longer and our population ages. Longevity coupled with falling birth rates has resulted in steady growth in both the number and the proportion of the population who are older, giving rise to a public narrative around older people as a burden and cost to society.

The purpose of the EveryAGE Counts Campaign is to positively change thinking about ageing, to re-imagine getting older and to set the foundations for current and future generations to age well. To do this, we intend to work collaboratively and co-operatively with governments, political parties, employers, unions and community sector stakeholders, based on the strong engagement of diverse older people themselves.

At its heart the campaign respects and acknowledges the inherent worth of each individual and their right to choice, control and dignity regardless of their age or health.



The campaign is aiming for an Australia where older people:

- **are valued and their contribution is acknowledged;**
- **have opportunities to learn, grow and live purposeful lives;**
- **participate in work for as long as they want to;**
- **are visible and represented in media in all their diversity;**
- **are connected with their community and contact between generations is fostered;**
- **have a voice and are part of all major policy decisions that affect them;**
- **have equal access to goods and services and consumer protections when they need them;**
- **get the right care and support which maintains their dignity and autonomy when needed.**

To achieve this impact, the EveryAGE Counts Campaign is in for the long haul. We recognise that change can take time to grow and embed in individual and collective attitudes, interpersonal relationships, community behaviours, media representation, professional practices and government policies, programs and laws. We also recognise that it will only be achieved through collaboration between the generations and across different groups in society. The EveryAGE Counts Campaign wants to be a partner with and a supporter of governments, policy-makers, employers, unions, learning institutions, service providers and community groups to achieve a positive future for older Australians.

EveryAGE Counts is organising to build:

- **a national coalition for action;**
- **an active, broad-based social movement;**
- **effective advocacy and political engagement;**
- **a stronger policy, research and evidence base;**
- **powerful responses to structural ageism and discrimination;**
- **effective communications and marketing.**



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