



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR OLDER AUSTRALIANS

The Australian Greens will stand up for over those over 50 who are out of work by ensuring that employment support and anti-discrimination reform are protected from the Abbott Government's cruel cuts

Age discrimination, fewer employment opportunities and inadequate job services make it tough for those over 50, who are forced out of the workforce, to find a new job.

According to a recent budget estimates there are almost 200,000 unemployed Australians aged between 50 and 64 receiving the Newstart allowance from Centrelink¹, a number that has increased by more than 41% since 2010, partially due to bad policies such as cuts to the single parent payment and changes to disability support pension eligibility.

Without tackling employment for older Australians, more and more people will be forced to use their saving before they reach retirement age and rely on income support such as Newstart for years before they retire, undermining their financial security, health and wellbeing.

Many of these older workers face significant discrimination from potential employers or are physically unable to continue in their old jobs and lack the skills to enter a new industry. If we don't do something soon to address these issues, we will be condemning hundreds of thousands of older Australians to poverty.

But rather than tackling this crisis, the Abbott Government's Commission of Audit has recommended a number of measures that if implemented would put more pressure on the unemployed including:

- Newstart recipients over 60 would lose their small additional supplement.
- Access to job services when people first become unemployed would be reduced
- The subsidies offered to employers who take on long-term unemployed under Wage-Connect program be reduced
- The pension age would be lifted to 70.

The Australian Greens have always fought to ensure that older Australians are looked after. Our achievements include securing a rise in the base rate of the pension and improving the aged care legislation to better support those on a low income who need care.

Our three part initiative for older workers will help ensure that they get a real start, rather than getting stuck in poverty as a result of spending extended periods of time on Newstart.

> EMPLOYMENT

Too many older Australians are facing extended times of unemployment and are deprived of an adequate income as they approach retirement age. An adequate income is important security in the decades before people seek to retire because the life that most retirees can look forward to is very reliant on how much they saved during their working life (including whether they bought and paid off their own home).

Yet, 41% of people aged over 50 on Newstart have been receiving it for more than two years and a significant cohort of those in their forties and fifties who find themselves outside the workforce are unlikely to re-enter it.²

Newstart is not an appropriate payment to live on for anything but a short period of time, because while costs of housing and living are increasing rapidly, the base single rate of Newstart is only \$255 a week (or \$276 for over 60's).³

The Greens will help older Australians who want to escape the Newstart poverty trap and re-enter the workforce by:

- **Providing all eligible mature age job seekers with more intensive support** (such as a minimum of Stream 2 assistance through Job Services Australia) as soon as they enter JSA system as well as ensuring



that specialist job services that can address other barriers such as partial disability or low educational achievements are available to older workers.

- Ensuring that all job seekers over 45 are able to **access re-training through their job service provider** and are fully informed of their right to retraining funding.
- **Establish an expert panel** to build on the work of the Greens-instigated Senate inquiry into the adequacy of Newstart, by investigating the current trends in unemployment and effectiveness of current system to achieve outcomes for older workers and the integration of JAS's with other training, work experience and social services.

> WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS TO END DISCRIMINATION

These initiatives will give older workers the best possible chance of re-entering the workforce quickly. However, given that most of the complaints that the aged commissioner receives are in the area of employment (68% of complaints in 2011-12), these initiatives will also need to be reinforced by the:

- **Continuation of current programs to tackle age discrimination**
- **Continuation of programs that provide incentives to employers to take on an older worker.**

A 2009 National Seniors Australia report *Still Putting In: Measuring the Economic and Social Contributions of Older Australians*, found that there is an economic loss of around \$10.8 billion a year to the Australian economy for not utilising the skills and experience of older Australians:

- A loss of \$8.7 billion a year for not utilising the skills and experience of older Australians who want to work but were not looking for work (161,800 in total); and
- A loss of \$2.1 billion a year for not utilising the skills and experience of 39,331 who were unemployed and looking for full-time work.⁴

Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show about one-third of older people who have given up looking for work say it is because employers think they are too old.⁵

We need to get over the perception that older Australians cannot learn new skills or continue to make valuable contributions to our workplaces. One in 10 Australian businesses has said that they will not hire anyone over the age of 50- that's just not good enough.⁶

Contrary to these discriminatory perceptions of older workers, research shows that they bring high motivation

levels, reliability, sustained job performance and a lifetime's accumulation of experience, knowledge and skills to the workplace.⁷

The Greens believe that all older Australians should be able to access the workforce if they want to, and participate fully without being discriminated against.

> BREAKING DOWN OTHER LEGAL BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

The Greens supported the recent reforms that have helped older Australians access the workforce beyond the official retirement age of 65. However, there are still a number of practical barriers to employing older workers.

The Greens will address the legal barriers as well as confront the sources of workplace discrimination that lead to exclusion from the workforce by:

- Working across jurisdictions to **implement changes to workers compensation and work-related insurances**, to remove unnecessary legal barriers to employing an older person.
- Securing the **right to flexible work** for all older workers, particularly carers.



¹http://www.aph.gov.au/~media/Estimates/Live/clac_ctte/estimates/add_1314/Social%20Services/Answers/347.pdf

²http://www.aph.gov.au/~media/Estimates/Live/clac_ctte/estimates/add_1314/Social%20Services/Answers/347.pdf

³<http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/newstart-allowance>

⁴ National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre, Still Putting In (2009), p. 11.

⁵<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30Sep+2010>

⁶ Susan Ryan, Fact or Fiction: Stereotypes of Older Australians 2013 https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/age/publications/Working_past_our_60s_2012.pdf

⁷ <http://www.tai.org.au/content/hard-get-break-1>