



Australian
Human Rights
Commission

Western Sydney University

Lunch time lecture

Combatting Discrimination & Promoting Cohesion

“Will you still need me”

Wednesday 22 November 2017

Event 12:00pm – 2:40pm

Speech start: 1:00pm

Check Against Delivery

Western Sydney University
Sir Ian & Nancy Turbott Auditorium, Parramatta South Campus,
Parramatta NSW 2150

Introduction

- Thank **Faiza Rehman** for introduction.

Will you still need me

- Paul McCartney's famous song 'Will you still need me' penned in 1966, at the age of 24, when the oldest of Australia's baby boomers were just turning 20, despite Paul contemplating turning 64, for most boomers then it was probably the furthest thing from their minds, and for most of them would have seemed an impossibility.
- Indeed, they had been immersed in the 'youth culture' in the 60s, and exposed to popular cultural references at the time expressing the exact opposite, with famous lines like 'forever young' and 'I hope I die before I get old' saturating our radios.
- But the demographic clock stops for no one and for many years it had been ticking away in the background.

Ageing profile

- Fast forward to the present day. Baby boomers aged 65 and over make up approximately 15% of the Australian population.¹ The 2015 Intergenerational Report has projected that the number of boomers to enter this age range will more than double by 2055.²
- As a result of the high levels of post-war immigration, almost 40% of all migrants from non-English speaking countries are aged 50 years and over.

- With rising life expectancies, Australian baby boomers can now expect to live well into their 80s and beyond. That's on average an extra 25 years more than their parents and grandparents' generation.³
- These added years of life come with many opportunities but also challenges of age discrimination.
- In today's lecture, I would like to talk about two key areas of age discrimination; how they impact older Australians, including those from CALD backgrounds; and what we can do to address it.

Workforce participation

- First, workforce participation.
- Last year, the Australian Human Rights Commission conducted a national inquiry into employment discrimination against older people and people with disability. The inquiry was called *Willing to Work*.
- Through the voices of those who participated in the Willing to Work Inquiry, the Commission consistently heard that older workers, are subject to ageism, negative assumptions, myths and pervasive stereotypes associated with their age. They are seen as 'overqualified', 'won't fit the organisational culture' or 'not to be taken seriously as they are just looking for a path to retirement'.

- An earlier prevalence study of age discrimination by the Commission found that over a quarter (27%) of people over the age of 50 reported having recently experienced employment-related age discrimination.
- Whether subtle or overt, the cumulative nature of age discrimination can have devastating effects on individuals, impacting on their physical and mental health, dignity, independence and self-esteem.
- Older people from CALD backgrounds are among those who suffer this discrimination.
- Almost 20%, or 1.34 million, of all Australians aged 50 years and over were born in non-English speaking countries.⁴
- In 2015, there were over 140,000 job seekers from CALD backgrounds registered with *jobactive* (the Australian Government employment service). Of these, approximately 33% were aged over 50 years.⁵
- The inquiry heard that factors such as a 'strange' surname, heavy accent, qualifications that are not recognised in Australia, and the fact that a person is nearing retirement age could all contribute to a person's negative treatment in employment contexts.
- FOR EXAMPLE: An older woman in Perth from a CALD background was told she had 'communication issues' which was why she was not successful in getting a job in her field, despite her qualifications,

experience and excellent recommendations. She had an accent and had no difficulties with English.

- Older people from CALD backgrounds can also be more vulnerable to workplace discrimination because they may not be aware of their rights under Australian laws. For example they may be reluctant to complain about workplace bullying or harrassment or seek compensation for harm. They may also not be aware of the services and complaint mechanisms available to them.
- As Australia's population continues to age, very soon there will be fewer people of traditional working age compared with the very young and elderly. Therefore, encouraging higher workforce participation among older Australians is both a demographic and economic imperative.
- Older workers are also good for business, offering offer loyalty, low absenteeism, skills and experience.
- The Grattan Institute report estimates that a 7% increase in mature-age labour force participation would raise GDP in 2022 by approximately \$25 billion.⁶
- What can we do about this terrible waste of skills and opportunity?
- The *Willing to Work* report makes a number of recommendations to government, business and employers about things they could do to combat age discrimination.

- I am currently working with government and employers to progress the implementation of these recommendations.
- In particular, I feel strongly that the Australian Public Service should lead by example as a model employer.
- I also think there is a critical need for education and training of HR, recruiters and managers around age inclusion and diversity in the workplace.
- Further, it is important to ensure that information about government services, complaint mechanisms and internal procedures are properly communicated to all employees. Where possible, this information should also be made available in community languages.

Elder abuse

- The second topic I want to talk about today is elder abuse.
- Elder abuse is often hidden and underreported.
- There is currently a lack of precise data about the prevalence of elder abuse in Australia. Based on the evidence that is available, it is likely that between 2-10% of Australians experience elder abuse in any given year.
- Forms of abuse include physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, financial abuse and neglect. Financial abuse appears to be most common followed by psychological abuse. One study suggests that neglect could be as high as 20% among older women.

- Most abuse appears to be intergenerational and intra-familial. Older women are more likely to be victims than older men and perpetrators are commonly close family members such as sons and daughters.⁷
- Elder abuse can be particularly complex within CALD communities due to particular cultural expectations around family roles and responsibilities.
- CALD older people may also be susceptible to abuse due to language barriers, social isolation and increased dependence.
- EXAMPLE: An elderly grandmother from a European background, was coerced to sign a Transfer to her property. She was unable to read English could not understand the documents presented to her.
- EXAMPLE: Indian, Greek, Chinese communities had approached Eastern Community Legal Centre about the issue of young people inviting their wealthy parents to migrate to Australia then stripping them on their assets.
- As Australia's ageing population continues to increase, the risk and incidence of elder abuse is likely to become more critical.
- It is a dark and hidden scourge that touches all aspects of our society and it is all of our responsibility.
- Last month, on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, the Australian Law Reform Commission released its findings and

recommendations following a 15-month national inquiry into elder abuse, which was commissioned by the Federal Government.⁸

- One of the recommendations from the report titled, *Elder Abuse - A National Legal Response*, is for the development of a National Plan to combat elder abuse via a long-term integrated approach.
- We must all be vigilant in ensuring implementation of the ALRC report recommendations. In fact, this is one of my key priorities as Age Discrimination Commissioner.
- CALD groups must also ensure that the concerns of their communities are represented in the National Plan and future services and protections.

Conclusion

- As more and more older Australians are living healthier and more active lives, Paul McCartney's insecurities about turning 64 may at first seem misconceived.
- However, on closer inspection we find that age discrimination is real and rife in our society. It continues to be a barrier to older people reaching their full potential in the workplace, at home and in the community.

- In all this, we must remember that older people, like everyone else, have the right work, be respected and live lives of dignity free from violence, neglect and abuse.
- If this isn't enough to motivate you, self-interest should be sufficient.
- My final message to you is that barring a premature death, each and every one of you is going to get older. The example and culture you set now is what you will inherit one day. It is up to you as to what the climate will be like in the mid-2000s – I hope it is different from today.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Feature Article: Population by Age and Sex, Australia, States and Territories* (Cat. No. 3101.0 – Australian Demographic Statistics, June 2015). At <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/featurearticlesbyCatalogue/7A40A407211F35F4CA257A2200120EAA?OpenDocument> (viewed 12 September 2016).

² Commonwealth of Australia, *2015 Intergenerational Report: Australia in 2055* (5 March 2015), Report, Ch1. At <http://www.treasury.gov.au/PublicationsAndMedia/Publications/2015/2015-Intergenerational-Report> (viewed 12 September 2016).

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Historical Population Statistics, 2014* (Cat. No. 3105.0.65.001). At <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3105.0.65.001Main+Features12014?OpenDocument> (viewed 1 July 2016).

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 Census in Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, Submission 248 to the Australian Human Rights Commission, *Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability*, 4 December 2015, 21.

⁵ Statistics provided to Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia by the Department of Employment in Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, Submission 248 to the Australian Human Rights Commission, *Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability*, 4 December 2015, 21.

⁶ Grattan Institute, *Game-Changers: Economic reform priorities for Australia*, Grattan Institute Report No. 2012-5, June, 2012, 50-52 at http://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Game_Changers_Web.pdf (viewed 26 April 2016).

⁷ Rae Kaspiew, Rachel Carson and Helen Rhoades, 'Elder Abuse: Understanding Issues, Frameworks and Responses' (Research Report 35, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2016) 5.

⁸ Australian Law Reform Commission Report 131, *Elder Abuse – A National Legal Response* (June 2017). At <https://www.alrc.gov.au/publications/elder-abuse-report> (viewed 27 June 2017).