

Ageing and Work: Fact or Myth

This information sheet is designed to challenge the misconceptions workers have about ageing, health and mature workers. This fact sheet may be used to:

- challenge assumptions, negative attitudes and stereotypes about mature age workers
- promote the valuable skills, knowledge and experience of mature age workers
- raise workplace awareness of the business benefit of mature age workers
- support workforce participation and retention of mature age workers

Why is this important?

Challenging stereotypical beliefs can influence attitudes towards the training, promotion and retention of older workers¹. Participation and engagement of all workers, regardless of age, is important for a productive, inclusive Australia. Whether real or perceived, age discrimination can influence older workers to self-select out of the labour market.

MYTH	FACTS
MOST MATURE AGE WORKERS CAN'T WAIT TO RETIRE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A large number of APS workers (23%) are eligible to retire over the next ten years² • Mature workers who are able to choose, will remain in work if the conditions are right • Most people retire at an age which suits them and their employers. The average retirement ages of men and women are converging and rising.⁶ • Ageing is universal, but, it's not uniform. Older workers choose to stay longer in work for several reasons⁶; <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) engaging work; a sense of interesting and important work, linked to pride in doing a good job ii) social contact; social contact with others is good for well-being, iii) status; the opportunity to use their skills, experience and knowledge, and have recognition from workmates and managers iv) money; money is rarely the only motivator for staying in work, although a growing percentage of mature workers remain in the workforce for financial reasons³

MYTH	FACTS
MATURE WORKERS HAVE EXPERIENCE, THEY DON'T NEED TRAINING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older Australians are the fastest growing users of technology³ • Experienced workers are valuable, and they need training throughout their careers to keep their skills up to date and relevant to a changing environment • Older workers in general are less likely to have formal qualifications and have learned informally from a lifetime's experience • Performance problems which appear to be age-related may in fact be due to lack of support from managers, or unmet training needs • Training is worthwhile- a worker of 54 years may have at least another decade in work to use their new skills and they are less likely than younger workers to change jobs, seeing an employer's investment in their training as a sign of commitment⁶
HEALTH AND SAFETY RISKS ARE GREATER FOR MATURE WORKERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers are required to identify and address health and safety risks for all workers, and regardless of age, are required to provide reasonable adjustments for workers identified with a disability⁴ • Victorian research shows the rate of work related injury peaks at ages 45 to 54 and declines with older age⁵ • Some physically demanding tasks become more difficult with age. However, with changes in work practices, technology and health and safety, if well managed, most peoples' capacity to work does not decline significantly before 65, with many remaining very productive long after that⁶ • For most people, stress levels go down after the mid 40's, and some of the indicators of stress, such as short term absenteeism, decline as people age⁶

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MYTH	FACTS
MATURE AGE WORKERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO WORK PART-TIME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the APS, mature age workers are far less likely to be employed on a part-time basis and less likely to be very satisfied with access to flexible working arrangements². • Mature age workers have reported that they would prefer greater access to flexible working arrangements if they were to lead a longer, productive life of work³.
MATURE AGE WORKERS ARE MORE EXPENSIVE THAN YOUNGER WORKERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although there may be a larger percentage of mature age workers paid at a higher base salary, cost efficiencies are often made through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – reduced turnover and replacement costs – lower rates of unplanned absenteeism, and – greater returns on investment in training²

For more information about work, health and ageing, go to www.comcare.gov.au.

For further reading:

- Managing a Healthy Ageing Workforce: A national Business Imperative. A guide for employers March 2012 [cipd.co.uk/public policy](http://www.cipd.co.uk/public-policy) - <http://www.cipd.co.uk/>
- The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) - <http://www.cipd.co.uk/>
- MCNAIR, S., FLYNN, M and OWEN, L (2004) – *Changing work in later life; a study of job transitions*.
- MCNAIR, S. (2010) – *A sense of a future; a study of training and work in later life*

1 State of the Service Report 2010-11, Australian Public Service Commission, www.apsc.gov.au
 2 National Seniors Australia 2011, Ageing and the barriers to labour force participation in Australia, www.productiveageing.com.au
 3 Smith, P 2012, Monash University, www.iwh.on.ca and www.worksafe.voc.gov.au
 4 Australian Human Rights Commission, www.hreoc.gov.au
 5 Australian Human Rights Commission, www.hreoc.gov.au
 6 The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) - <http://www.cipd.co.uk/>