

ROADBLOCKS ON THE DRIVE BACK TO WORK - NEW RESEARCH

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New research by National Seniors Australia has found that older Australians are confronted by the barriers of ageism, harsh pension rules and a scarcity of age-appropriate job opportunities when trying to re-enter the workforce.

The country's leading not-for-profit advocacy organisation for seniors documented the barriers in a new report called '[Older Australians' Perspectives on Working After Retirement](#)' which surveyed 3067 Australians aged 50 and over.

While 63% of retirees surveyed do not want to work, just under 20% do, and they need action to overcome the barriers that stand in their way. Their difficulties have been poorly understood and reported.

Barriers

The report identified 14 different kinds of barriers based on survey participants' views.

One major hurdle is the Age Pension income test and related concerns, mentioned by approximately 21% of participants, which is the driver behind the National Seniors '[Let Pensioners Work](#)' campaign according to National Seniors Chief Executive and Director of Research Professor McCallum.

Professor McCallum said, "The punitive nature of these rules, particularly in a time of dire labour shortage, needs immediate attention."

Unfair ageist attitudes to older workers topped the list of barriers, with 36% of participants directly mentioning it and others alluding to it.

"I had trouble returning to the workforce (part time) at 33," said one older survey participant quoted in the report. "Employers told me I was too old then!"

Another said, "The Job Agency didn't refer me to one position in 18 months. I was over 60."

According to the research, part of the problem is a lack of appropriate opportunities for older workers, a barrier mentioned by 14% of participants.

If we want a reliable workforce to fix shortages, the report recommends supporting employers to redesign jobs so they are less physically taxing and more flexible in hours and conditions, to capitalise on the wealth of skills and experience older workers can contribute.

“We are overlooking an entire workforce of people with experience not just in their chosen profession but real-world experience, who are willing and entirely able to reintegrate back into employment,” Professor McCallum said.

“They are being overlooked because of a range of factors including ageism, government rules and narrow ideas about what older workers can offer.”

Motivations

The study also found that for those who want to return to work, 19% nominated a benefit to their physical and mental health.

Respondents told the survey that factors attracting them back to the workforce were that work kept them active, in some cases was “fun”, helped them maintain their existing skills as well as learning new ones and kept them in a routine.

“What this shows is that there is a positive, collective benefit to our society by keeping older Australians engaged through employment,” Professor McCallum said.

Not surprisingly money was the primary motivating factor for 52% of those surveyed, with a higher rate, 60% for participants on the pension.

This was due to a range of factors including financial stress and the rising cost-of-living, creating a financial buffer against unexpected expenses such as medical costs, and increasing financial comfort in retirement.

Professor McCallum said, “Not everyone in retirement wants to go back to work and nor should they be pushed into it, but the number who do should not be ignored. And should we not forget the large numbers of older Australians who also volunteer and provide care at home

“We need to overcome the ‘use-by-date’ mentality we apply to many older people in the workforce and instead of thinking they’re past it, we should be thinking how we can put all that wealth of experience and enthusiasm to work,” he said.

As one survey participant put it, “People look at age and not ability. They forget the wealth of experience from having lived and excelled at various jobs over a lengthy work life.”

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Professor John McCallum is available for comment

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