**Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination against Older Australians and Australians with Disability**

# Submission No 206

**Name** Des Walsh

**Submission made by**

☒ Older Australian in work

☒ Business/employer

# Submission regarding Older Australians / Australians with Disability / Both

### **Your experience**

**Have you (or the person you are submitting on behalf of) experienced employment discrimination?**

[x]  Yes

[ ]  No

[ ]  Not sure

**Did you take any action in relation to the employment discrimination you experienced?**

[ ]  Yes

[x]  No

**Please tell us more, for example, what action you took and how effective you felt it was; or why you chose not to take any action.**

In my fifties I enquired a few times about positions advertised and well within my capabilities but it was made clear to me that it was not worth my while applying and I knew it was the age thing. Nothing on paper or electronically recorded.

I did not see any value in pursuing this so just got on with building my own business.

**Did your experience of employment discrimination impact on your participation in the workforce? (For example, did you have to stop work, change jobs or take sick leave?)**

[ ] Yes

[x] No

**Please tell us more**

I wasn’t actually “in the workforce”. I had resigned from positions I’d held and, as in the previous answer, I was building my own business. (I’m starting to wonder if this form is really for me ☺ but I don’t employ anyone and don’t intend to so the business owner form doesn’t seem to fit)

### **Barriers**

**Do you think older Australians/Australians with disability face barriers when they look for work or are in a job?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**If yes, or not sure, what do you think these barriers might be?**

Perceptions of older people being:

1. Too slow
2. Inflexible
3. Digitally illiterate

I believe people who have researched these things say we employ “people like us”. A twenty something, even thirty something, has to be unusually self-aware and self-disciplined not to see a fifty something person or older as “not one of us” and unlikely to fit in.

**Does employment discrimination have an impact on gaining and keeping employment for older Australians/Australians with disability?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Are there any practices, attitudes or laws which discourage or prevent equal participation in employment of older Australians/Australians with disability?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Please tell us more**

Attitudes. It’s a long time since I enquired about getting a job but from anecdotes I am pretty sure the game is stacked, attitudinally, against employing older Australians.

I’m guessing attitudes still play a role regarding Australians with disability.

(I learned a lot about attitudes to people with disability and prejudicial practice, when I co-researched, co-authored a national report on disability and the arts, for the Australia Council years ago)

**What are the incentives and disincentives for older Australians/Australians with disability to work?**

**Incentives:**

* Sense of self worth
* Mental and emotional stimulation
* Sociability
* Independence – at least relatively
* Being part of something bigger than yourself
* Being able to contribute
* Better than daytime television

**Disincentives:**

* Discrimination
* Being patronised (“well-meant discrimination”) – e.g. people speaking LOUDER to someone in a wheelchair
* Disability-unfriendly premises
* Disability-unfriendly work practices
* For some, the sheer hard work of getting there, getting home
* Tiredness (see previous point)
* Being a token disabled person in the place?

### **Good practice**

**Are there examples of good practice and workplace policies in employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability?**

[ ] Yes

[ ] No

[x] Not sure

**Please tell us of examples of good practice in employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability in work that you are aware of.**

### **Solutions**

**What action should be taken to address employment discrimination against older Australians/Australians with disability?**

I’m guessing this won’t fit in the report, but my money would be on educating, empowering older Australians/Australians with disability, who have the inclination and will, to be independent entrepreneurs.

The digital economy provides so many opportunities that enable people to work from home and build a local, regional, national or global business. Low entry threshold in terms of capital (a computer, website hosting fees and an internet connection subscription).

But there are traps.

The biggest challenges to doing this are, in my experience:

* Making the mental and emotional transition from an employee mentality (sense of entitlement, fixed working hours, “somebody should fix this” attitude) to a business owner mentality (knowing that the buck stops with me)
* Lack of working capital
* Lack of education about how to actually run a business successfully
* Being too quick to buy off the shelf franchises, then finding out the hard way that the only person making a profit is the franchisor
* So many scam artists offering get rich quick “businesses” – people spend all their savings trying to make these schemes work
* Family and friends the worst enemies of the entrepreneurial spirit – “aren’t you too old/ too immobile, etc to be doing this?”
* Not having been part of a business-oriented family or circle of friends and colleagues so not having anyone to talk to seriously about business
* People being very risk-averse (probably should not try)
* See Michael Gerber – “The E-Myth”

**What should be done to enhance workforce participation of older Australians/Australians with disability?**

I’m no expert on how to enhance workforce participation, but I do have experience of creating a workplace for myself by establishing my own business.

I would like to see an organised movement to identify and share stories of older Australians/Australians with disability who have cracked the code, moved on from “I can’t get a job” to “I have a successful business” – models of often quiet but effective achievement. But not a bureaucracy for it and not a program that subsidises training organisations to add this as an “offering”.

It’s a marketing challenge, providing living examples people can identify with, not a training challenge – people can organise and pay their own training once they know what the gaps are in their knowledge: in this way of thinking people have to get used to the idea that their ongoing education is an investment in their own success, not a cost.

If the marketing concept doesn’t get off the ground because there are not enough good stories to share, then I’m wrong and you haven’t spent taxpayers’ money padding the budgets of training companies. ☺

**What outcomes or recommendations would you like to see from this National Inquiry?**

**An initiative** to promote practical, successful entrepreneurship among older Australians – and Australians with disabilities if that’s appropriate.

And doing that not through training programs but through investigation, collecting stories and sharing stories. A marketing program with a limited life and built-in evaluation.

Then showing people how to tap into age-friendly networks such as Seniorpreneurs <http://seniorpreneurs.foundation/> I don’t know if there is anything similar for people with a disability.

Part of that exercise or a distinct initiative, perhaps sponsored by a bank or foundation or some other organisation that sees value in it, to encourage older Australians and Australians with a disability to create businesses, with all the safeguards of due diligence, having sufficient working capital etc. See the excellent resources at [business.gov.au](http://business.gov.au)

I would be pitching the information especially to those who would like the idea but who may have fallen into the trap of thinking/saying they are too old or otherwise blocked from becoming sufficiently digitally literate and digitally competent and social media active.

I include social media explicitly because it is just a necessary part of doing business now and I hear people who are perfectly capable of learning enough to be effective taking the line of least resistance and pulling the “too old” card.