**Submission to**

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

**From Anthony Smith (SilverLine Consultancy - the 45 + Program)**

**Discussion questions**

1. What policies, workplace practices, programs or incentives assist with increasing participation of older workers?

Australia - **45 + Program**, **On the Front Foot** (Geelong)

How adequate are these policies, practices or incentives?

**45 + Program** - Independent Evaluation conducted by ConNetica and funded by CBUS - strong positive evaluation - recommends national roll-out (see attached 45 + Program Progress Report, ConNetica Excerpts.)

**On the Front Foot** (Formal evaluation being conducted at the moment by Deakin University; expected to confirm strong evaluation by GRLLEN - see attached **On the Front Foot)**

What is the role of Government, peak business and employee groups, and individual employers?

Unemployment and suicide have a significant economic cost to business as well as the terrible social cost. Business has a significant role in re-employment support / job-creation. There are now precedents for partnership contribution in the Geelong re-employment support work.

2. Are there distinct challenges faced by different sized businesses and organisations, sectors and industries in employing older workers?

3. What other data or information is available on employment discrimination against older Australians?

**Disability**

National Coronial Information System (NCIS) - suicide data unemployment and ‘other not in the labour force’.

Research (attached AISRAP - Miseries...) shows high level numbers and rates of suicide amongst unemployed men and a category ‘Not in the labour force’. The ‘Not in the labour force’ includes ’disability’ and ‘carers’. There are large numbers of adult men (mature-aged - mid-30s, 40s and 50s) on ‘disability’ (attached - Govt Research and my comments). Many unemployed mature-aged men are moved from ‘Unemployed’ across to ‘disability’. There is strong anecdotal evidence that this also occurs to unemployed mature-aged men being moved across to ‘carer’.

Together these 2 categories - unemployed and ‘Not in the labour force’ accounts for more than 50 % of all male suicides in Queensland over about 2 decades (attached Miseries... and My Comments). This total may be considerably under-reported as many men are listed by their traditional occupation at the time of their suicide death even though they were actually unemployed.

**General challenges for re-employment for mature-aged unemployed** - particularly skilled blue-collar men

Some of the challenges have already been reported to the federal government in a report from the Pilot **45 + Program** Progress Report and the ConNetica independent evaluation of the **45 +** Pilot - see attached.

There are many challenges to mature-aged retrenched blue-collar workers.

From 45 + Program Progress Report:

**Barriers:**

**Many of the issues around re-employment for mature-aged men and women have been identified in Grey Matters.**

**Other barriers**

* Some Employment Consultants (ECs) are still dismissive about **age** being a barrier for mature-aged clients.
* Judgmental and stereotyping clients for ‘other barriers’ - restricting client possibilities based on these ‘other barriers’. The ‘other barriers’ in some cases appear to be indicative of a lack of rapport with the client.
* Little or no information let alone support to register with Private Labour Hire
* Little or no information let alone support to help self-marketing to HR / Employers
* Some men express a concern about the lack or rapport they have with their EC.
* Many clients have little idea how to build a resume. They therefore tend to accept what is done for them by ECs. However these Resumes are often not a good reflection of the skills and experience of the clients and are written in a style suggestive of low skill-set clients.
* Of the resources available, there is very little that are developed **to suit blue-collar men**
* Many are deeply suspicious of training programs recommended by their ECs and only become open once they begin to sense the value of a more appropriate approach to their challenges.

As well as this - many blue-collar men and women are unaware of how training works - what RPL is; how assessment is done etc. It is fundamental to considering new careers to have some confidence about re-training.

4. What lessons and leading practices can we learn from other countries to address employment discrimination and increase workforce participation of older Australians?

International research - Active Labour Market

We need

**Stronger Active Labour Market Programs**

Programs (see attached - PDFs of a selection of recent international research)

**Professional Development training**

Professional Development training - for management and staff of all CentreLink, Department of Employment, Jobactive and any other stakeholder organisations who may come into direct contact with unemployed men and need to work with them to improve their job search activity; training on constructive engagement with men to improve motivation for both job-search activity and on-going personal health and well-being of men. The need for this training is now supported by an international research evidence base and information and Guidelines distributed by Suicide Prevention Australia, the peak suicide prevention body in Australia.

(See attached - National Guidelines for Suicide Prevention – Men and Unemployment)

5. How adequately do existing laws protect older Australians from employment discrimination? How effective are the legal remedies for older workers who have experienced discrimination? How could existing laws be amended or supplemented?

More flexibility in the measurement of outcomes re-employment support for mature-aged - eg it can take a considerable amount of time to prepare for higher level study for a complete career change. Current policy doesn’t give time to accommodate this - this then reduces the support the agencies might offer for people to consider the complete change as an option.

6. What difficulties are there for employers in understanding and complying with legal obligations?

7. What are the distinct challenges faced by certain groups of older Australians (e.g. women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or LGBTI people) in relation to employment discrimination?

**High suicide rates and numbers**

Mature-aged women have an elevated rate as well as men - though the numbers of women who kill themselves are much smaller.

Unemployed mature-aged men are one of the largest groupings of suicide in Australia (see above under Discussion question 2 - Disability)

Mature-aged blue-collar men are particularly disadvantaged by a number of aspects of re-employment support as well as general community support - in particular the general ‘mental health’ support is not helpful to many men and may compound their difficulties. (see ‘Miseries...’ research attached for evidence of the unhelpful nature of the mental health system as it relates to men and suicide).

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**Attachments:**

**45 + Program** Progress Report

Excerpts Evaluation - ConNetica independent evaluation of **45 +** Pilot

**[REDACTED]**

**Bibliography of attachments provided with Submission No 45**

Australian Institute of Male Health & Studies, *National Guidelines for Suicide Prevention – Men and Unemployment*. At <http://www.mengage.org.au/Social-Factors/Employment-Work/Unemployment-And-Suicide-In-Australian-Males> (viewed 25 August 2015).

Geelong Careers, ‘Success of ‘On the Front Foot’ – Where to Now?’ (Media Release, 28 November). At <http://www.geelongcareers.org.au/news/534/success-of-on-the-front-foot-where-to-now> (viewed 25 August 2015).

Samara McPhedran and Diego De Leo ‘Miseries Suffered, Unvoiced, Unknown? Communication of Suicidal Intent by Men in ‘Rural’’ Queensland, Australia’ (2013) 43 (6) *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*  589.

Kerry Knox ‘Approaching Suicide as a Public Health Issue’ (2014) 161 (2) *Annals of Internal Medicine* 151.

Alison Milner, Stephen Morrell and Anthony D La Montagne, ‘Economically inactive, unemployed and employed suicides in Australia by age and sex over a 10-year period: what was the impact of the 2007 economic recession?, (2014) 43 (5) *International Journal of Epidemiology* 1500.

Carlos Nordt, Ingeborg Warnke, Erich Seifritz and Wolfram Kawohl, ‘Modelling suicide and unemployment: a longitudinal analysis covering 63 countries, 2000–11’ (2015) 2 (3) *The Lancet*, 239

Aaron Reeves, Martin McKee, David Gunnell, Shu-Sen Chang, Sanjay Basu, Benjamin Barr,

David Stuckler, ‘Economic shocks, resilience, and male suicides in the Great Recession: cross-national analysis of 20 EU countries’ (2014) 25 (3) *European Journal of Public Health*.