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

# Submission No 263

**Name** Joan Hughes

**Submission made by**

[x]  Older Australian in work – working below my experience & qualifications

[x]  Older Australian looking for work – executive work

[x]  Other
 Please describe: Community Volunteer

# 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 – this is my judgement hence the reason for my submission

[ ]  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.**

I have been a CEO in NGO sector for over 20 years including:

* Executive Director ACT/SE NSW, Manager Parliamentary & Government Relations, **Australian Red Cross** 2011 – 2014 - Canberra
* Chief Executive Officer, **Carers Australia** 2006 – 2011 - Canberra
* Chief Executive Officer, **Carers NSW** 1993 – 2006 - Sydney

In returning to live in Sydney in 2014, I had a few months holiday including some thinking about my next career move. I decided that my skills and attributes were still very relevant for executive roles in the NGO sector. I applied for 16 jobs including positions for paid government advisory boards/councils/committees. I got interviews for most of the positions which made the outcome of not been securing a job even more difficult. When I asked for feedback, it was mostly because I was over qualified, over experienced or not enough experience in the content area. I also applied for a couple of senior manager roles and I know from the questions and reactions in the interview and feedback, that my experience could pose a difficulty for prospective managers even though I stated that my experience could be an advantage to the organisation. I also made it clear that I would look forward to not having as much responsibility.

As I have never found it difficult to get employment, I was curious to know who were successful in obtaining the positions I applied for. I am not making comment about the individuals but there is a trend – younger women with more qualifications and men some of whom were younger but some were of similar age.

**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?)**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

**Please tell us more**

I found the continual knock backs very hard to cope with emotionally and intellectually as I have never had difficulty in getting employment. As well, not being in executive employment has changed my retirement plan. I had planned to work well into my 60s, firstly because I want to work and have great capacity, skills, experience and commitment; secondly, I could only afford to increase my superannuation payments in the last few years and it is not sufficient for my retirement plan. So not working at this executive level has really affected me financially. I gave up looking for CEO positions and decided to pursue volunteer opportunities. I now volunteer for 3 organisations and causes that align to my values and interests. **[Redacted]**

In June 2016, I got casual work for a local community care organisation and work 12-

15 hours a week which is my choice. I really enjoy the work and know that I am effective with the clients. It’s casual work so I receive $23 hour with no paid leave. Previously, I was on approximately $95 hour with the usual conditions of permanent employment and salary packaging options.

### **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?**

Age is definitely a factor. Some organisations think older people don’t have the energy, stamina and competitive edge for executive jobs. As well gender is a factor.

The statistics tell us that there are fewer women in CEO and Executive Board positions compared to men. When I was a CEO, it was not uncommon to receive correspondence addressed to Mr John Hughes. As well some organisations have already made decisions about who will get the job as it’s an internal candidate but the organisation needs to advertise because of relevant HR law and practices.

I also think there is some bias regarding *who knows whom* in sectors so instead of making employee decisions based on the application and interview, it can be influenced by this factor. Of course, this is hard to prove. As well I have had to compete with high profile politicians who have retired from politics.

**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**

From my experience negative attitudes and ignorance about older people can influence HR employment practices and decisions. There is a big difference between the law and policy and the actual practice. I was asked in one of my interviews if I still had the energy to take on an executive role and responsibilities. I also think older people are too embarrassed to discuss their negative experiences in seeking employment. My knock backs did affect my confidence and questioning of my own abilities but with so much affirmation and encouragement from my friends and family members I have been able to work through these issues and put them in context.

It is such a waste of talent, skills and attributes for a society not to employ older people. I still receive email alerts from various sources about relevant CEO and executive vacancies so I will continue to track these opportunities but of course, the longer you are not in employment, the harder it gets and the older you get. As we are all going to live longer, it’s imperative for governments to keep older people in meaningful employment, paid and unpaid. This is fundamental to a healthy and inclusive society, helps the economy in many ways and most importantly assists older people to stay well connected, healthy and more financially independent.

**Thanks for the opportunity to submit my recent experiences in seeking work as an older Australian.**