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

# Submission No 315

**Name** Withheld

**Submission made by**

[x]  Australian with disability who would like to work

# 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.**

I initially stated my concerns to management and was told 'this is how it is and the workplace will not change. You need to change. They showed a complete lack of understanding and unwillingness to attempt to understand or act to ensure my health and safety.

On the last occasion I responded with an email about my rights but because of ill health was not able to continue and had to go off on sick leave without pay.

The disability is not yet recognised in Australia though it is in other countries. I my self felt disempowered because of this and did not have the energy or health to fight.

**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**

Yes this ignorance and lack of understanding of my condition meant I continued to work in an unsafe environment for as long as I could survive until reaching a point of total collapse and now chronic illness. I was not listened to or taken seriously. No measures where put in place to protect me.

The pain and suffering I endured in an attempt to remain part of the workforce worsened my condition and increased my sensitivities.

For example I endured from mobile phones, wireless computers, smart meters, phone towers in close proximity, solar panels with inverters, flurescent lights

extreme head pain as though my head would explode

brain fog unable to think, concentrate and difficulty with memory

extreme nausea

dizziness and feelings of collapse when things where initially turned on

internal shakiness

high blood pressure

burning sensations particularly in my bones and eyes etc

I had been able to work from home on school holidays which gave me much needed recuperation time in a space which was wifi free. When there was a change of leadership this right was removed and I was forced to be at the workplace over this period. I attempted to explain my situation to management but was told this is what is going to happen. Again I was dismissed. So initially I tried to continue working the best I could. I would try and work inside until the pain was unbearable. I then spent most time outside which was very difficult and uncomfortable during summer and winter conditions. I felt I had to endure this to keep my job.

Work also updated their phones which meant stronger phones which to me meant more pain. It meant sitting in a meeting with a number of phones and computers and florescent lights and pain. There was little respect for my condition. I was told it was normal and mobile phones were a part of the job-though they were only a fairly recent addition. Again I was provided no support but experienced increased pain and ridicule at being different.

I endured pain and suffering and discrimination while trying to help people understand. This only caused greater pain and suffering which eventually led to my total downfall where I was no longer able to function at all. I have now been off work for one year. I can not work and still trying to recover from my harrowing experience. I am currently fighting to get income protection insurance to cover me so I can focus on healing as I really would like to get back to work in some manner. However to return to work I will need a wifi free space, understanding people around me who can show some respect for something they may not understand, cooperation and action from the workplace to provide a safe environment.

### **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?**

I have seen it first hand in the school environment where I was told this is how it is and the workplace will not change - you need to change. There is little respect for someone who has different needs. I was made to feel like I needed to leave if I could not handle the conditions. It appears easier for the workplace to 'force' an employee out who is too difficult or different than adjust the workspace and attitudes.

There is definitely a lack of knowledge and understanding about disability and discrimination. There is also no documentation that labels electrohypersensitivity as a disability that the workplace could be directed to, to provide direction.

The workplace has no direction that they are aware of and is unwilling to adjust and do not think they have to.

**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**

In my work place there was definitely lack of understanding or willingness to understand. There was a lack of willingness to adjust the work environment. The approach appears to be to denounce any disability and force people out if they don't adjust.

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

**Incentives:**

Being sensitive to wi fi means my life has become very restrictive and isolating. It is difficult to go anywhere. A work environment can be a stimulating environment, a place to connect with other adults and even be possibly valued for contributing skills and knowledge in your area of expertise.

Achieving outcomes in the work place provides a sense of service and value.

Focusing on working and being able to give and contribute to a common goal leads to a healthier emotional and mental state of wellbeing. Much healthier than being stuck at home focussing on what you can't do. Many mental health conditions can result from not being able to work due to disability including grief at the loss of everything-work, identity, income, social life etc through to depression and a sense of hopelessness.

Currently by not working I have no income and my savings are quickly dwindling. This not only affects my current financial situation but that of the future where I may become a burden on society if attitudes do not change and there is nowhere I can work. Wifi sensitivity appears to be increasing rapidly which suggests there will be a continued increased financial burden on society-if workplaces do not adjust.

Currently it looks like I have lost my career. I have a masters degree and have put a lot of time into study and gaining experience to serve the community in my role as Psychologist. I am motivated to use my expertise that I have built my life around. It would be satisfying to still have some impact in the workplace but the workplace needs to understand disability and discrimination and their need to act appropriately to provide a safe workspace.

**Disincentives:**

As someone with Electrohypersensitivity I am seen as odd and a burden to the workplace. People can not understand my condition and I am therefore forced to choose whether to work with the pain and suffering that can leads to collapse, internal shakiness, heart palpitations, excruciating headpain etc -leading to chronic conditions -or not work and not be paid

Within the work place attitudes and prejudice can have a great emotional impact when you already feel marginalised.

I am currently applying for income protection insurance in the hope that I can eventually get back into the workforce but have been told my condition does not exist. This is not an incentive to work. It is impossible to function in the normal wifi environment but this extra stress creates an added burden and toll on my health making it more difficult for any recovery because all energy resources are used to fight for basic rights.

### **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?**

It is vital that electrohypersensitivity be recognised as a functional disability in the workplace.

There needs to be education about the dangers of wifi especially for those with this sensitivity.

The use of wifi in the workforce needs to be limited-ie iphones off in meetings, computers hardwired etc.

Wifi needs to be removed from schools. This is somewhere that I have worked and can no longer work. It is a huge source of radiation and I have met and heard of many children who have been affected and had to leave school. Recently in NSW the Government stopped wifi being installed in a school so that a sensitive child could attend. Please see:

http://www.emfacts.com/2015/11/parents-success-in-stopping-wifi-installation-at-australian-school-2/

Overseas many countries have woken up to the damage to children in schools. For example:

* Germany recommends cabled computer
* The Israeli Ministry of Education has told schools to use wired computers in preference to Wi-Fi in classrooms, and requires teachers to turn off Wi-Fi routers when not in use.
* France has legislated to discourage Wi-Fi in schools until it is “safe for human consumption’’,
* Council of Europe has called for a ban on Wi-Fi in classrooms.
* While in Australia http://www.wifi-in-schools-australia.org/ attempts to educate parents and the system.

There needs to be a reduction in wifi in public spaces such as waiting rooms and offices, places that people with EHS need to attend in their everyday lives. People with wheelchairs are given access to such places. It is imperative that people with EHS can have basic rights to access such services too.

The more adversely affected we are in day to day activities the more time out we need to recover from the adversity, the pain and suffering. This makes it that much more difficult to work if we do have access to a healthy environment.

For further information please see:

* The bioinitiatve report at http://www.bioinitiative.org/
* Dr Devra Davis recent talk in Australia on 'the truth about wifi'

 http://www.eng.unimelb.edu.au/engage/events/lectures/davis-2015

* Dr Erica Mallery-Blythe

 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNFdZVeXw7M

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

Education and recognition of individual rights

Disabilities recognised and support provided to the individual to ensure people can contribute to the workforce.

Support provided to the workplace to help them understand and support them to take relevant action to ensure a safe space

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

For it to recommended that environmental sensitivities be recognised as a disability in Australian workplaces.

For it to be recommended that when people have electrohypersensitivity a wi free space be provided and wifi be limited in other areas of the workplace. This is easily possible with for example with hardwired computers and wi turned off laptops in meetings

For a clear outline of human rights for people with electrohypersensitivity/ environmental sensitivities to be developed which includes the right to be treated as human beings, the right to access everyday services including medical services, and the right to work and not be discriminated against.

For examples please see:

electrohypersensitive and human rights -commentary to the European economic and social committee

http://www.radiationresearch.org/images/rrt\_articles/IAJ\_EHS\_\_Human\_Rights\_0141204.pdf

open the link to Isaac Jamiesons pdf

canadian human rights commission policy on environmental sensitivities

http://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/sites/default/files/policy\_sensitivity\_0.pdf

Thankyou