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

# Submission No 126

**Name** Joseph Podosky on behalf of 2nd Act

**Submission made by**

[x]  Older Australian in work

[x]  Business/employer

[ ]  Other

# FORM 2: Business or Employer Submission

### **About you**

**What is your role within your organisation?**

[x]  Owner

☐ Manager

☐ Human Resources Manager

☐ Other

**If other, please tell us your role within your organisation**

**Is employment discrimination a barrier for older Australians/Australians with disability who are willing to work?**

[x]  Yes

☐No

☐Not sure

**If yes, is employment discrimination a barrier (please tick all that are relevant):**

☐While working in a job

[x]  While looking for work

[x]  While dealing with recruitment companies

**Please tell us more**

**[Redacted–an individual that I know]** was made redundant at 55. He is a highly qualified project manager in mining services and was regularly told that he was “overly qualified for the role”. That’s code for too old. He got back into the industry but not in a conventional manner. This is what I demonstrate with my business, 2nd Act. Sometimes, the solution is not applying for more and more jobs. You have to think differently.

**What is your experience of recruiting and/or employing older Australians/Australians with disability?**

As a former partner in a business, I have been an employer. The business has employed people across many age groups including mature aged people. I have not been involved with employing Australians with disability.

### **Barriers**

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

[x]  Yes

☐No

☐Not sure

**Please tell us more**

My business career has mostly been in the advertising industry which is notorious for “killing off” its elders and treating younger employees as sweat-shop workers. For me to stay fully employed up to 60 years of age, there was only one way…own the business. 60 year old employees within the advertising industry in Australia would be very rare indeed. Advertising starts casting its people aside from mid-forties.

**Does employment discrimination have an impact on older Australians/Australians with disability gaining and keeping employment in your business/industry?**

[x]  Yes

☐No

☐Not sure

**Please tell us more**

Discriminating against a job applicant on the basis of their age affects us all. On the **personal level**, it destroys a person’s self-confidence, their ability to earn an income and to be an effective and contributing member of society.

On a **societal level**, it affects relationships, families and contributes to the rise of poverty.

On a **national level**, it costs the nation financially because of the need for unemployment benefits but it also means less income taxes to contribute to the benefit of the nation.

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

[x]  Yes

☐No

☐Not sure

**Please tell us more**

We need to overcome the entrenched attitude of younger employers/managers/recruiters based on misconceptions that older Australians:

Are not very tech savvy

Are not hard-working or productive

Take more time off work

Don’t stay in their job for long

Are often seen as “over-qualified” (read “too old”) for the job advertised. Even though many mature age Australians with high-flying backgrounds, may want a lesser role.

All items above are incorrect but remain as entrenched thinking/attitudes amongst many recruiters & employers…and that’s across most age groups.

**What are the incentives and disincentives for your business/industry to employ and retain older Australians/Australians with disability?**

**Incentives**

N/A

**Disincentives**

N/A

### **Good practice**

**Are there examples of good practice and/or workplace policies for employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability in work in your business/industry?**

☐Yes

☐No

[x]  Not sure

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

In my previous business (an ad agency) we did employ mature aged people on a few occasions. Mostly within the admin area but occasionally in senior creative roles. In one instance we employed a senior art director who was mid to late 50s. But what he brought to the business was a superior level of creativity and experience. He helped us win new business. He was a big asset to the business.

My current business (2nd Act) is just a one person consultancy…for now.

**What works well in recruiting and/or retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability in your business/industry?**

Thinking differently. Just filling in more and more job applications is not the answer.

### **Solutions**

**What would help your business/industry employ and retain older Australians/Australians with disability?**

N/A

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

While the Age Discrimination Act 2004 makes it illegal to discriminate against a person based on their age, the fact is that age discrimination in the workplace is very prevalent. The law, while known, is relatively ineffectual.

As I see it, there are three approaches that may help:

1. **Quota systems:**

Major employers and especially local, state & federal government bodies need to adopt a system to ensure they employ a certain level of mature age workers. In other words, a positive bias towards mature age people. This would be difficult to introduce but perhaps step one is trialling it within government agencies/departments.

**2) Behavioural change:**

The federal govt & big business need to undertake a major campaign to bust the myths of the mature age worker and create a positive spin on how a mature age worker will usually add value to a business. This campaign needs to be aimed at the broader society but in particular employers, recruiters and business leaders.

**3) The individual:**

Each mature age individual needs to review themselves and see what they need to do to make themselves more employable, no matter how old they are. They also need to ensure that they “future-proof” their career.

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

I would like to see the three points I listed previously initiated. The **first item**, quota systems, is a “big picture” item and would require a major undertaking by the federal government. I appreciate that this proposal would be a difficult assignment.

**Item two** though, engendering a change in behaviour, while needing major funds, could be achieved by a combination of a government PR/social media/advertising campaign along with the possibility of involving major corporates.

Imagine a major campaign launched on the back of the new Robert De Niro / Anne Hathaway movie “The Intern”. Not the be all and end all for the campaign but an interesting proposition…using a Hollywood movie as a platform to promote the benefits of a mature age worker. In the case of the movie, a 70 year old intern in a very young, high-tech business. Food for thought.

The **third item** is one where my business (2nd Act) has a vested interest. This addresses the need for individuals to review themselves. Where individual mature age workers, and those not far off the magic “45 year old” marker, review their career and undertake to upgrade their skills and future-proof their careers so that they can work into their 50s, 60s and beyond.