



Age Positive: Promoting positive & diverse portrayals of older Australians

RESEARCH PROJECT FACT SHEET

Recognising the contribution of older Australians

Australians are living longer and healthier lives. A baby boy born today can expect to live to almost 80 and a girl to 84 – an increase of 25 years since 1901.^{1 2}

Women aged 65 in 2009 can expect to live a further 16 years without requiring assistance with core activities and men can expect another 15 years.³

Australia's ageing population brings real economic and social opportunity – for Australia, industry, workplaces and for individuals. To maximise this opportunity, we must overcome formidable and often longstanding barriers, including the persistence of out-dated stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards older people.

Age discrimination and stereotyping of older people pervades Australian society and prevents many older Australians from realising their potential and contributing to society – in both paid and unpaid employment, and other aspects of their lives. The result is significant economic, social and psychological costs. The economic cost of not using the skills and experience of older Australians is estimated to be \$10.8 billion per annum.⁴

Attitudes need to be re-shaped so older Australians can maximize their contribution to workplaces and the community and realise their human right to participate in all aspects of society.

A project to address stereotypes & re-shape attitudes

With this in mind, the Australian Human Rights Commission has engaged Urbis to conduct research into age discrimination, age stereotyping and ageism.

Urbis will apply a methodology of integrated qualitative and quantitative research to understand the creation and reinforcement of age stereotypes and age discrimination. This research will be used to develop strategies to address stereotyping and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours towards older Australians reflected in both the media specifically and across the Australian community.

Urbis, an Australian research organisation established for more than 30 years, was recognised by the Australasian Evaluation Society for the Best Study of the Year in 2011 for their work for the Victorian Department of Human Services.

The project is funded by the Federal Government in response to recommendations made by the Advisory Panel on the Economic Potential of Senior Australians. The Panel was established by the Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer, the Hon Wayne Swan MP, and the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, the Hon Mark Butler MP, with the objective to identify and respond to the economic and social opportunities presented by an older population.

The Government response to the Panel's recommendations on 18 April 2012 included funding of \$2.1 million over four years to the Age Discrimination Commissioner to conduct research on age discrimination, age stereotyping and ageism more generally, to feed into a media roundtable and communication strategy. This research project is included in this funding.

Aims of the project

The Age Discrimination Commissioner is focused on addressing barriers to equality and participation faced by older Australians. This is achieved through research, education and policy activities to build awareness of the damaging effects of age discrimination and to tackle the attitudes and stereotypes that can lead to age discrimination.

The aim of this latest project is to address a critical research gap that exists in Australia by:

- Exposing the prevailing stereotypes, and invisibility, of older Australians in the media – both editorial and advertising.
- Understanding the scope and depth of age stereotyping and age discrimination in the Australian community.
- Understanding the impact of stereotyping and discriminatory attitudes in both the media and community on older Australians themselves.
- Developing effective strategies to address age stereotyping and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours in both the media and community.

The research will be key input to the media roundtable discussions the Commission will hold in June 2013 and the communication strategy and an awareness campaign planned for 2013-2015. The aims of the media roundtables and campaign are to:

- Encourage the media to portray older Australians in an accurate, balanced and diverse manner – and a way that reflects their value, capability and experience.
- Reshape attitudes in the community to support older Australians to realise their potential and maximize their contribution to workplaces and the community.

The research project, which will be conducted over seven months, commenced in November 2012.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 'Life expectancy in Australia continues to climb higher and higher' (Media Release, 8 November 2012). At

<http://abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/3302.0Media%20Release12011?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3302.0&issue=2011&num=&view=> (viewed 29 November 2012).

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, *4102.0 - Australian Social Trends, 1995 - Health Status: Life expectancy trends* (1995), At <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.NSF/0/EB83BDFC951740E5CA2570EC00751D54?opendocument> (viewed 30 November 2012).

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Australia's Health 2012* (2012), p.82

⁴ National Seniors Australia, *Still Putting In: Measuring the Economic and Social Contributions of Older Australians* (2009), p.11. At <http://www.productiveageing.com.au/userfiles/file/StillPuttingIn.pdf> (viewed 29 November 2012)