

**MEDIA RELEASE****24 October 2017****THE FUTURE OF OLDER WORKERS IN AUSTRALIA**

The potential mature workforce is growing larger by the year. How to increase the participation of this population subgroup in the workforce, and maximise their productivity and health, were the key themes of a Workshop on Mature Labour Force Participation held in Canberra last week.

Delivering the opening address at the workshop organised by the ARC Centre of Excellence in Population Ageing Research (CEPAR), the Age Discrimination Commissioner, the Honourable Kay Patterson AO, spoke of the importance of translating research outcomes into government policy and business practice. This was echoed by representatives of the Commonwealth and State Governments who identified knowledge gaps where research was needed to inform policy development.

Kaarin Anstey, Professor of Psychology at the Australian National University and CEPAR Chief Investigator, talked about changing competencies as workers aged and the need for these to be taken into account in recruitment and job design. For example, crystallised intelligence, or the ability to use learned knowledge and experience, increases with age while fluid intelligence, which includes skills like the ability to solve new problems, declines.

The challenges faced by mature workers in balancing work and care for elderly relatives was discussed by Marian Baird, Professor of Gender and Employment Relations at Sydney University and CEPAR Chief Investigator. 'Elder care is not like child care. It's less predictable, not home-based and likely to be more administrative in nature,' said Professor Baird. She highlighted the need to promote greater awareness of the right to request flexible work to provide personal care, support and assistance to someone who is frail and aged, which has been part of the Fair Work Act since 2013.

Sharon Parker, Professor of Management and Organisations at the University of Western Australia and CEPAR Chief Investigator, presented a framework which would enable mature workers to flourish. 'A positive and accepting age diversity climate is one where mature workers are valued and supported in organisations and their unique needs and preferences are accommodated,' said Professor Parker.

'By redesigning the tasks, activities and responsibilities of jobs to suit older workers, organisations can maximise their participation, productivity and health.'

Professor Parker also outlined a survey of mature workers in organisations that was about to commence as part of the CEPAR research program. The research will address many of the knowledge gaps identified by the Department of Employment's representative at the Workshop, Carmel O'Regan, which included information about the behaviours, motivations and characteristics of good employees.

The need to shift the narrative about older workers, and the behaviour of organisations was discussed by Council on the Ageing's Chief Executive Officer, Ian Yates, who said the issues concerning mature labour force participation needed to be considered in the context of the bigger picture of age discrimination.

The importance of increasing mature labour force participation cannot be underestimated. The Australian Treasury has estimated that a five percentage point increase in mature labour force participation would generate by 2050, an additional 2.4% GDP per capita. CEPAR estimates the mature working age population in Australia will rise from 3.5 million today to 5.6 million in 2050.

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