

15 July 2021

Hon Rob Lucas MLC
Treasurer
treasurer.dtf@sa.gov.au

Dear Treasurer

RE – Public sector workforce rejuvenation means a focus on older workers

As you know, COTA SA has urged the SA Government to focus on older workers.

We were alarmed that, instead of this, the 2021-22 State Budget contained a measure “allowing workforce rejuvenation” on a voluntary basis to create an incentive for employees to separate from the SA Public Service. Many people have interpreted this measure to us as targeting older workers and luring them out of the public service.

In our COTA SA 2021-22 State Budget Submission, and in a letter to you dated 26 November 2020, we have urged a focus on measures that will assist older South Australian workers, and especially older women, to get and keep work.

The public service workforce rejuvenation appears to be doing the very opposite.

Our changing demography tells us that one of the very important sources of a future workforce in both metropolitan Adelaide and in rural SA will be older people.

In spite of this, consistent surveys indicate that about a third of older workers experience age discrimination which results in unemployment, underemployment and an under investment in the training and development that maintains contemporary skills for employment.

Older people are unemployed for much longer periods than any other age group. While all older workers are affected, older women are particularly disadvantaged including because they have had much less opportunity to accumulate resources for a secure future. Prior to COVID, women aged over 60 made up the largest proportion of Newstart recipients. COVID has compounded this.

It is critical that there are active strategies to support older workers - to find pathways back to work, to keep jobs and to have opportunities to update and develop contemporary skills.

We again urge the State Government to focus on older workers – and particularly women.

We need such a focus both for the sake of older workers but also as part of ensuring we have a labour force across South Australia that will get our jobs done.

In the same way that the SA Government has initiated strategies to support the employment of young South Australians, we urge a similar focus on older workers. Our letter in November last year proposed a project between COTA SA and the Working Women’s Centre to engage employers and older workers to trial practical strategies to counter ageism and improve access to employment.

We ask too that there is proper monitoring of the public sector workforce rejuvenation initiative so that it does not become a front for age discrimination and the unfair targeting of older workers.

Treasurer, we have welcomed the investment in SA including in a variety of rural, infrastructure and mental health initiatives. We do urge that there is an opportunity for all South Australians to be part of the post COVID recovery.

Yours sincerely



JANE MUSSARED
Chief Executive

cc Cassie Mason, Director, Office for Ageing Well (OFAW)