

STRICT EMBARGO

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**Landmark study shows workplace ageism is alive and well
among older South Australians**

COTA SA, the peak body for older South Australians, is calling on the State Government and employers to do more to support older workers in response to a new landmark national report launched today in Canberra.

The State of the (Older) Nation 2018 Report - the most comprehensive national study ever undertaken to seek the views of Australians aged over 50 – has revealed 29% older South Australians have experienced age-based discrimination.

COTA SA CEO Jane Mussared says ageism in the workplace, feeling less valued by society than when they were younger, and cost of living are among a number of key issues identified in the report that affect the health and wellbeing of older South Australians.

"We tend to count unemployment but this report identifies underemployment as a problem for more than a quarter of older people who are working," Ms Mussared said.

"This is despite the study finding that the vast majority of older Australians feel younger than their current age, with more than half feeling at least 10 years younger with plenty more to give."

Ms Mussared says the report reinforces the urgent need to address discrimination and ageism against older workers and job seekers in order to reduce the serious knock on effect that unemployment has for this large – and growing portion – of our community.

"Unemployment and underemployment have far reaching consequences, particularly as we age, leading to both financial and housing stress," Ms Mussared said.

"We now know that one in two older Australians are anxious about the rising cost of living with a quarter worrying about whether their finances will be adequate to meet their needs for the rest of their lives.

"Those who are already struggling to cope financially or whose circumstances change suddenly, losing access to adequate work income in our 50s and 60s can have dire consequences, including an increased risk of homelessness.

"It's double jeopardy, whereby many people say they need to work longer because they can't afford to retire, but on the other hand, they're being discriminated against based on their age so are struggling to stay in work," Ms Mussared said.

Key employment, ageism and cost of living findings in the report were:

- More than a quarter (28%) of Australians in paid employment want more paid work
- 29% of South Australians have experienced employment-related age discrimination – which included being told they were too qualified, being sidelined or patronised, or being refused employment
- Over a fifth (23%) of South Australians who indicated they were discriminated against were told they were 'too old'

- A fifth (19%) of those who experienced workplace discrimination say they were forced into early retirement or semi-retirement an average of 5 years before they had planned, impacting home ownership and superannuation
- 36% of working older South Australians aged 50+ don't expect they will ever retire due to pressures including cost of living
- Only 1 in 5 (18%) said they feel valued as an employee
- 56% of South Australians surveyed say the rising cost of living is leaving them behind
- 1 in 5 older South Australians feel insecure about their finances and 1 in 4 don't have any money to spend on leisure or social activities

Ms Mussared said there is an opportunity for SA to lead the way in raising awareness of the prevalence and cost of age discrimination among employers, to research best practice interventions and to explore options for older workers to continue to work and earn, such as mid-career planning, which will provide financial security as they age.

"The State Government has a role to play. We need funding to get started with a project that brings together employer groups and older workers to explore the barriers to employment and propose practical solutions," she said.

"In South Australia, low skilled workers, including those losing manufacturing jobs or needing careers that better suit their physical attributes, may well need particular support to restructure their careers.

"Mid-career planning would provide an opportunity for workers to plan for their future (in areas such as health, housing and financial), and for any upskilling or reskilling that may be required. We know people are more likely to get new jobs and to stay employed as they age if they keep the job they have, making the adjustments, changes and upskilling that are required along the way."

COTA SA backs COTA Australia's call for a commitment from all political parties to develop a comprehensive long-term national strategy to address the needs of older Australians – including raising rent assistance by 40%; taking a whole-of-government approach to budget funding; and eliminating age discrimination in the workplace.

The report investigated issues including employment, age discrimination, cost of living, financial security, health, home and aged care, housing, later life planning, consumer rights and transport.

The full report is available to download at www.stateoftheoldernation.org.au and was commissioned by the federation of nine Councils on the Ageing from across Australia and was independently conducted. It is expected to be an annual report to monitor the progress and the attitudes of older Australians over the long term.

COTA SA is an older people's movement run by, for and with older people. COTA SA represents the aspirations, interests and rights of 633,000 older South Australians. Further information on COTA SA can be found at www.cotasa.org.au.

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