



MEDIA RELEASE

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Older people and work: Stop the intergenerational wars and start improving systems for Australians of all ages

Australia needs to harness the benefits of older people remaining in the workforce, but those discussions need to be focused on the benefit for older people, the economy and people of all ages rather than be set up to pit one generation against the other, COTA Australia says.

Patricia Sparrow, Chief Executive Officer of COTA Australia – the leading advocacy organisation for older Australians – says it’s critical government and businesses don’t fall into the trap of framing the challenges, including employment challenges, as intergenerational disputes but rather an opportunity to address ageism in Australia and look at systems changes that benefit all generations.

“In many cases, systemic ageism forces people out of the workforce and into retirement earlier than they want, which isn’t just bad for older workers but is bad for every generation,” Ms Sparrow said.

“There are huge personal benefits to being able to work as well as benefits to the economy that way, if older people choose to work longer.

“This shouldn’t be about creating ‘sticks’ to force older people to work longer, it needs to be about ‘carrots’ by tackling the barriers that stop older people from working if they want to.

“Ageism is a key factor. We know that one in three recruiters say they won’t hire an older person. When they employed, both older and younger people report not feeling like their team leaders know how to manage people at either end of the age spectrum.

“Government and business must make training to tackle the systemic ageism in workplaces an immediate priority, starting with those involved in the recruitment process.

“The Federal Government’s employment white paper is due to be released soon and we look forward to seeing how it intends to make sure older workers have choices and chances. If the Federal Government’s employment plans don’t include a plan to improve the rules and processes for age pensioners to work, it will be missing a big opportunity which will hurt every generation.

Ms Sparrow said looking at issues in silos also does everyone a disservice.

“Older people make a huge contribution to society in a myriad of ways, whether it’s through childcare support, volunteering, or countless other means. We need to be looking at this intergenerational report as a springboard for policy reform in a range of areas that will improve the lives of older people and everyone else.

“By treating older Australians like a problem to be solved instead of people with valuable experience and expertise that can and should be shared, we’re robbing every generation.

“We’re an ageing and population, which is fantastic because we’re living longer and healthier. That also obviously comes with its challenges, but framing those challenges as intergenerational disputes is simplistic, naive and doesn’t do anyone any favours,” Ms Sparrow said.

Media Alert: COTA Australia Chief Executive Officer, Patricia Sparrow, is available for comment today.

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