

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
15 February 2018

Mid career check and ageism on the agenda to support older South Australian workers

Older female blue collar workers impacted by the diminishing manufacturing industry in South Australia are among those targeted for a new mid-career check and planning service proposed for over 50s.

The proposal is contained within COTA SA's 2018 State Election Platform, with the service designed to address the critical issue of unemployment and ageism impacting on older South Australians – particularly women.

The proposed trial would deliver a service that helps over 50s plan ahead, upskill and retrain and understand their future housing and financial goals.

COTA SA Chief Executive, Jane Mussared, says the service would support older workers who are more likely to transition between jobs while still employed or grow in their current workplace by adjusting, changing and upskilling as required along the way.

She said while the service would benefit all older South Australian workers, there's a particular need in blue collar industries where older workers aren't financially able to stop working, yet may need to find roles better suited to their physical attributes as they age.

"This is particularly the case for jobs that are physically demanding, including cleaners, tradies, manufacturing line workers, and those who work in human services, hospitality and retail. Some of these jobs also lack security and are offered as casual positions which can add serious financial pressure," Ms Mussared said.

"More and more South Australians want – and in fact, need - to work well into their 60s and beyond, however age discrimination in employment¹ means that many mature workers are unable to keep and find jobs.

"As a result, only one third of people aged over 55 participate in the workforce and unemployed older job seekers take on average 68 weeks to find work², with many abandoning their search for work or putting up with significant underemployment – settling on a job that doesn't take advantage of their skills acquired over many years.

"This also has an impact both financially and personally with feelings of isolation and lack of self worth."

Ms Mussared says investment in mid-career planning³ will yield considerable benefits in terms of engagement and performance⁴. It is also an opportunity for workers to proactively make a plan for their future (such as health, housing and financial), and for the upskilling or reskilling that may be required."

COTA SA's State Election Platform also calls on politicians to support initiatives by employers and recruiters to tackle employment-based age discrimination.

"Almost a third of Australians perceived some form of age-related discrimination while employed or looking for work in the last 12 months, starting as early as 45 years of age⁵," Ms Mussared said.

“It’s critical the business community recognises, values and employs the skills of mature workers – and in particular the value, experience and knowledge older women bring to the workforce.

“We’re seeing older women with a lifetime of education, employment and life skills being overlooked for jobs, based on their age, which is simply short sighted.

“Older women tell us it’s almost impossible to get another full-time position because employers assume they are about to retire and therefore consider them not to be a worthwhile investment.

Ms Mussared said that the opposite was in fact true and that older workers offered benefits to organisations including sustained job performance, high motivation and retention levels, high reliability and an accumulation of both soft and hard skills across a lifetime of working.

“Research shows that workers aged 55 and over are much less likely to change jobs compared with workers of other ages, reducing the high cost that staff turnover imposes on employers. In fact, for many women this is a time that they are looking to crank up their careers and shore their finances up a bit,” she said.

“Older women are telling us they feel invisible and that constant job rejection is causing them to suffer. The time is now to address these issues which have serious implications for an ageing population.”

To download the full version of the 2018 COTA SA State Election Platform, click [here](#).

COTA SA is an older people's movement run by, for and with older people and 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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References

1. p17, Work Well; Retire Well, findings of the Work, Care, Health and Retirement Ageing Agenders Project, 2017
2. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-05-19/age-discrimination-over-50s-worst-bracket-to-be-unemployed/8540548>
3. Work and retirement intentions among SA “Baby Boomers” A Mixed Method Approach (2016), David Waterford, Jo Battersby and Jane Mussared unpublished
4. Mid-Career Checks were first proposed by former Age Discrimination Commissioner, Susan Ryan, as part of the Willing to Work Inquiry.
5. Justine Irving, *Age discrimination in the workplace happening to people as young as 45: study*, research notes on older workers, retirement and ageism project by UniSA