

Using Human Resources Policy to Promote Age Diversity

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
AHRI	Australian HR Institute
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
HILDA	Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia
HR	Human Resources
VWT	Victorian Women's Trust

Executive Summary

Like much of the developed world, Australia has an aging population. As the baby boomer population, born between 1946 – 1964, have aged, over-65s have made up an increasing portion of the Australian population (ABS, 2020a). Due to low birth rates and increasing life expectancy, the proportion of the population aged over 65 is expected to continue growing over the following decades (AIHW, 2018). The Australian Government has predicted that the share of the population aged 65 years and over will be 23% in 2060-61, compared to 16% in 2019-20 (Australian Government, 2021, p. 37). Because the population is aging, a growing number of workers will be older, and organisations will need to retain older workers in order to maintain their workforces.

While an older workforce will be an inevitable consequence of the aging population, many Australian organisations are lacking policies which directly address the needs of older employees. In April 2021 the Australian HR Institute (AHRI) released a report on *Employing and retaining older workers*, created in collaboration with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). The report is based on the results of a survey taken in 2014, 2018 and 2021 of academics, human resources (HR) and business leaders (AHRI, 2021). The report demonstrates that the needs of older workers are not being met by many Australian organisations, and many older workers are leaving the workforce as a result.

Building on the results of the AHRI report, this report considers the changes that can be made to organisations' HR policies to accommodate the needs of older workers. The report also addresses the reasons for having an age diverse workforce, including benefits for employers, their employees and society in general.

Findings

- Age diversity can improve company productivity especially in 'creative' industries.
- The departure of older workers from the workforce is leading to a loss of knowledge and skills from organisations.

- While many organisations recognise that age diversity could benefit their business, very few have policies to actively promote age diversity in their workforce.
 - Age discrimination is preventing many older workers from participating in the workforce.
 - Women are particularly affected by age discrimination because of 'gendered ageism'. As a result, they face poor economic outcomes in retirement.
 - Organisations with age diversity in their workforce may face some challenges due to the process of 'social categorisation'. It is possible to mitigate this through the introduction of policies which signal that age diversity is valued in the organisation.
 - Training and development, part-time options and flexible work were identified as key initiatives for retaining older workers.
 - There is an 'age-training gap', older women are particularly likely to stop receiving training and educational opportunities.
 - Management attitudes contribute to age discrimination in the workforce. Many Australian organisations do not offer training on how to manage different generations to line managers.
 - Older women are often responsible for caring for their family members, including their grandchildren, spouse or parent. Caring commitments can make it difficult to remain in the paid workforce.
 - Women from CALD backgrounds face particular challenges when it comes to balancing caring responsibilities with paid work.
 - Many older women are working while dealing with the symptoms of menopause, which can affect their careers.
- ## Recommendations
1. Employers should review their training and educational practices to identify whether there is age or gender bias in the allocation of training opportunities or funding for education.
 2. Workers should have the opportunity to pursue reasonable training and education, regardless of gender or age.
 3. Unconscious bias training should be a regular component of professional development, and this training should include education on age discrimination.
 4. Managers should receive specific training on age bias and on managing age-diverse teams.
 5. If possible, flexible work should be made standard across the workforce, to reduce the stigma faced by women who work flexibly to accommodate their caring responsibilities.
 6. Workplaces should offer leave for workers who need to do regular care for family members.
 7. Employers should educate themselves on the cultural needs of workers from CALD backgrounds and accommodate their needs in regard to caring responsibilities and cultural practices.
 8. Appropriate accommodations should be made for women experiencing menopause symptoms, including leave, flexible work, working from home or the ability to work in a cool and quiet environment.
 9. Organisations should make efforts to educate their workforce on menopause and its symptoms in order to reduce stigma. This education could be included in diversity and inclusion training and induction training.



Introduction

A growing number of employers are recognising the benefits of age diversity in the workforce. An age diverse workforce can boost productivity and improve workers' performance. However, many older workers are still facing discrimination because of their age. A recent report released by the Australia HR Institute (AHRI) in partnership with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), *Employing and retaining older workers*, has illuminated the issue of age discrimination in Australian workplaces. The report concerns the results of a survey undertaken in February 2021, as well as in 2018 and 2014. The survey, which drew responses from 604 academics, human resources (HR) and business leaders, shows that many still hold discriminatory attitudes towards older workers (AHRI, 2021, p. 5). The report also reveals that many employers are not implementing HR policies which would make their workplaces age diversity friendly (*Ibid*, p. 22).

Older women are particularly vulnerable to discrimination because of the combined effects of sexism and ageism. Workforce participation amongst older women is low, and many older women are facing dire

economic conditions in their retirement (Australian Government, n.d.; Senate Economics References Committee, 2016). Older women face a number of challenges to remain in the workforce, including lack of access to training, juggling of caring responsibilities and working while experiencing menopause.

By introducing policies to address and accommodate the needs of older women, workplaces can reduce discrimination and retain older workers. This report includes some policy solutions which could be implemented by employers to achieve these outcomes.



Age Discrimination

Despite the benefits that can be realised by employers through pursuing age diversity in the workforce, many older Australians find it difficult to stay employed or find new work due to the prevalence of age discrimination. Age discrimination refers to the unfavourable treatment of a person because they are considered to be too old or too young (AHRC, 2014, p. 1)

Age discrimination is illegal under the *Age Discrimination Act 2004*, but older individuals still find it difficult to find and retain work (Senate Economics References Committee, 2016, p. 34). The AHRC has found the workplace to be one of the most common contexts for age discrimination. Of all the age discrimination complaints made to the AHRC in 2014-15, 70% are related to employment discrimination (AHRC, 2016, p. 11).

Age discrimination can present in a number of ways, including as an obstacle to employment. Job adverts alluding to age, for example seeking “recent graduates”, are a more subtle form of discrimination faced by older workers looking for work (Terrell, 2019). Older workers already in work may also face discrimination within their organisation through limited opportunities for advancement (Gordon, 2018, p. 33). It may be perceived that they have lower productivity and limited technology skills, compared to younger colleagues (*Ibid*).

The *Employing and retaining older workers* report demonstrates that negative stereotypes about the competency of older workers are dominant in Australian workplaces. Older workers were considered loyal and reliable by survey respondents; however, younger workers were considered to have greater ambitions, better technology skills and to be more physically capable by the majority of those surveyed (AHRI, 2021, p. 10).

The report also considers the perception of age by recruiters. According to almost half of the HR professionals surveyed, their organisation had an age above which they would be reluctant to recruit (*Ibid*, p. 16). Hesitancy to recruit older workers was found to be more prevalent in the public sector, compared to private and not-for-profit organisations (*Ibid*, p. 17). Larger organisations (employing more than 500 people) were also 10% more likely to be hesitant about hiring older workers (*Ibid*).

Age discrimination can have serious negative impacts on those who are subjected to it. First of all, the experience of discrimination, including negative stereotypes and assumptions can cause a decline in physical and mental health (AHRC, 2016, p. 12). Discrimination can also reduce self-confidence and self-esteem and diminish motivation to remain in the workforce (AHRC, 2016, p. 12). Further, discrimination can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, where-in workers who are consistently exposed to negative stereotypes are likely to conform to lower expectations (Gordon, 2018, p. 35).

Since 2018, there has been a 6.1% increase in the proportion of HR professionals who have identified people aged 51-55 as ‘older workers’ (AHRI, 2021, p. 9). This suggests that a larger, and younger group of workers may be facing aged based discrimination in the workforce, and therefore dealing with the detrimental effects of workplace discrimination.

Age Diversity

Evidence suggests that embracing an age diverse workforce could boost productivity. A 2013 study based on survey data of around 18,000 companies from the German Institute for Employment Research found that age diversity can have positive impacts on company productivity, particularly in 'innovative' or 'creative' industries (Backes-Gellner and Veen, 2013, p. 291). In these industries, researchers found that the ideal workforce was one with a broad mixture of young and old employees (*Ibid*). It is believed that increased age diversity can encourage better problem-solving practices due to the combination of workers with different skills and backgrounds (*Ibid*, p. 282). This can be a competitive advantage in industries where creativity and complex decision making are required (*Ibid*, p. 282).

Conversely, a lack of age diversity can create a stagnant workforce, in which people stay in the same position for a long period of time, limiting advancement opportunities for others (Backes-Gellner and Veen, 2013, p. 283). An age diverse workforce can be more dynamic, as older workers leaving or moving to part-time work can provide opportunities for younger workers to advance and take on new responsibilities (*Ibid*).

Failure to retain older workers can also result in a loss of human capital for employers. According to the *Employing and retaining older workers* report, the departure of older workers has caused a loss of key skills or knowledge in almost 60% of the organisations included in the survey (AHRI, 2021, p. 21). As the aging of the Australian population is expected to continue over the coming decades, due to a combination of low birth rates and increasing life expectancy, the share of younger workers will shrink making the loss of older workers more detrimental (AIHW, 2018; Australian Government, 2021, p. 37).

Working in an age diverse workforce can also benefit older workers, and therefore may contribute to them staying in the workforce longer. One study has shown that older workers felt the most included as members of an age diverse team (Matz-Costa et al, 2012, p. 62). Older workers who are employed in age diverse workforces are also likely to have greater self-esteem and work performance than their counterparts who are facing age discrimination (AHRC, 2016, p. 12)).

The benefits of an age diverse workforce are already recognised by many employers. A global survey conducted by AARP, an interest group representing over 50s, collected data from 6000 employers in 36 countries (Terrell, 2020). 83% of those surveyed indicated that they saw age diversity in their workforce as integral to growth and success (*Ibid*).

However, this has not always translated into proactive policies encouraging age diversity. According to AARP's survey, 53% of businesses did not include age as part of their diversity and inclusion policies (*Ibid*). The *Employing and retaining older workers* report reveals that only 9.7% of the Australian organisations surveyed were proactively recruiting older workers (AHRI, 2021, p. 13). A much greater percent (23%) of organisations had taken no steps to encourage age diversity through their recruitment practices (*Ibid*). The report also found that 31.6% of organisations consult with older workers on issues of concern to the workplace, while 7.3% planned to in the future (*Ibid*, p. 8).

Gendered Ageism

As a result of existing at the intersection of age and gender bias, older women are particularly vulnerable to discrimination. The intersection of sexism and age discrimination has been labelled 'gendered ageism' (Lössbroek and Radl, 2019, p. 2175). Women are more likely to face discrimination based on their age due to cultural factors, such the negative depictions of older women in media and culture, and the importance placed on women's physical attractiveness (*Ibid*). One effect of gendered ageism is that women are considered to be "old" at a younger age than men, despite having longer life expectancies (*Ibid*).

Gendered ageism is detrimental to the employment prospects of older women. Older women are more likely than men to face perceptions that their skills are outdated, they are slow to learn new things and that they will do substandard work (Senate Economics References Committee, 2016, p. 33). Furthermore, according to Radl (2012) women are considered 'too old to work' at age 60, while men are at 64.5 (p. 762). The experience of older women is not given the same respect as that of older men, who are often seen as leaders and mentors (Barnett, 2005, p. 26). These

perceptions may have contributed to a disparity in labour force participation between men and women. Workforce participation rate for older men (aged 55-64 years) was 13% higher than for older women in 2017 (Australian Government, n.d.). Women are also more likely to experience the negative effects of discrimination on health and self-image. The AHRC has found that women are more likely to report that their most recent experience of age discrimination had caused them stress or impacted their mental health or self-esteem (ARHC, 2016, p. 71).

Concerning both sexism and age discrimination, researchers have described the phenomena of 'collective relative deprivation' (CRD). CRD emerges when members of a group (e.g. older women) feel that their group is systemically disadvantaged in the workplace, while another group is privileged (Kunze et al, 2013, p. 418). The experience of CRD can reduce commitment to work, job involvement and ultimately impact an organisation's performance (*Ibid*).

Age discrimination can also be more financially problematic for women. Many women return to the workforce after taking time out to raise children. For these women, employment in older age can be an important opportunity to increase their retirement savings (AHRC, 2009, p. 19). The effect of age discrimination on earnings, due to lower workforce participation and lesser opportunities for advancement can therefore be detrimental for women seeking to make up for lost time in paid work (*Ibid*).

Early Retirement and Economic Disadvantage for Older Women

Data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) from 2020 demonstrates a trend towards early retirement in Australia. While the average age that Australians intend to retire is at 65.5 years, the average retirement age is actually only 55.4 years (ABS, 2020b). This means that the average Australian is retiring over a decade before they are eligible for the aged pension, the main source of income for retirees (*Ibid*).

Early retirement is particularly prevalent amongst women. The ABS has found that the population of retired women has increased more relative to that of men, and



that on average, women retire earlier than men (ABS, 2020b). In the context of the financial pressure faced by many older women, this trend is troubling. Older, single women are one of the fastest growing groups living in poverty (Senate Economics References Committee, 2016, p. 13). The financial pressure faced by women in retirement means that they are more likely to re-enter the workforce, and to move to lower cost accommodation after retirement (Senate Economics References Committee, 2016, p. 14).

HILDA survey data demonstrates that early retirement is associated with poorer economic outcomes, while those who retire later are more economically advantaged (Wilkins et al, 2020). In the period from 2013-2018, early retirees tended to be the most economically disadvantaged cohort of retirees (*Ibid*, p. 138). A growing number of early retirees were not partnered and did not own their own home, both of which are strongly associated with poor economic outcomes in retirement (*Ibid*, p. 136). This is in contrast to earlier periods, when early retirement and higher income were linked. The data suggests that historically, wealthier people were choosing to retire early, while the more economically disadvantaged stayed in work longer, however this paradigm has shifted since the 2010s (*Ibid*, p. 138).

Many women who leave work before they are eligible for the aged pension are forced onto general unemployment benefits. COTA, an advocacy group representing older Australians, reported to the Senate Economics References Committee in 2016 that women aged 50-59 were the largest group of long-term Newstart (now known as Jobseeker) recipients (Senate Economics References Committee, 2016, p. 114). They noted that reliance on these payments for long periods prior to reaching retirement age can lead to poor financial outcomes in the long term, due to loss of income and savings (*Ibid*).

There is an economic imperative for many women to stay in work longer, with 70% of employed older women stating financial pressure as a reason to stay in the workforce (Maury, 2020). Staying in work can also have social and emotional benefits. As the current Age Discrimination Commissioner, Dr Kay Patterson AO (2021) notes, employment is stimulating,

challenging and offers social opportunities for older people. She also notes that while some older employees will be moving towards retirement and therefore looking for options such as flexible work, others are continuing to build careers and wish to increase their participation (*Ibid*).

Susan Ryan AO, then The Age and Disability Discrimination Commissioner, stated in 2016 that:

“boosting the participation rates and making it possible for older women to maintain employment is the strongest change we can make in terms of enabling those women to save more, to have more savings for retirement, and also to have better health when they go into retirement.” (Senate Economics References Committee, 2016, p. 47).

The disproportionate representation of women in caring roles also affects the workforce participation of older women. As noted by the AHRC (2009), many women over 45 years of age are returning to work after periods out of work caring for children (p. 19). These women may be seeking to build-up their retirement savings (*Ibid*). However, the workforce participation rate of women aged 55-64 is less than one percent lower than for women in general, at 58.8% compared to 59.2% (Australian Government, n.d.). Thus, while many women may be eager to return work, participation remains low for women of all ages.

Given the importance of workforce participation for older women and their economic security in old age, the large number of women leaving the workforce before they reach retirement age is concerning. Assisting women to stay in the workforce for longer could be a key factor in supporting the economic security of older women.

HR Policies for a Successful Age Diverse Workforce

Research has found that it is possible to mitigate the social categorisation process and develop a workplace culture from which age diversity can be beneficial. Wegge et al (2012), argue that where there is a high appreciation of age diversity, a good team environment, and when tasks are complex, age diversity can be beneficial for team effectiveness (p. 5147). Kunze et al (2013) also argue that organisational policies promoting age-diversity can mitigate the conflict that could be caused by an age diverse workforce (p. 422).

According to Gelfand et al (2005), creating a workplace climate which embraces diversity necessitates a shared perception that the organisation prioritises maintaining diversity and eliminating discrimination (p. 104, as cited in Gordon, 2018, p. 37). In order for organisations to demonstrate their commitment to age diversity, certain policies can be implemented to improve attitudes towards older workers both in the general workforce and in management. Kunze et al (2013) found that the presence of diversity friendly HR policies acts as a signal to the entire workforce that age diversity is valued in the organisation (p. 421). This means that employees will be less likely to engage in the discrimination that may have ordinarily stemmed from the social categorisation process (Ibid).

The *Employing and retaining older workers* report can also shed light on the kinds of HR policies that Australian workplaces could adopt to promote age diversity and retain older workers. The survey included a question on the most common reasons that older workers left their organisations (AHRI, 2021 p. 23). While ‘retirement’ was the most common response, some responses indicate that workplace discrimination could be causing older workers to leave their jobs. For example, 17.9% of respondents indicated that ‘poor relationship with manager’ was a common reason for workers to leave (Ibid). A lack of promotional opportunities was also considered to be a key factor by 11.8% of respondents (Ibid). Organisations which do not demonstrate appreciation for older workers will struggle to retain these workers in the long term, and therefore will be unable to maintain an age diverse workforce. These statistics also

demonstrate that employers could retain more older workers through changes to HR policy. By addressing age discrimination through policy, employers could avoid losing older workers who feel marginalised in their workplaces.

The survey results also show that a growing number of older Australians are leaving the workforce because of caring responsibilities and a lack of flexibility (Ibid). The incidents of people leaving work due to caring for a partner or older relative has increased from 14.9% in 2014 to 20.9% in 2021, while the caring for children or grandchildren has increased from 9.4% to 12.9% over the same period (Ibid). The need for flexibility has similarly increased as a factor, from 10% in 2014 to 12.1% in 2021 (Ibid). Again, by addressing the needs of older workers through better flexibility and accommodation of caring roles, employers would be able to retain more older workers.

The survey results also indicate that particular initiatives and policies can be implemented by employers to retain older workers. Training and development, part-time options and flexible work were considered to be the top initiatives for retaining older workers, according to survey participants (Ibid, p. 21). The following sections will explore how these initiatives could be implemented by Australian employers through specific policies, in order to retain older workers and foster a workplace environment which is supportive of age diversity.

1. Training and Development

i. Employee Training and Development — The “Age Training Gap”

Employee training and professional development are key workplace policies which promote age diversity. In 2019, Treasurer Josh Frydenberg indicated that Australian workers undertake 80% of their training before age 21 (Dalzell, 2019). The academic literature contains “overwhelming evidence” of the existence of the “age-training gap” (Lössbroek and Radl, 2019, p. 2171). The *Employing and retaining older workers* report shows that while 63.1% of organisations offered “continued access to training and

development” for older workers in 2014, this has dropped to 54.6% in 2021 (AHRI, 2021, p. 22).

The literature also supports the idea that women are particularly disadvantaged in regard to training, due to gendered ageism (Lössbroek and Radl, 2019, p. 2189). A study of older (50+) workers in nine European countries found that while women were overrepresented in organisations offering more educational programmes, they were less likely to be selected for these opportunities than male colleagues. (Ibid, p. 2184). Further, employers fully or partially paid for men to undertake education opportunities at a higher rate than women (Ibid, p. 2188). Finally, it was found that training and educational opportunities for older men were unaffected by having a manager with ageist stereotypes, while older women received less training when this was the case (Ibid, p. 2189). The lack of access to training and educational opportunities across the lifetime is a key factor affecting the workplace participation and lifetime earnings of women, according to the NSW Council of Social Services (Senate Economics References Committee, 2016, p. 47).

Why Are Older Workers Receiving Less Training?

There are a number of theories regarding the age-training gap, and why it particularly affects women. One reason given for offering older workers less training opportunities is that it will offer lower returns on investment (Lössbroek and Radl, 2019, p. 2173). Training is an investment for employers, costing time and money, and the return on that investment is measured on the productivity gained from the investment (Ibid). Part of this calculation is based on the expected time the employee will be working after the training (Ibid). Therefore, older workers, and especially women, who are expected to retire earlier and to be more likely to work part-time, are seen as less worthwhile investments (Ibid).

Another reason older workers are less likely to be offered training opportunities relates to stereotypes about their ability, or willingness, to receive training (Ibid, p. 2175). The perception that older workers have a lower propensity for education and



training can lead to older workers being offered less training opportunities (*Ibid*). There are number of stereotypes concerning which types of workers have the best disposition to learning, including more highly educated employees, and those in the upper echelons of the workplace hierarchy (*Ibid*, p. 2173, 2174). Because men in the 50+ age cohort are more highly educated than women of the same age, and because women are less likely to hold positions in the upper echelons of an organisation, these stereotypes are particularly harmful for women (*Ibid*).

How Can Organisations Benefit from Training Older Employees?

While employers may be reluctant to offer training opportunities to older workers due to the perception that they will not remain in work for long after receiving the training, opportunities for training may actually extend the working life of older employees (Armstrong-Stassen and Schlosser, 2007, p. 431). Workers who engaged in training and development were found to be more committed to their organisations (*Ibid*). The findings of one study on training for older workers were that organisations aiming to retain older workers should ensure that worker's roles include opportunities for personal development and gaining new knowledge and skills (*Ibid*, p. 432).

Policy Solutions

1. Employers should review their training and educational practices to identify whether there is age or gender bias in the allocation of training opportunities or funding for education.
2. Workers should have the opportunity to pursue reasonable training and education, regardless of gender or age.

ii. Management Training

Kunze et al (2013) argue that negative-age stereotypes held by top management could intensify the social categorisation process, making the success of age-diversity more difficult to achieve (p. 419). Based on the "upper echelons theory", they contend that employees model their behaviour on the behaviour of management, which is considered to be

desirable (*Ibid*). Therefore, if management within an organisation does not hold negative beliefs about older workers, this could filter down through the organisation, lessening discrimination overall. Furthermore, as in the case of older women seeking training and educational opportunities, management attitudes can directly affect the experience of older workers (Lössbroek and Radl, 2019, p. 2189).

Due to the importance of management attitudes and behaviour, Wegge et al (2012) propose a training programme for managers (p. 5150). Taking place over two modules, the training would include information and discussion of age differences, the consequences of discrimination and give strategies relating to the workplace (*Ibid*). This training was found to reduce stereotypes, conflict and enhance innovation in a trial (*Ibid*).

Although many companies seem eager to have an age diverse workforce, very few have taken steps to promote inclusivity through training for management. According to data collected for the *Employing and retaining older workers* report, 43.9% of those surveyed said that their organisation 'seldom or never' offered unconscious bias training, while 47.2% stated that unconscious bias training provided by their organisation did not address age bias (AHRI, 2021, p. 26). Almost 70% of organisations included in the survey do not offer training on how to manage different generations to line managers (*Ibid*, p. 21). These statistics indicate that many Australian organisations are not doing enough to mitigate the effects of social categorisation. As a result, employers may be finding that increased age diversity is leading to increased conflict in the workplace.

Policy Solutions

1. Unconscious bias training should be a regular component of professional development, and this training should include education on age discrimination.
2. Managers should receive specific training on age bias and on managing age-diverse teams.

2. Training and Development

There is ample evidence that older workers benefit from having the option to work part-time or flexibly. According to Lumsdaine and Vermeer (2015), older workers who are able to reduce their weekly hours are less likely to retire (p. 451). According to Age Discrimination Commissioner Kay Patterson AO, older workers value the ability to work flexibly, so that they can travel, care for family members and transition to retirement (Patterson, 2021). While Patterson recommends flexible work be made available to all workers regardless of age in order to reduce stigma (*Ibid*), this report will suggest some particular policies for flexible work which will allow employers to support older women to navigate their particular circumstances.

i. Flexibility for Caring Responsibilities

Grandparent Care

As previously detailed, there has been an increase in the number of older workers leaving work due to caring for children or grandchildren since 2014 (AHRI, 2021, p. 23). Over the same period there has been a steady decrease in the number of workplaces offering grandparental leave to employees in their late careers (*Ibid* p. 22). While in 2014, just 9.3% of surveyed workplaces offered this leave, in 2021 this has further shrunk to 7.0% (*Ibid*). The lack of leave entitlements for grandparents will particularly affect older women who want to stay in work, as the majority of grandparent care is done by women.

The Role of Grandparents in Australia

Grandparent care is relatively common in modern Australia. Around half of grandparents in Australia have provided some care for their grandchildren, and of those who had ever done grandparent care, 44% cared for their grandchildren at least once a week (Horsfall and Dempsey, 2015, p. 1073). Younger grandparents are more likely to provide care, with two thirds of grandparents aged under 64 years having provided care, and half of those aged 65-74 (*Ibid*).

Grandmothers are more likely to partake in grandchild care than grandfathers. 47% of grandmothers cared for grandchildren at least once a week, compared to 41% of



grandfathers (*Ibid*). Furthermore, while grandfathers were more likely to only contribute to grandchild care intermittently, grandmothers were more likely to provide grandchild care every day, or several times a week (*Ibid*). Research by Horsfall and Dempsey (2015) on the gendered aspects of grandparent care in Australia found that grandmothers in particular felt an expectation to provide care for their grandchildren (p. 1077). Grandmothers interviewed in the study said they felt obligated to always be available to their families (*Ibid*).

The type of role fulfilled by grandmothers is also often different to that performed by grandfathers. Grandmothers typically performed domestic labour tasks, such as cooking and housework, as part of their role as a grandparent (*Ibid*, p. 1078). In fact, while the maximum amount of domestic labour for grandfathers was eight hours per week, regardless of retirement status and frequency of caregiving, partly retired grandmothers providing care daily did on average 26 hours of domestic labour per week (*Ibid*, p. 1076). Grandmothers are also more likely to be more directly involved in the physical and emotional care of children, including toileting children and changing nappies (*Ibid* p. 1078, 1080). Mirroring the experience of mothers, grandmothers are more likely to take on routine, less rewarding tasks (*Ibid*, p. 1079).

In contrast, the role fulfilled by grandfathers is more likely to involve discrete and fun activities (*Ibid*, p. 1079, 1080). For example, one grandmother interviewed by Horsfall and Dempsey (2015) reflected that while she multitasked between chores and childcare, her husband's time with their grandchildren was "leisure time" (*Ibid*, p. 1079). Grandfathers in the study also spent time with their grandchildren through sport and games (*Ibid*, p. 1081).

➤ *Juggling Grandchild Care and Paid Work*

Because of the more hands-on role that many grandmothers take, it is important to recognise how grandparent care can affect their working lives, and the steps that can be taken by organisations to reconcile this. A study by Lumsdaine and Vermeer (2015), investigating the relationship

between providing care for grandchildren and retirement, has found that both having grandchildren and providing care for them is associated with decreased labour force attachment for grandmothers, and lower expectations of working in the future (p. 446). For women aged 58-61 years, those caring for grandchildren were 33% less likely to work full-time than those without grandchildren (*Ibid*). Grandparent care adds additional time pressure for older women, and many grandmothers are forced to juggle caring responsibilities, domestic labour and paid work, in a manner reflective of the challenges faced by working mothers (Horsfall and Dempsey, 2015, p. 1078). Grandmothers who regularly cared for grandchildren report being 'always' or 'often' rushed or pressed for time at higher rates than other grandparents (Craig and Jenkins, 2016, p. 293).

➤ *Transfer of Childcare Responsibilities*

An increasing amount of attention has been given to the needs of working mothers in recent years. However, the rise of two-income households coupled with the high expense of childcare has led to a transfer of the parent/work juggle to grandparents, particularly grandmothers, as outlined above. For older women, an additional adult child who works full-time is associated with a 14% increase in the likelihood that she will care for her grandchildren (Lumsdaine and Vermeer, 2015, p. 451). This indicates that older women may be sacrificing their careers and incomes to allow their adult children to work full-time.

Because grandmothers are likely to have taken breaks from paid work to care for their own children, the expectation that they will reduce work to care for their grandchildren is another blow to their ability to retire financially stable (Craig & Jenkins, 2016, p. 296).

As the role of grandmothers is closely related to the childcare needs of mothers, specific policies relating to leave for grandparents should be coupled with broader efforts to allow parents to juggle paid work with care of children. This may include flexible work options for all employees, generous parental leave

schemes and increased childcare availability. While individual employers may not always be able to implement all of these policies, making the workplace more parent-friendly can relieve some of the impact on grandparents as informal carers (Lumsdaine and Vermeer 2015, p. 453).

Caring for Spouses and Older Family Members

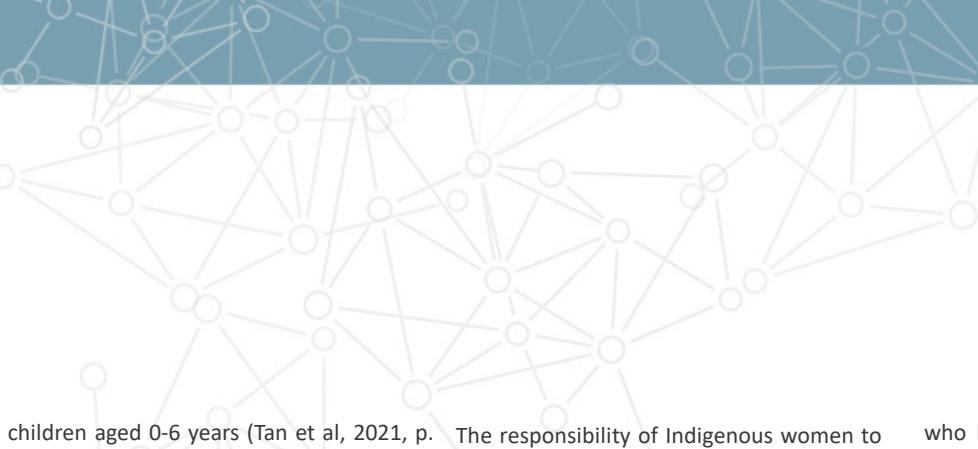
Besides caring for grandchildren, older women can also have other caring responsibilities such as for a spouse or parent. As previously detailed, since 2014 there has been around a 5% increase in people leaving work due to caring for a partner or older relative (AHRI, 2021, p. 23). However, as with grandparent care leave, the number of organisations offering employees leave for elderly care has dropped over the same period, to 8.9% down from 14.5% (*Ibid*, p. 22).

The baby boomer generation are "sandwiched" between two generations requiring care, their elderly parents and their younger children or grandchildren (ARHC, 2016, p. 68). The responsibility to care for aging, ill or disabled family members can make it difficult for older women to maintain their paid work (Booth, 2020). In fact, the AHRC (2016) has suggested that many 'retired' older Australians have actually left the workforce to care for a parent or spouse (p. 68). While both genders may be involved in caring for family members, according to the ABS, retired women are four times more likely than men to have left their last job to care for an ill, disabled or elderly person (ABS, 2020b).

Caring Roles in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families

As outlined above, the responsibility of caring for family members, from grandchildren to elderly parents, falls largely to women. In addition to this, women from CALD backgrounds can face a greater sense of expectation to care for family members, which can increase the barriers to maintaining employment (ARHC, 2016, p. 68).

In China, there is a culture of multi-generational families who live together, with 45% of grandparents co-residing with



children aged 0-6 years (Tan et al, 2021, p. 2). Traditionally Chinese intergenerational households have operated through a system of patriarchal hierarchy, with young women taking on the bulk of housework (*Ibid*, p. 3). However, recently there has been a shift to parents assisting their adult children with housework and childcare, due to the increase in women in paid work (*Ibid*, p. 3, 19). Chinese grandmothers have taken an important role as informal childcare while more young women have taken roles in the paid workforce (*Ibid*, p. 19).

Notwithstanding the increasingly central role of Chinese grandmothers as carers for their grandchildren, the culture is traditionally one with “strong filial expectations” (Cong and Silverstein, 2008, p. 599). As such, adult children are expected to be the primary caregivers for their parents (*Ibid*). More specifically, adult sons are expected to provide financial support, while daughters and daughters-in-law are responsible for the physical care of elderly parents (Chen and Jordan, 2018, p. 193). The cultural expectation of care further exacerbates the share of household labour done by women (Tan et al, 2021, p. 15).

While this evidence relates specifically to families in China, we may expect that women in the Australian Chinese diaspora and from other cultures of filial piety will have similar family structures. The lack of knowledge and acceptance of these cultural norms in Australia may make it even more difficult for these women to balance their caring responsibilities and paid work.

Australian First Nations women also face particular challenges relating to their caring roles and responsibilities. Indigenous women may be responsible for the care of many family members due to incarceration, homelessness, child removal, illness and death (Eades et al, 2020, p. 3). Due to the continuing effects of settler colonialism, these factors are more prevalent in Indigenous communities (Cassidy, 2003, p. 409). Aboriginal women may also take on caring responsibilities to support family members undertaking formal study (Eades et al, 2020, p. 5).

The responsibility of Indigenous women to care for their extended families can place them under significant stress, which can affect their health and may make it difficult for them to work (*Ibid*, p. 3, 4). Cultural responsibilities, such as attending funerals for extended periods may also make it difficult for Indigenous women to stay in work, if employers do not appreciate and accommodate these practices (*Ibid*, p. 4). However, staying in employment is particularly important for Indigenous women, as they may also be supporting their families financially (*Ibid*, p. 4, 5).

Current Policies

Current employment law does not guarantee grandparents any kind of leave to take care of their grandchildren under ordinary circumstances. While workers can be entitled to 10 days of personal/carer’s leave, this only applies when a worker is caring for a family member experiencing illness, injury or another emergency (Fair Work Ombudsman, n.d.). As such, there is no leave entitlement for grandparents who regularly care for their grandchildren. Furthermore, while the current law would allow for the care of an ill parent or spouse in acute circumstances, it may not give workers the flexibility necessary to care for an elderly or disabled family member on an ongoing basis.

Flexibility for Employees with Caring Responsibilities

Recognising and accommodating the complex roles and responsibilities that employees, especially older women, may have as carers is a key part component of creating a diversity friendly workplace through HR policies. In fact, Carers NSW have argued that failing to accommodate the needs of employees who may be caring for older family members as well as younger generations, as is the case for many baby boomers, could amount to discrimination (ARHC, 2016, p. 68).

Introducing flexible work policies, which will allow workers to balance caring responsibilities with paid work, may increase the retention of older workers, thus increasing age diversity. Research shows that while workers who are caring for a spouse are more likely to retire, those

who have flexibility over their hours, and are able to reduce their hours are less likely to retire (Lumsdaine & Vermeer 2015, p. 13). Similarly, study into the work-life balance of non-retired workers has found that older workers with greater flexibility over their work hours were better able to balance their paid work and home life (Cebulla et al, 2019, p. 304, 305).

While workplaces could introduce specific leave for workers with caring responsibilities, such as grandparent leave or carers leave, the Age Discrimination Commissioner Dr Kay Patterson AO has suggested that introducing flexibility across the workforce could reduce the stigma of aging (Patterson, 2021).

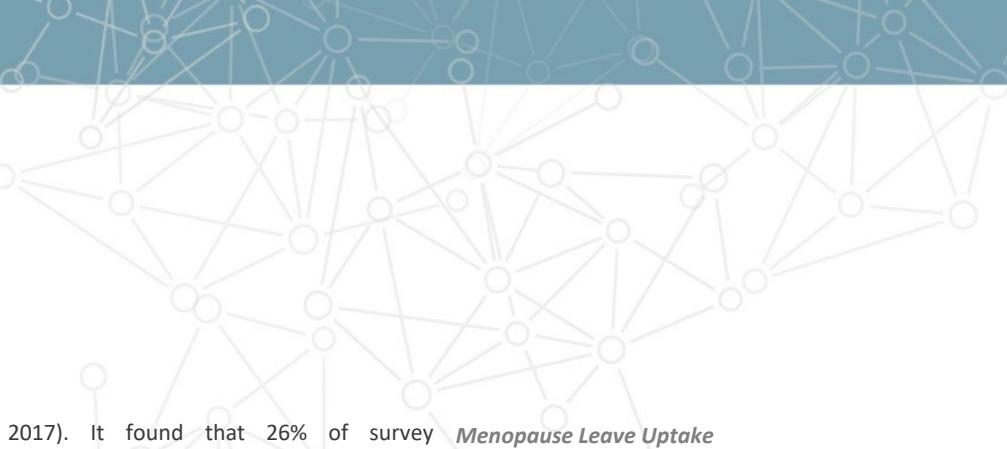
Policy Solutions

1. If possible, flexible work should be made standard across the workforce, to reduce the stigma faced by women who work flexibly to accommodate their caring responsibilities.
2. Workplaces should offer leave for workers who need to do regular care for family members.
3. Employers should educate themselves on the cultural needs of workers from CALD backgrounds and accommodate their needs in regard to caring responsibilities and cultural practices.

ii. Menopause and Health Leave

The experience of menopause can also be detrimental to the careers of older women. Menopause, which can include symptoms of hot flushes, migraines, brain fog and depression, often affects women aged between 45-55 years old, coinciding with the point at which women might be pursuing senior management roles (Makortoff, 2021). It may also coincide with the return to work of women who have left the workforce to care for children. Despite this, the impact of menopause on women’s careers has been little investigated (*Ibid*).

The Victorian Women’s Trust (VWT) has conducted an online survey of 3,400 people and has held 22 discussion groups in Victoria to understand the experiences of people who experience menstruation and menopause (Melican and Mountford,



2017). It found that 26% of survey participants who had experienced menopause felt that taking time off would have helped them (*Ibid*). Unfortunately, many women currently have to use their sick, personal or holiday leave when they are dealing with symptoms of menopause (Tu, 2021; Melican and Mountford, 2017). Not only is this putting women at a disadvantage compared to their male colleagues, taking sick leave to deal with menopause, which is not an illness, masks the true reason for the leave and may increase the stigma and secrecy that exists around menopause (Melican and Mountford, 2017).

Research also indicates that leave for menopause could boost overall productivity by reducing presenteeism (Robin and Poorhosseinzadeh, 2021). Presenteeism is the loss of productivity resulting from an employee being present at work but not fully effective due to illness or injury and is one of the leading causes of lost productivity (*Ibid*). On the other hand, when workers feel free to take time off to address health issues, the workforce is more productive, and turnover is reduced (*Ibid*). Apart from leave, other reasonable adjustments can be made for employees experiencing menopause, such as working from home, and cool, private workspaces (Makortoff, 2021). These changes are similar to providing standing desks or ergonomic chairs for workers with physiological problems (Robin and Poorhosseinzadeh, 2021).

Apart from providing accommodations for women experiencing menopause, organisations could also consider providing education about menopause to their workforces, in order to raise awareness and reduce stigma. CIPD, a UK based professional body for HR workers, argue that employers should communicate a positive attitude toward menopause to employees and aim to create a workplace culture which is open to discussions about menopause (CIPD, 2019, p. 13). They suggest that education about menopause could be included in diversity and inclusion training and in induction training for new employees (*Ibid*).

Menopause Leave Uptake

Although provisions for employees experiencing menopause have been adopted by very few organisations, there are a few employers who can offer an example of how menopause symptoms can be accommodated through workplace policies.

In October 2021 the major online clothing retailer Asos announced a number of new policies, including leave for pregnancy loss, fertility treatment and menopause for its 3,800 employees, mainly based in the UK (Ambrose, 2021). The new policy means that staff will be able to work flexibly, work from home or take time off during menopause (Towey, 2021).

While Asos has been a recent and high-profile example of a company adopting HR policies aimed at employees experiencing menopause, a number of Australian organisations have introduced similar policies in recent years. The VWT was the first Australian employer to introduce a policy of paid menstruation and menopause leave in 2017, following the Trust's research into the experience of menopause and menstruation (Robin and Poorhosseinzadeh, 2021). The policy allows for 12 days of non-cumulative, paid leave per year, as well as the option to work from home or rest in a quiet area (Robin and Poorhosseinzadeh, 2021; Melican and Mountford, 2017).

Since 2017 the take up of similar policies has been minimal, however the super fund Future Super has worked with the VWT to create Menstrual and Menopausal Guidelines and to introduce their own leave policy (Tu, 2021). Similarly, the period underwear company ModiBodi has introduced specific leave for menstruation, menopause and miscarriage (ModiBodi, 2021). People experiencing these events can also work from home under the policy (*Ibid*). These policies allow employees to take time off without requiring a medical certificate and operate separately to regular sick leave.

Australian unions have also backed the movement towards menopause-friendly



HR policies. The Victorian Health and Community Services Union, supported by the ACTU has requested leave and flexibility for workers experiencing reproductive health issues in negotiations with the Victorian Hospitals' Industrial Association (Tuohy, 2020). Under the proposal, workers would be able to access up to five days of leave a year for menopause, IVF, endometriosis, vasectomies, serious menstrual pain and other reproductive health issues (*Ibid*). Workers could also work flexibly, from home, or request adjustments to the workplace (*Ibid*). Unlike the policies introduced by the VWT, Future Super and Modibodi, workers would need to present a medical certificate or statutory declaration to access the leave (*Ibid*). The national Health Services Union has suggested that other unions adopt the policy (*Ibid*).

Is Menopause Leave Hindering Progress on Women's Equality?

There have been some criticisms of menopause leave and how it may disadvantage women in the workforce. It has been argued that menopause leave policies would make it more difficult for women to find employment, as employers would be incentivised to employ men instead (Robin and Poorhosseinzadeh, 2021). It has also been argued that menopause and menstruation leave could reinforce stereotypes about women being the "weaker sex", and that they are emotional or unreliable (*Ibid*).

However, proponents of reproductive health leave have argued that these policies will in fact increase gender equality in the workplace. Introducing a menopause policy gives workplaces an opportunity to engage with workers on women's health issues, and could reduce stigma in the workplace (CIPD, 2019, p. 17). Kate Marshall, from the Victorian Health and Community Services Union and the national Health Services Union has argued that reproductive health policies can remove stigma around reproductive health issues, which can hinder women's success in the workforce (Tuohy, 2020). The ACTU president Michele O'Neil has similarly

argued that these policies can "create a more equal and accommodating workplace" (*Ibid*). By having policies related to menopause, employers can support and include older women, as well as signalling to other employees that older women are valued (CIPD, 2019, p. 13). This is in line with the findings made by Kunze et al (2013), that the introduction of diversity friendly policies can signal the value of diversity to the entire workforce (p. 421).

Policy Solutions

1. Appropriate accommodations should be made for women experiencing menopause symptoms, including leave, flexible work, working from home or the ability to work in a cool and quiet environment.
2. The Victorian Women's Trust has a publicly available template for menstrual and menopause policy, which can be used by organisations wishing to implement their own policy (Victorian Women's Trust, n.d.).
3. Organisations should make efforts to educate their workforce on menopause and its symptoms in order to reduce stigma. This education could be included in diversity and inclusion training and induction training for new employees.



Conclusion

There are a number of policies that can be implemented by employers looking to improve age diversity in their workforce. Employers who wish to retain older workers must address the needs of older workers by offering more training opportunities for older workers and introducing flexible work policies which accommodate workers' caring responsibilities. Organisations can also make the workplace more accessible for women experiencing menopause, and reduce stigma, by introducing menopause policies. It will also be important for employers to address negative attitudes and stereotypes about older workers that still exist in many workplaces, through diversity and inclusion training.

These policies will be particularly important for encouraging the workforce participation of older women, an often-marginalised group whose contribution to the workforce is largely underappreciated. The policies outlined in this report will benefit both the women they support and the organisations who introduce them, by boosting workers' confidence, improving performance and productivity.

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