



Mature Workers Matter Project

funded by Employers Mutual Ltd



Report for Stage One:

Industry Consultation



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1. About this report

Mature Workers Matter is a 12-month project designed to sustain our mature workforce for today and for the future. The project is funded by Employers Mutual Ltd.

The project focuses on:

- building leadership capability in mature workforce matters such as health, wellbeing, career choices, work flexibility, work design
- supporting the implementation of practical interventions to improve the working experience of mature workers
- providing resources to keep workers in good health and free of injury as they age

This report details the findings of Stage 1 of the project: *Industry Consultation - Design and conduct focus groups with the industry to identify strategies to support mature workers.*

Methodology - Focus Groups

Throughout September 2010, SageCo conducted six focus groups. Invitations were sent via email to all ACS member organisations inviting the participation of CEOs, HR Practitioners, Supervisors and mature workers.

The central premise of all focus groups was twofold:

- share your **insights** about the risks, challenges and opportunities of an ageing workforce to the aged and community care sector
- discuss **what works and what could work better** in structuring work for mature workers

In addition, CEOs and HR Supervisors were asked to think about what leadership, resources and assistance would be required to make the necessary changes for sustainability in the aged care and community services industry.

The focus group agenda comprised:

- A short overview including myths, demographics, risks, challenges, opportunities
- A facilitated exercise designed to stimulate thinking outside the current parameters
- Completion of MWM survey
- A verbal feedback summary
- Morning / Afternoon tea

Focus Group	Date and Venue	Number of participants
CEO Roundtable	Monday 3 September: 9 am – 11 am ACS Conference Room	9
Supervisors and HR Practitioners	Friday 10 September: 9am – 11 am ACS Training room	17
Mature Workers: Whyalla	Friday 17 September 1 pm – 3 pm: Whyalla Aged Care. 25 Newton Street, Whyalla	7
Mature Workers: Naracoorte	Friday 24 September 1 pm – 3 pm: Longridge Retirement Village, Attiwill Street, Naracoorte	14
Mature Workers: Metro	Tuesday 28 September 1 pm – 3 pm: ACS Training Room 246 Glen Osmond Rd, Fullarton	22
Mature Workers: Metro	Wednesday 29 September 1 pm – 3 pm: ACS Training Room 246 Glen Osmond Rd, Fullarton	15

Methodology -Survey

Participants in the focus groups were asked to complete a survey (see appendix for full details) and hand in to the facilitator. Invitees and those who could not participate in the focus groups were asked to complete the survey on line.

The survey addressed:

- Demographics
- Systemic changes needed to make the aged care industry a safer place for mature workers
- Practical solutions to address the OHSW needs of mature workers
- Availability or access to resources that would support the safety and welfare of mature aged workers
- What employers could do to influence an employee's decision to work longer
- How to make employee's roles more flexible
- The most important thing employers could do to ensure sustainability in the aged care and community sector workforce

163 people completed the survey.

2. Summary

Headlines:

1. At a strategic and structural level we need to challenge some of our current assumptions about **work organisation and workforce resourcing**
2. There is a need for a more sophisticated understanding and application of **flexible work practices** and **job design** in order to reduce workplace stress, reduce injury rates, improve the success of return to work and improve the workplace environment for mature workers
3. The ability to incorporate flexibility to address **individual needs** balanced by organisational needs is fundamental for future sustainability
4. Mature workers rank **flexibility and wellbeing support** highly in terms of general occupational, health, safety and welfare needs; some of this can be addressed with low cost, effective solutions in the short term
5. Ensuring a highly **consultative and conversational process** between mature workers and Executives / Managers / Supervisors / HR Practitioners is essential for the success of any MWM initiative

1. CEO roundtable

The methodology used for the CEO roundtable was different to all other focus groups. The aim of the roundtable was to encourage industry leaders to be advocates for the Mature Workers Matter project and to provide a strong platform for action.

Participants were involved in an exercise called 'Back to the Future' which encouraged them to think creatively and outside the regular industry paradigms. The two groups were asked to define the extremes of best possible future (heaven) and the worst possible future (hell).

Heaven was described as:

- No limits on how or what resources you want to live your life – regardless of age or health
- Adequate funding to resource and employ enough / unlimited skilled and fully engaged staff

Hell was described as:

- No care system at all
- An ever widening gap between funding and expectation of stakeholders

In summarising the comments at the end of the session, participants agreed:

- We need transformational (not incremental) change to the aged care industry. We are ingrained to think logically and we must think outside the square and employ a different approach to ensure sustainability.
- We must use the evidence and data that we have to influence the agenda
- There is a need for concerted actions and we don't have the 'how top's' yet.

- Factors which are central to the change include:
- Funding
- Workforce issues
- Engaging the unions

Observations

- Participants did find it difficult to step away from the traditional paradigm of 'funding' as a panacea for solving workforce issues.
- It is important for the project that we continue to engage more natural senior advocates for mature workers and for leading the changes required.

2. Mature worker focus groups

Participants were asked to brainstorm characteristics of the 'best workplace for mature workers' using the career cycle as a guide. The output of these sessions will be incorporated into the toolkits to be produced in Stage 2.

Common themes and ideas included:

- Allow longer time for **shadowing / buddy system** when beginning new roles ie two weeks or until confident
- Use **technology** to make things more efficient and ease administrative or physical load
- Provide **wellbeing support** to encourage healthy ageing and lifestyle
- Create **client centred rosters** which are not necessarily defined by job categories or full-time / part time
- Ensure mature workers have a say **in job redesign**
- Redesign roles to suit the strengths of each employee and support functions by **teaming** employees together eg clinical nurse, admin and carer as team
- Provide **career pathways**, lifelong learning and career redirection support to retain within industry
- Establish **national partnerships** with aged care providers to allow worker exchange in different locations
- Include **mentoring, coaching or training** as part of the role
- Introduce clear **phased retirement options** with pre-retirement coaching to allow for reduction in workload and less stress

Observations

- Generally, mature workers didn't nominate radical change for organisations to become an employer of choice. Despite being encouraged to think 'beyond their wildest dreams' and be creative, their suggestions were highly pragmatic, mostly achievable and supported by the survey data.
- Overall, participants were highly engaged, positive and productive throughout the focus groups with a strong sense of pride and ownership of their role in the industry

3. Supervisors and HR Practitioners Workshop

Supervisors and HR Practitioners were randomly divided into three groups to prepare a submission for 'the greatest workplace for mature workers in the world'.

Key themes from the group work include:

- Create a flexible work culture including work hours, leave provisions
- Implement wellbeing initiatives
- Workflow analysis
- Consultation conversations

Feedback regarding participants' next steps from the session included:

- We need to get started – no more excuses. Use more strategic approaches now the 'crunch' has come
- Engage staff around the MWM project
- Explore the next level of flexibility – not just part time or job share
- Apply for funding for innovative strategies
- Consult with our mature staff

Observations

- There was a general tendency to talk in 'motherhood' statements as opposed to thinking beyond the current paradigms and articulating innovative ideas. This may be a factor of time limitations – but is an indicator that some ongoing coaching and support for implementation is required.
- Participants were well informed and embraced the activities enthusiastically.

4. Survey results – a snapshot

- **90%** were aged 45 +
- **50%** had management responsibilities
- **61%** were from metro area, **38%** from rural and **1%** remote

Making the aged care industry a safer place for mature workers:

- **88%** supported increasing the emphasis on management support, job design, flexible work arrangements and use of technology for mature workers
- **65%** increasing or establishing systems to demonstrate the value of mature workers eg engagement in policy developments, forum discussions, decision making
- **55%** supported a review of OHSW policies to ensure they address the specific needs of an over 45s workforce

Practical interventions to address the OHSW needs of mature workers:

- **75%** wanted support for flexible work conditions eg varied work hours / location, increased types of leave
- **69%** said the provision of wellness programs or real incentives to attend such programs (eg free health checks, gym, dieticians etc)
- **38%** nominated the reduction of physical loads and demands of certain roles and **41%** nominated more control over the timing of work and methods used

71% said they were not aware of any **resources** that would assist better support of the safety and welfare of mature workers

The top three things that employers could provide that would most influence an employee's decision to work longer are:

- **72%** Work the same role but on a more flexible basis ie varied work hours / location, increased leave
- **46%** would like mentoring or coaching or training to be a significant part of their role
- **36%** wanted to redesign their role to focus more on core knowledge and less on administration

When asked what one change they would make to their current role to make it more flexible, the options were ranked:

- **31%** more flexible hours
- **27%** part time or reduced hours
- **16%** extra leave
- **8%** flexible locations
- **6%** project based
- **4%** job share

The final question was a free text option asking for the '**most important thing**' your employer could do to ensure we have a sustainable workforce now and for the future.

Answers which included **flexibility** make up **30%** of the comments.

Other key themes include:

- Systematic workload review
- Service oriented job design
- Role design and the 'workability' of roles/ individuals
- Wellness support
- Knowledge transfer and training
- Communication and consultation
- Career progression and training

3. Recommendations for next steps

1. Continue to engage **CEO level champions** of the MWM project to ensure visibility of the project and inclusion of age management activities in overall business strategies
2. Seek support for **economic modelling** to address workforce issues – particularly around the cost of increasing headcount to allow for increased flexibility versus the savings made by increasing retention, reducing turnover, reducing the injury and return from injury rate and increasing employee satisfaction.
3. The data validates the current focus for **Stage 2 resource development** and **design of Master Classes**:
 - a. Collate and develop practical strategies to support mature workers
 - b. Examples of best practice – case studies
 - c. Workforce profiling tools which identify injury/incidents across age groups
 - d. Tools to measure individual capacity to perform (adapted Work Ability Tool)
 - e. Job re-design tool and examples of different models of care
 - f. A Mature Workers Matter checklist that aged and community care providers can use to evaluate their organisations performance when it comes to supporting mature workers
4. In addition, there should be a strong focus on building capability in the development and application of a wide range of **flexible work conditions** that respond to individual needs (such as return to work, phased retirement, care responsibilities, physical capacity).

4. Appendices

1. **MWM Survey – data only**
2. **MWM Survey – cross tabulated reports**
 - a. Flexibility and job role
 - b. Three practical things to implement and job role
3. **Text from survey**
4. **Focus Group Output**