

MATURE WORKERS MATTER PROJECT

ACS has been successful in achieving funding from Employers Mutual Ltd to develop a resource aimed at supporting mature workers in the aged and community care sector by addressing the broad factors which increase the risk of a work related injury and impede return to work outcomes.

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION

The proportion of direct care staff working in the aged and community care sector aged 45 years or over is almost double that of the national average. Figures from the National Institute of Labour Studies (NILS)¹ show that 60% of the residential workforce and 70% of the community care workforce are aged 45 years or over. The national average is 37%. The higher proportion of older workers in this sector presents a unique and complex challenge to employers. Providing direct care services to clients is physically demanding. When the workforce is predominately female (91% residential and 93% community) as well as ageing, the occupational health and safety implications become primary concerns for the future sustainability of the industry.

The *Mature Workers Matter* project will explore the broader issues and challenges impacting the occupational health, safety and welfare of mature workers in the aged and community care sector. The project will focus on reviewing relevant evidence on specific occupational health, safety and welfare concerns of an ageing workforce. It will then identify successful strategies that are currently being implemented and investigate new strategies aimed at improving injury prevention and return to work outcomes for older workers.

The final “products” of the *Mature Workers Matter* project will be a multi-media resource, comprising information available on CD-rom with an online support feature. To maximise project sustainability, industry “Champions” will be recruited as regional advocates, promoting strategies leading to age-friendly workplaces.

The multi-media resource will include:

- Information about why it is important to implement age-friendly policies and programs in the workplace.
- Suggested practical strategies to support mature workers in the aged and community care industry to help prevent work-related injury or illness and maximise successful return to work outcomes.
- Case studies and examples of successful programs supporting mature workers. This will provide organisations with the opportunity to see how the principles and strategies were applied in an actual workplace setting.
- A collection of suggested tools which assist organisations to support mature workers Including:
 - A tool to measure the age profile of existing workers at an organisational level
 - An adapted Work Ability Index (WAI) tool for the aged and community care sector which will assist employers to assess the capacity of a mature worker to perform the requirements of their job

- A job re-design tool that will assist employers to modify roles to suit worker capacity
- A *Mature Workers Matter* checklist that aged and community care providers can use to evaluate whether their organisation has policies and strategies in place support mature workers.

Apart from the multi-media resource, the project aims to maximise sustainable outcomes by providing the following:

- Information and training sessions demonstrating how to use the tools and apply the strategies in the workplace.
- Individual “in-house” training to prepare industry “Champions” who can provide ongoing leadership in implementing, trialling and developing age friendly strategies within the sector.

The *Mature Workers Matter* project steering group will invite appropriate Government Ministers, senior government officials, key stakeholders and the media to a product launch. The launch will precede the information and training sessions which will be held in the metropolitan area and in two regional centres.

The last phase of the project will involve a closure report outlining:

- An overview of the project
- Any learnings from the process
- A financial acquittal
- An evaluation of the project outcomes measuring;
 - the number of people who attend the training sessions
 - the level of satisfaction with the training sessions and information provided
 - the number of organisations willing to implement the multi-media resource kit in their workplace
 - the number of Champions appointed within the sector
- Recommendations for any further actions or directions to better support mature workers in the future.

The *Mature Workers Matter* resource will be freely available to anyone. ACS will also negotiate with Aged and Community Services Australia a link from their website to the ACS resource and *Mature Workers Matter* webpage.

EXPECTED BENEFITS OF PROJECT

The goals of the proposed *Mature Workers Matter* project are to develop a multi-media resource which will:

1. Improve injury prevention for older workers employed in the aged and community sector.
2. Improve return to work outcomes for older workers employed in the aged and community sector who have had work-related injury or illness.
3. Identify practical ways of overcoming barriers in supporting mature workers in preventing work related injuries and successful return to work.
4. Identify other opportunities to support mature workers in the aged and community care sector.
5. Develop strategic partnerships with industry stakeholders in providing leadership in the effective and efficient management of the occupational

health, safety and welfare of mature workers in the aged and community care sector.

TIMEFRAME

The Project will commence in May 2010 and be completed by November 2011. If the Project Officer responsible for delivering the project outcomes is employed on a part time basis, the length of the project will be extended in line with their appointment.