

## Debunking five common falsehoods about older workers

### MYTH #1

You can't teach an older worker new skills.



### FACT: ALL EMPLOYEES, INCLUDING OLDER WORKERS, CAN LEARN AND BENEFIT FROM PRACTICAL AND RELEVANT TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES.

There is a common assumption that older workers can't (or don't want to) learn new things. Research from The Benevolent Society says many Australians believe it's better to train young people because older Australians are slow to learn and are less capable of picking up new skills. In fact, older workers are able and generally keen to upskill or reskill, particularly through practical and relevant training opportunities.

Businesses benefit from upskilling and providing training to all employees, regardless of their age. Training and development opportunities motivate and incentivise employees, ensure they have the requisite skills to do their job, and improve staff retention, all of which ultimately benefit the bottom-line.

OECD (2021) 'Promoting an Age Inclusive Workforce', Chapter 5 Maintaining and developing skills of a multigenerational workforce.

The Benevolent Society (2017), 'The Drivers of Ageism'.

### MYTH #2

Older workers are prone to health problems.



### FACT: AUSTRALIANS ARE LIVING LONGER AND HEALTHIER LIVES.

Not only do Australians enjoy one of the highest life expectancies in the world (80.7 years for men and 84.9 years for women), they also live healthier lives, with 68% of people aged 75 and over assessing their health as good, very good or excellent.

Workers aged 55 and over are less likely to take days off due to illness or to care for others and are less likely to experience work-related injuries compared with workers aged 54 and under.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [Deaths in Australia](#) (Web Report, August 2020).

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018) [Work-Related Injuries, Australia](#).

### MYTH #3

Older workers lack commitment because they are counting down the days until they retire.



### FACT: OLDER WORKERS ARE LOYAL AND COMMITTED EMPLOYEES.

People aged 55 years and over account for almost 20% of the Australian workforce and are the fastest growing age cohort in the workforce.

According to a recent survey by the Australian Human Resources Institute, almost 40% of older workers expect to retire between 66-70 years, and 17.4% expect to retire between 71-75 years.

This means many employees have an additional 20 to 30 years of professional life and development ahead of them from the time they are considered 'older workers'.

Furthermore, older workers are often less likely to change jobs compared with their younger colleagues, and thus contribute to greater productivity through retention of industry knowledge, organisational stability and lower staff turnover.

AI Group Economics and Research (2019) 'Australia's older workforce in 2019'.

Australian Human Resources Institute (2021) '[Employing and Retaining Older Workers](#)'.

OECD (2021) '[Promoting an Age Inclusive Workforce](#)', Chapter 2 Good for Business: Age diversity in the workplace and productivity.

### MYTH #4

Younger workers perform better than older workers.



### FACT: RELEVANT EXPERIENCE IS A BETTER INDICATOR OF PRODUCTIVITY THAN AGE.

Productivity is not a function of age. Studies have shown that verbal skills, communication and intelligence remain unchanged as a person ages. Similarly, a study of managers conducted by Monash University, found that there was no statistical difference in intelligence, problem solving or leadership ability between age groups.

Older workers bring years of experience, industry knowledge and expertise to a team, and are often more focused at work and keen to participate in organisational change processes.

Sarros, JC, Pirola-Merlo A and Baker R (2012) 'Research Report: The Impact of Age on Managerial Style'.

Smith E, Smith A and Smith CS (2010) 'Old dogs, new tricks: Training mature-aged manufacturing workers' *Journal of Workplace Learning* 22 (5): 277-291.

### MYTH #5

Older workers take jobs from younger workers.



### FACT: THERE ARE NOT A FINITE NUMBER OF AVAILABLE JOBS.

The idea that older workers take jobs from the young is known by economists as the 'lump of labour' fallacy. It is the same myth raised (and debunked) when women entered the workforce in larger numbers. It is based on the idea that there are a set number of available jobs, so every older person who keeps working denies a space for a younger colleague.

In fact, the number of jobs is not finite and there are considerable economic benefits in keeping people employed for longer. Furthermore, research suggests that there is a positive relationship between employment rates for older and younger workers in OECD countries, which means that countries with higher employment rates among older workers tend to also have higher employment rates among younger workers.

OECD (2021) '[Promoting an Age Inclusive Workforce](#)', Chapter 1 Key trends: The future workforce is more age diverse, and offers large potential.