

Media Release

PILOT PROJECT TO COMBAT AGE DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT

Wednesday, August 15, 2001

A new pilot project was today launched by VicHealth, the Equal Opportunity Commission and the Hon. Bronwyn Pike, Minister for Housing and Aged Care to assist older persons, employers and recruitment/ employment agencies to improve understanding of the value of older workers. *Working for Ages: Active Strategies for a Productive Workforce* will work to raise awareness of the positive benefits of employing older persons. Ultimately the project will work to reduce discrimination on the basis of age in Victoria.

The launch of this project is a positive boost in efforts to stamp out discrimination in employment for those older people currently employed and for those looking for employment for older men and women here in Victoria, according to Dr Rob Moodie, CEO of VicHealth.

"Research reinforces the growing incidence of age discrimination in workplaces across Victoria,' said Dr Moodie. 'And this has significant implications if you consider that the baby boomer generation, which forms a large part of Australia's population, is not getting any younger. This combined with falling fertility rates means we have an ageing labour force."

"Older workers face significant stereotypes at the individual and community level. It's inherent in hiring processes, training opportunities and availability of support. We need to start raising awareness to break down these stereotypes of older people as 'old economy' workers."

"Evidence suggests older workers feel powerless and reluctant to file discrimination complaints for fear of being victimised even further. It is this sort of victimisation and discrimination that has significant health implications."

"Discrimination is a health issue as well as an economic issue. The health and economic costs of discriminating against people on the basis of age are now being documented in increasing numbers of research reports."

According to Dr Moodie, it is well documented that those communities that allow all their citizens - young or old, to play a full and useful role in the social, economic and cultural life of the community will be healthier than those where people face insecurity, exclusion and deprivation.

"There are personal and social benefits of belonging to a workplace. It's about being accepted, respected and included."

"We need to reaffirm the value of older workers with the workplace. Unfortunately there are still negative stereotypes leading to the perception that older people are inactive, less capable or committed to contributing through employment."

"What this means is that we as a community need to start reducing negative perceptions about older age." Ultimately it's about reaffirming their value in society. Our long-term health as a community depends on it."

The *Working for Ages: Active Strategies for a Productive Workforce* project will support the promotion of the state legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of age and exploration of other methods to reduce ageism. The project, which will be piloted in Melbourne's western and eastern regions, aims to develop cross sector collaboration and initiatives to assist older persons, employers, recruitment/employment agencies and the tertiary and TAFE sectors to improve understanding of the value of older workers and access for retraining as part of a competitive workforce.

For more information, please contact:

VICHEALTH

Media & PR Coordinator

PH: 03 9667 1319