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RESEARCH BRIEF

# REIMAGINING WORK, REST AND PLAY

*Why more Australians want  
to work past 70*

AUGUST, 2022

**89 DEGREES EAST RESEARCH**

*Insights that shape our nation's future*

## KEY POINTS

- Australia is facing a critical shortage of workers
- Australians are living longer and work can be more flexible
- Our workforce participation rates above 65 are low compared to other countries
- 125 000 more Australians are willing to stay at work later in life, right now
- If nothing changes, by 2039 we will be excluding 250 000 Australians who want to work
- We surveyed 624 working Australians aged 50-60 to ask if they wanted to work longer, why, and what would help them do it

## INTRODUCTION

The Jobs + Skills Summit is a generational opportunity to rethink how Australians get our work done while continuing to enjoy a lifestyle that is our heritage and the envy of the world.

Australians have historically and proudly led the world achieving a balance in our lives between work, rest and play. As we live longer and longer, Australia can once again set the standard.

We should support the many older Australians who want to work at their stage of life with the same policy attention we apply to help young people begin work, and families manage work and raise children.

With the right support, our research suggests that Australia can tap into an extra 125 000 people – right now, who want to participate in our workforce immediately.

These older Australians are experienced and willing to work but are not, because they lack support and opportunities.



## **LIVING LONGER**

Once upon a time, people in their 50s were thought of as entering the last phase of work and winding down to their retirement.

For many Australians that concept is now well and truly outdated.

Australians are staying healthier, living longer, needing to save more for a longer retirement as well as, critically, still enjoying working.

At the same time, younger people and families are demanding more part-time work and more flexibility to suit their stage of life.

Our original research and international comparisons demonstrate there are significant economic opportunities for the Australian economy and businesses, as well as personal benefits for older people who want to stay in the workforce.

## **AN UNTAPPED WORKFORCE**

25% of people aged 50–60 told us they would like to keep working until they were at least 70 (including 7% who said 75), but workforce participation rates show that less than 15% of people aged 65 or older actually do keep working.

That means roughly 125 000 people who are experienced and willing to work are not getting that opportunity – at a time when we have a massive shortage of workers.

By contrast, in New Zealand, more than 24% of people over 65 are still part of the workforce.

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has called for an increased migration program of 200,000 a year. This is a level never delivered before in Australian history and especially unlikely to be achieved in the wake of disruption to global travel and rising global living standards.

But older Australians are here and ready to go.



## WHAT OLDER WORKERS NEED

So how can we tap into this local, talented pool of labour?

What can the Australian government and businesses do?

We asked 50-60 year old people what would help them keep working past 65.



- **Access to Training**
- **More flexibility about when they work**

**Close to 2 in 3 older workers would consider updating their skills and knowledge through retraining.**

- 63% probably or definitely would consider updating their skills and knowledge (21% definitely would and 43% probably would).
- Only 16% would not consider further training in the last decade of work and 20% aren't sure.
- For people who would like to work until they are 70+ years old, they are significantly more likely to consider updating their skills and knowledge (75% definitely/probably would), indicating that further training will extend the time that workers will remain engaged in the workforce.

**More than 2 in 5 don't have the digital confidence and technology skills needed for jobs of the future.**

- 42% are not sure or don't think they have the right skills in digital and technology, indicating a need to boost confidence and training in this area for our older workforce.
- 58% are feeling confident they have the right digital and technology skills.
- Amongst those who don't think they have the right digital skills, 45% would like to do an online course or face to face course, and 29% would prefer on the job training.



- Ensuring training programs are practical and relevant to the workplace and area of work is important, and ideally conducted during work hours.

**Time frame prepared to do further training and skills development is 12 months or less:**

- On average the most common time frame to do further training or skills development is between 6–12 months.
- 27% would be prepared to study for less than 3 months, 20% around 3 months, 17% for 6 months and 22% for 12 months. This then drops off significantly with only 3% willing to study for 2 years.
- Offering short courses, 3 months, 6 months and 12 month courses will be of highest appeal to 50– 60 year olds.

**Enablers that will encourage older workers to enrol in further training and skills development are:**

1. Free training and courses for over 50s **(66%)**
2. On the job training through my employer **(54%)**
3. Financial support, so my income isn't impacted **(53%)**
4. Ability to study and work at the same time **(51%)**
5. Knowing it's a quality training course, that is directly relevant and practical **(45%)**.

**MANAGING HEALTH AND CARING**

**Being mindful of health:** 52% said reducing stress and balancing good health with work is a 'top 3' concern.

**Flexibility:** 50% (and 58% of women) rated part-time, job sharing and flexible working hours in their top 3.

**Boosting super:** 35% rated 'building my superannuation' as a top 3 reason to keep working.



## WHAT IS HOLDING THEM BACK

### Barriers preventing older workforce from doing further training and updating their skills are:

1. Cost (51%)
2. Time (46%)
3. Not sure what courses and opportunities are available (33%)
4. Worried about taking time away from work (29%)



*"There's a disconnect between training providers and employers, and a lack of trust in most training providers"*

*"I don't think I would get a better job at the end"*

*"There's not a lot of opportunity in my current job, plus being over 50 nobody wants you"*

Older Australians also need flexibility and an understanding of their stage-of-life needs to be able to keep working:



*"Working part time, looking after my family and looking after elderly parents 91+ years, those are my barriers"*

### Negative age-based stereotypes are commonly experienced by the older workforce.

- 77% of all people aged 50–60 years have experienced age-based stereotypes in the workplace, 23% have not.
- The most common age-based stereotypes experienced are:
  - o 1) "older workers are less capable with technology" 43%
  - o 2) "older workers are less open to learning new things" 34%
  - o 3) "older workers are overqualified for the job" 29%



- 72% of our older workforce believe action is needed to address age-related stereotypes in order to encourage older workers to stay in the workforce for longer and pursue new career opportunities.

In their own words, older working Australians told us they have experienced negative attitudes from employers including:



*“Older workers are feared by younger superiors with less experience and knowledge”*

*“May not stay in the job long due to retirement”*

*“Younger managers think you don’t know anything”*

## **RETHINKING THE LAST DECADE OF WORK**

Older workers are telling us we need a new mindset and new systems.

We have a system set up for students and young people entering the workforce.

We have apprenticeships, cadetships, traineeships and graduate programs, forming part of a cultural understanding that young people need help as they transition from higher education into the workforce.

It should come as no surprise that older people have particular challenges as they’re leaving the workforce as well. But their challenges don’t get the same recognition or assistance.

In fact, we often assume that this group has the power and freedom to work the way they want, when they want. And because of an outdated mindset we assume people nearing retirement age (soon to be 67) simply want to stop working.

But of course work is often something that people love, it gives them meaning. It can be an identity and it’s a social opportunity.

In our research, 42 % of 50-60 year olds said “doing meaningful work” was a top 3 reason for them to stay at work.

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### **About the Sample:**

In August, a nationally representative survey was conducted online amongst n=624 Australians aged 50–60 years old. Recruitment sourced through a quality consumer-opt in panel with quota management reflecting population distribution across Australia.

- 100% aged between 50–60 years old.
- Gender: 49% Female, 51% Male
- Metro cities 67%, Regional/Rural 33%
- Working status: 63% working full time, 23% part-time, 8% casual work and 1% volunteer work, 3% looking for work and 2% having a work break.
- Metro Locations: Melbourne 21%, Sydney 22%, Brisbane 8%, Adelaide 6%, Perth 10%.
- Regional/Rural: Regional Vic 6%, Regional NSW 10%, Regional QLD 8%, Regional SA 2%, Regional WA 2%, ACT 1%, NT 1%, TAS 2%.

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### **Can original, insightful research like this help you set the agenda?**

This original research was commissioned by [89 Degrees East](#) and conducted by [Dr Rebecca Huntley](#) and [Tim Chapman](#). For more information on how our insight could help you start a discussion and shape Australia's future, contact [research@89degreeseast.com](mailto:research@89degreeseast.com)

