

# Jobs need to be redesigned to keep Baby Boomers in the workforce for longer, experts say

[Jocelyn Nickels](#), Jan 10, 2020

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With an ageing population and the need for more financial stability, Australia is seeing more senior citizens choosing to hold off retirement plans until much later in life. However, experts say Baby Boomers risk being forced out of the workforce before they're ready if employers don't work to redesign jobs to suit their needs.

According to a recent report, if employers continue on their current path of penalising rather than encouraging older workers, the number who will need to be supported by other workers could rise by an average of 40 per cent by 2050 across developed nations, including Australia.

The [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\) research](#) said there needs to be greater flexibility in working times and better working conditions in order to promote higher workplace participation at all ages. The report also called out ageism in the workplace, especially around recruitment and promotion, and said this must be addressed promptly in order to create an age-diverse workforce.

Rachael Palmer, organisational psychologist at Transitioning Well, said it's not about promoting or singing the praises of older people over and above the younger generation,

but enforcing measures to level the playing field. She said job redesign is a key factor in assisting those in all areas of employment by not only creating more opportunities for the older population, but giving seniors a sense of meaning and purpose in life.

“It’s about upskilling people and making sure that their knowledge remains current, making reasonable adjustments to the work to suit their needs, as well as assisting them in the transition to retirement,” Palmer explained. “All of these things will make workplaces far more accommodating to older people, while not alienating younger people as well.”

Whether they realise it or not, Palmer said organisations do have an age at which they won’t hire people, with most generally avoiding anyone over of the age of 50. It’s a continual problem throughout Australia which is causing a great amount of distress for some over-60s who both need and want to remain working.

Seniors are faced with the reality that they may never work again once they reach 60 and it starts to affect their wellbeing and confidence to apply for further jobs. Palmer blamed the assumptions and stereotypes created by society for this problem and said employers need to re-think the way they view older workers.

“There are assumptions like they’re [seniors] going to take more sick leave or have more injuries, but research shows this isn’t the case and older people are taking about the same amount of time off as the younger generations,” she said. “The types of injuries changes and they [seniors] might need a bit longer off work to heal, but younger people have more injuries and [less time] off work.

“While other elements perhaps do start to become lesser as they get older, it evens out. They [seniors] bring different strengths and different skills to the table.”

Palmer said having older employees in the workplace will provide benefits for the whole company, with people in different generations able to support and train each other. Younger people can teach seniors about technology advances, while Baby Boomers can share their knowledge and skills gained over their working lives. This two-way mentoring adds a sense of meaning and purpose to older people in their jobs and can increase overall productivity in the workplace.

To change this continuing workplace ageism and better support older employees, Palmer said the first step is to create an avenue for communication. By simply talking to senior workers, employers will get a better understanding of how jobs could be redesigned to assist them and keep them working for longer.

This is one of the areas Palmer is working on in her position at Transitioning Well with the Ageing Workforce Ready Project. The project aims to protect and promote the mental health and wellbeing of ageing workers in the public transport industry. She said although it may be confronting at first to approach older workers to discuss the topic, it’s extremely beneficial.

However, Palmer also stressed the importance of not putting too much pressure on organisations and employers to redesign jobs immediately as the process can be quite time consuming.

“It’s very easy to say we need to be more creative, or make shifts shorter, or create part-time work, but we’ve got to be really careful that we don’t patronise organisations,” she said. “There are huge hurdles in terms of assumptions and technology that they need to get through.”