

AGEING WORKFORCE READY

NEWSLETTER #2
MARCH 2020

The outbreak of COVID-19 is having a significant impact on all sectors of society, demanding that we make rapid changes to our way of life and placing substantial financial, emotional and social stressors on all of us.

The Ageing Workforce Ready Project team hope that by publishing a newsletter during this unique time we can provide much needed support to employers with older employees.

COVID-19 AND EMPLOYMENT LAW

Your organisation has probably made many difficult changes in the past weeks and days, with more still to be made. It is important that decision makers are familiar with the relevant laws to ensure any changes are in line with them.

Here are two useful sources of information:

- <https://hrlegal.com.au/update-4-legislative-changes-jobkeeper-wage-support-award-variations-for-covid-19/>
- <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/news-and-media-releases/website-news/coronavirus-and-australian-workplace-laws>

Some other resources for HR Professionals:

- <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/infectious-diseases>
- <https://www.ahri.com.au/about-us/media-and-advocacy/coronavirus-guidance-for-hr-professionals-and-employers/>
- <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-employers>



COVID-19 AND THE AGEING WORKFORCE

The government has strongly advised that people aged 70 and over stay at home for their own protection, and that these arrangements should also apply to those with chronic illness over 60 and Indigenous persons over the age of 50.

Older workers, whether they are self-isolating or working, may be experiencing significant concerns about their own health, the health of people they love, as well as their financial future. All this can impact their mental health.

Although these emotions can be extremely challenging, there are things employers can do to help navigate these challenges:

- Stay connected with employees who are self-isolating or who have been stood down. Provide information about what the organisation is doing, and get creative about checking-in on people's wellbeing.
- Provide extra encouragement and support for older people who are embracing technology. Be aware that a lot of communication from organisations providing help is digital; help people to access the information they need.
- Communicate openly and honestly about any organisational changes that are being made in response to COVID-19. If difficult decisions need to be made, communicate the reasons for those decisions.
- Download the official government 'Coronavirus Australia' app which is available in the Apple App Store or Google Play, or join the WhatsApp channel—sign up via aus.gov.au/whatsapp
- Raise awareness about resources of specific interest to older people, such as National Seniors: <https://nationalseniors.com.au/news/latest> and APS: <https://bit.ly/3bA5meJ>



MENTAL HEALTH AND COVID-19

A global health crisis like the one we are experiencing can create and contribute to significant mental health challenges. Some excellent articles have been released about how to safeguard our mental health during this time. Key takeaways are:

Find trusted resources: There is a lot of information about COVID-19, but it's important that to get information from reliable and trustworthy sources. Government and public health websites are a good source of information.

Create a healthy balance with media consumption: Staying up to date during times like this is important, but consuming large amounts of negative coverage can contribute to feelings of anxiety and fear. It may be useful to examine your media intake and make some adjustments if it is causing mental stress.

Practice empathy: It's important to practice empathy in challenging times like these. Reach out to those that might be struggling. Helping others not only benefits the community but it also helps us navigate these challenging times.

Don't panic buy: Panic-buying and stockpiling makes the problem worse. It creates more fear and can negatively affect vulnerable populations. The recommendation is to just have enough goods to get through a 14-day self-isolation. Having months' worth of goods is not necessary.

Try to not make assumptions: Remember that COVID-19 can affect people regardless of who they are or where they are from. It is important not to make assumptions about people or stigmatise those that may have contracted the virus.

Mental health and self-isolation: If you need to self-isolate there are certain things that can help. Remember that this is a temporary change and remind yourself that you are helping the community by doing so. Try to continue connecting with people safely, engage in activities you find meaningful, get enough sleep, eat healthy foods and engage in some physical activity.

Seek support: It is normal to feel overwhelmed and distressed during events like these. Acknowledging those feelings and seeking support if you need it is important. Whether that's activating your support networks or reaching out for professional help, doing so can really help us in dealing with these challenging times and the emotions that may follow.

There is lots more useful information regarding COVID-19 and mental health in the following articles:

- **Beyond Blue:** <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>
- **UN News:** <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1059542>
- **Australian Psychological Society:** <https://www.psychology.org.au/COVID-19-Australians>

RETIREMENT CHANGES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Financial considerations are beyond the scope of the AWR Project, however periods of economic uncertainty can create significant mental health challenges for individuals and their families.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has generated a period of economic volatility. People from across our society will experience financial stress in response, including older workers in casual jobs and approaching retirement.

What can employers do to support older workers experiencing financial challenges during this time?

As a rule of thumb employers and managers can only provide factual information about things such as super and government measures recently announced.

Only people licensed by the Australian Securities & Investments Commission (ASIC) can make comments, recommendations or give advice about financial matters.

However, it's important that employees have people that they feel comfortable having retirement related conversations with. Options may include:

- **Employee Assistance Providers:**
Some offer financial advice
- **Superannuation:** The employee's super fund
- **ASIC:** 1300 300 630
- **Moneysmart:** <https://moneysmart.gov.au/>
- **ATO:** <https://community.ato.gov.au/>



WE ARE CONTINUING TO MAKE PROGRESS ON THE AGEING WORKFORCE READY PROJECT THROUGHOUT THESE UNIQUE TIMES



PEOPLE FROM ACROSS OUR SOCIETY WILL EXPERIENCE FINANCIAL STRESS INCLUDING OLDER WORKERS IN CASUAL JOBS AND APPROACHING RETIREMENT

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Program funding: WorkSafe Victoria

AWR Project oversight: AustralianSuper

AWR Project delivery: Transitioning Well

Industry Partners: BusVic, Transdev, Yarra Trams

Stakeholders: Superfriend, RTBU, TWU

In addition, we are finding that many organisations are interested in what we are doing for a whole variety of reasons.

➤ PLEASE FEEL FREE TO SHARE THIS NEWSLETTER WITH THOSE IN YOUR NETWORK.

AWR PROJECT UPDATE

Some of our key achievements recently include:

Published “The Age Difference” which outlines the Transitioning Well approach to fostering wellbeing and performance in older workers.

HRM Online published an article based on the Roundtable conversations hosted at the end of last year <https://www.hrmonline.com.au/diversity-and-inclusion/two-ageing-workforce-paradoxes/>

The AWR Project Website is under construction and we hope to launch it very soon. [Follow Transitioning Well on LinkedIn](#) to be part of the social media launch, and look out for an email announcement.

Baseline data is currently being collected from Industry Partners using the Maturity of Practice Index. We are switching to virtual methods in-light-of physical distancing advice, and so far this seems to be working well.

Accelerating the implementation of an online community designed to provide information and support to Industry Partner employees. We will also review the design and timing of other planned interventions in the context of potential COVID-19 impacts.



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