

Older Workers Employment Action Plan

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New Zealand Council Of
Christian Social Services

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Email Address:	eo@nzccss.org.nz
Organisation Name:	New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS)
Organisation description:	<p>The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Older Workers Employment Action Plan.</p> <p>NZCCSS was formed over 50 years ago by the Anglican Care Network, Baptist Churches of New Zealand, Catholic Social Services, Presbyterian Support and the Methodist and Salvation Army Churches. Through this membership, NZCCSS represents over 250 organisations providing a range of social support services across Aotearoa. We believe in working to achieve a just and compassionate society for all, through our commitment to our faith and Te Tiriti o Waitangi.</p> <p>Further details on NZCCSS can be found on our website www.nzccss.org.nz.</p>

Tirohanga Whānui | Overview

NZCCSS broadly supports the overarching outcomes of the action plan. Our 250+ member organisations work closely with older people in their communities and are well placed to respond to the proposed plan.

At a structural level, the kaupapa and intent of the plan should ensure that all over 50 are served by the plan. It is fantastic to see those aged 50-64 included, however the diversity of experiences of older workers in the workplace, across population groups, educational qualifications, skills and competencies, and household income and wealth must be included.

NZCCSS organisations work alongside our poorest households, often long-term dependent on government support and/or low paid, low skilled and temporary work. This group experiences less choice about new work opportunities following a redundancy.

We are also increasingly supporting those whose employment life has had a material impact on their physical wellbeing. These people may be experiencing lower employability due to the impacts of age on their capacity to work. They haven't required social support across their lives and arrive unsure how to navigate systems and with a large amount of whakamaa.

The needs of these groups must be included in the scope of this action plan.

Objective 1: Employment related services are effective, accessible and meet the needs of older workers.

NZCCSS agrees there is a need for tailored employment related services to support the 50 + age group with employment.

For many in this group, knowledge of government supports and of employment opportunities will be needed. Not all of these workers will have experience dealing with government employment and support services. However, any targeted services within this demographic will also need to include the long-term unemployed.

Research into workforce gaps at a regional and national level should underpin this mahi. Strong local knowledge will be required, and regional training and education providers should also be represented.

NZCCSS would need more information on the design of any social unemployment scheme designed for older workers before providing comment. We are aware of the proposal by the Future Focus Work Forum. We have concerns that this will formalise a two-tier system with less skilled unemployed workers represented by work and Income and more skilled workers represented by the agency administering the social employment scheme. NZCCSS is looking to engage on this proposal once the consultation document is released and the specifics on the design of the scheme are made clear.

Objective 2: Addressing discrimination against older workers, need for job flexibility and opportunities to upskill to support an age friendly labour market.

NZCCSS agrees with the action plan's focus on addressing discrimination against older workers. A societal shift is needed to embrace natural aging and place value on life at all stages. It will be important for government to lead in this space – both as a large employer and funder and as an example to the rest of New Zealand.

Older workers in employment should have opportunities to upskill or retrain to support a career change. Current student loan settings, restricting the options of over 55's, are adding to the problem. Lifelong learning is a right, not a privilege and should be accessible to all not just those who can afford it.

Objective 3: Labour market actors involved in different sectors and regions are collaborating to maximise the opportunities of their ageing workforces

NZCCSS itself is a great example of what can be achieved when we collaborate! And we firmly believe we need far more collaboration and sharing to maximise potential in Aotearoa.

As commented above health care and social assistance is a sector with a high rate of workers aged 50+, while at the same time experiencing an acute skill shortage. Aged residential care has long relied on a migrant workforce. The pandemic has interrupted this supply of workers, leaving services with limited options to recruit. While at the same time many lost their jobs. It would have been beneficial to all if we could have quickly connected both groups.

We are also very aware of a huge need for workforce support in relation to food provision via social services. The existing workforce in this space, particularly in our areas that were locked down the

longest, are exhausted. Imagine if we were rapidly able to pathway people into these roles, even for shorter contracts?

The pandemic is horrendous. But it is also an opportunity for us to consider alternative ways to support one another, collaborate and work alongside one another in ways that have been absent from Aotearoa since neo-liberalism and associated scarcity dominated our practice.

Objective 4 – The needs of older workers who experience multiple disadvantage in the labour market are addressed in all aspects of the Government’s response to labour market disadvantage.

The experiences of older workers in the labour market is determined by a range of factors and therefore an effective Action Plan would need to take these into consideration.

NZCCSS strongly supports research being undertaken to understand the impact of specific issues which place workers at a disadvantage in the market place. An outcome of this understanding is tailored employment support for those who are long term unemployed or at risk of long-term unemployment.

We would however advocate that this research be both innovative itself (iterative, action research) and capture the innovation already occurring. We would be very interested in connecting with you to discuss what we already know is occurring, and the many ideas that our members have.