

## **Australian Statement Rights of the Older Persons**

Thirteen and a half percent of the Australian population is aged over 65. By 2050 it is projected that nearly one quarter of Australia's population will be over 65. At the same time, the number of Australians aged 85 and over is projected to increase from 400,000 in 2010 to 1.8 million Australians by 2050.

On 30 September 2010, in recognition of the concerns of older Australians and the projected growth in Australia's ageing population, the Government introduced legislation to establish a dedicated Age Discrimination Commissioner in the Australian Human Rights Commission. The Commissioner will address age discrimination by educating the community about discrimination and combating the attitudes and stereotypes which can contribute to discrimination on the basis of age.

This new initiative builds on existing mechanisms to protect the rights of Australia's older persons. These mechanisms include:

- The *Age Discrimination Act 2004* which prohibits age discrimination in many areas of public life, including employment and the provision of goods, services and facilities. The Act applies throughout Australia and is intended to promote a change in people's attitudes about the contributions of older persons to society. It is also through this Act that Australia implements the international commitment to eliminate age discrimination embodied in the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing as adopted in 2002;
- The rights of older people to health are protected through Australia's universal health care platform based on three fundamental pillars: free public hospital care; affordable medical services subsidised through the Medicare Benefits Scheme; and affordable medicines subsidised through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

Services delivered to all Australians through these three pillars, range from preventive health and early intervention services, through to the treatment of illness, chronic disease management, and acute care. In addition, the platform allows for the delivery of more intensive or tailored efforts to address particular needs of some groups including older people. The *National Health Act 1953* and the *Health Insurance Act 1973* provide for these arrangements.

- *The Aged Care Act 1997*, ensures access to aged care services by those who need them, regardless of race, culture, language, gender, economic circumstances or geographic location. Aged care services funded under the Act must meet quality standards designed to protect the health and well-being of care recipients. The Act is designed to encourage diverse, flexible and responsive aged care services and to promote ageing in place through the linking of care and support services to the places where older people prefer to live. The Act further protects and promotes the rights of care recipients, and gives them a voice through the Aged Care Complaints Investigation Scheme and the Aged Care Commissioner, advocacy services, the Community Visitors' Scheme, the Charter of Residents Rights and Responsibilities, and the Charter of Rights and Responsibilities for Community Care.

- All Australians who meet residence, means and age criteria are eligible to receive the Age Pension, without regard to their sex, ethnicity or origin. The Australian Age Pension is a non-contributory social security scheme that acts as a safety net for seniors with few other resources and supplements the retirement incomes of those with lower levels of private savings.
- The Consultative Forum on Mature Age Participation, established to provide advice to Government on practical solutions to address barriers to employment for mature age people, including employer and community attitudes, age-based discrimination, reskilling and career transitions, mentoring, suitability of training and retaining the expertise of older workers.
- Older Australians have access to a range of employment services through *Job Services Australia* and *Disability Employment Services*. In addition, in July 2010 the Australian Government committed \$43 million over four years to the *Experience+* initiative as a part of the Productive Ageing Package. *Experience+* is designed to help mature age Australians remain engaged in the labour market and encourage the transfer of their skills to younger generations. The initiative builds the Governments measures to support older Australians, in particular the changes to the Age Pension.

Australia is party to core international human rights treaties which provide protections against discrimination. Australia is also a party to a number of International Labour Organization Conventions protecting the right to work, in particular, the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention. Australia takes its international obligations seriously and as a State Party to these Conventions it provides protections to all Australians, including older persons, through legislative and policy measures.

In 2010, the Australian Government released *Australia's Human Rights Framework* (the Framework). The Framework reaffirms the Australian Government's commitment to protecting human rights, highlights the key guiding principles of education, engagement, protection and respect, and commits to the development of a new National Human Rights Action Plan.

The Government is also establishing an Advisory Panel on the Economic Potential of Senior Australians to give greater recognition to the contribution older people make to their families, the community, and the economy and to ensure that this contribution is considered in a range of policy debates.

As Australia looks towards 2050, and increasingly faces the challenges associated with an ageing population, we remain committed to ensuring older persons are able to live in dignity and security and be free of exploitation and physical or mental abuse. Australia looks forward to continuing its engagement with the international community to uphold these principles globally.