

**THE DRUM** Analysis and opinion  
on the issues of the day

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Headline From The Drum on ABC News 24

# Support is needed for longer working lives

By [Veronica Sheen](#)

Posted Fri 19 Jul 2013, 3:06pm AEST



[occupations](#). (teaff: www.flickr.com)

PHOTO: [Working to 67 will be very hard for people in many types of manual](#)

***If you are going to push back the age of retirement, you should make sure that older workers are given the support they need in order to comply, writes Veronica Sheen.***

***This is one of a series of articles looking at issues relating to care in our communities in the lead up to the 2013 federal election. More coverage can be found at the ABC's election website [Australia Votes](#).***

In the pile of issues that politicians think will give them traction in the forthcoming election, you probably won't find Australia's ageing population.

Maybe it doesn't come up in the focus group research, or is not deemed relevant in the family-focussed marginal electorates. So far I haven't heard a word about it. It certainly didn't figure in the Prime Minister's broad-ranging National Press Club Speech last week.

But if you are one of the legions of the demographic over 45, then you may wish to know where the parties stand on one of the most pertinent issues for your wellbeing in later life: your income.

For most people, this will depend on access to decent and well paid work well into your sixties. This isn't a hypothetical issue. The eligibility age for the means-tested age pension **increases from 65 to 67 by 2023**, affecting everyone born after July 1, 1952.

In addition, the preservation age for superannuation access increases from 55 to 60 years and **affects everyone born after July 1, 1960**. Of course, what we finally draw from superannuation will depend on how much work we have and how well paid it is over our working lives.

These changes to retirement incomes policy are a response to Australia's ageing demographic affecting taxation, social spending and economic growth as set out in the last **Treasury Intergenerational Report**.

Currently around 13.5 per cent of the population are aged 65 and over, but by 2050 this age group will make up almost 23 per cent of the population. There will be just 2.7 people of working age (15-64) compared to five now for each Australian aged 65 years and over.

A retirement incomes policy to require people to keep working well into their 60s, however justified this may be from a fiscal perspective, isn't backed up by any policies to help older workers to actually work longer.

It is easy enough for politicians and others in comfortable salaried jobs to say that everyone should keep working on into later life, but for many it may not be so easy to achieve for a range of reasons.

I am not arguing that the early retirement policies of old should be reinstated, or the earlier pension eligibility age reinstated. But I argue that the adjustment to later life working ages needs to be backed up by policies that actually help people to achieve it - and particularly focusing on certain vulnerable groups for whom working into later life may be a very challenging proposition.

Working to 67 will be very hard for people in many types of manual occupations including nursing and care work; various skilled trades; as well as labouring jobs.

There are high rates of musculoskeletal injuries for people in these occupations and the work becomes progressively more difficult to accomplish as one ages. I have never heard a moment's discussion as to how people in such occupations can make a transition into work that they can actually keep doing into later life.

This is one example of a serious flaw in a policy that assumes that everyone can simply keep going with an occupation chosen early in life. The real outcome is that such workers end on a disability pension, although the Commonwealth Government has made this more difficult to obtain.

Furthermore, the intensification of work, and the related growth in employment insecurity as explored in the [ACTU Inquiry into Insecure Work](#) last year, also poses significant challenges for older workers. Work intensification simply means putting more pressure on workers to achieve performance targets, and this can be a way of getting rid of slower workers who are also more likely to be older workers. As one woman who had been forced to quit a public sector administrative job explained to me:

*We were monitored on an hourly basis against performance benchmarks and if we did not reach them you would receive an email so there was a lot of pressure. They were always watching over you. There were productivity bonuses for the office, they called it team work, but it was a real pressure cooker. In nine years the individual benchmarks were doubled. Most people really struggled on a daily basis to make it.*

These practices are consistent with much of contemporary business strategy geared to continuous change in a fast-paced and competitive environment. Older workers within organisations may be seen as an impediment to these changes that businesses require - "the dead wood", as the Australian Human Rights Commission documented in

its **report on age discrimination**. But increased performance requirements can be a clever way of avoiding the claim of age discrimination - as we saw at [Toyota last year](#).

The Treasury Intergenerational Report points out that there will be a diminishing ratio of working-age to non-working-age people. But this doesn't mean that employers will necessarily look to employ more older workers. They still have options of off-shoring, importing workers, and technology substitution.

The need for multiple careers over the life course amid the swiftly changing contemporary economy and labour market has been well documented, but not much supporting policy has ever been implemented to assist in career transitions, especially for disadvantaged workers and those in unsustainable occupations for later life.

This is the unfinished business of retirement incomes policy.

*Dr Veronica Sheen is a lecturer at the School of Political and Social Inquiry at Monash University. View her full profile [here](#).*

**Topics:** [older-people](#), [work](#)

Comments (29)

Comments for this story are closed, but you can still [have your say](#).

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● **J.T.:**

19 Jul 2013 3:32:26pm

If you don't save for your retirement-guess what, no retirement for you.

If in your older age you can't afford to retire but due to your aged condition you can't work, you will not enjoy your life, the pension will be small, you will die poor.

Work hard, put money away then make sure you put more money away after that in case you need it.

Do the simple math or pay someone who will do it for you to work out how much you need to retire....otherwise, no retirement.

Retirement is not a human right.

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○ **mushroom:**

19 Jul 2013 7:57:50pm

J.T. people who started work in the fifties sixties and seventies did not have superannuation it did not exist.

The expectation was you worked hard honestly paid your taxes and retired to a well earned tax funded pension.

Now to tell them the money has been squandered and is not there to support them in retirement is a national disgrace and to ask tired worn bodies to soldier on is disgusting.

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- **Huonain:**

19 Jul 2013 3:32:46pm

Down here in Tassie, the State Govt is offering an incentive for public servants to retire early. Meanwhile, the federal govt is offering an incentive to stay in the workforce beyond retirement age.

It appears the govt doesn't know whether I should be coming or going. Bureaucracy - don't you love it? Whichever way I go, I get to pick the taxpayers pocket!

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- **Hobbit:**

19 Jul 2013 3:47:01pm

Thank you for drawing attention to this problem: it is unfortunately too true. As heard from a HR manager, despite laws against age discrimination, he routinely refuses older workers, not because they might not be able to do the job now, but because they are more prone to have physical problems in a shorter future and to access working compensation, which costs the business. If you access working comp once, you are already tarnished. It IS true that older people get more physical problems with age, and I can understand his logic; however, elders have a wealth of knowledge to bring and are often (not always, true) able to keep up with new technology and practices.

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- **Dan:**

19 Jul 2013 3:48:34pm

If people want to work past retirement age and are capable of doing so, good luck to them. I plan to go at 65 because I can afford to and I really don't want to work past then. I'd just like a rest!

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- **TrevorN:**

19 Jul 2013 3:51:11pm

The sad truth is that if you are a mature age worker - no matter what your qualifications - looking for a job it is going to be very hard to find one because of the inherent bias towards older workers.

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- **Charles:**

19 Jul 2013 3:54:21pm

Another ion a conga line of entitlement development scenarios. Here's a thought, why don't we just let them work it our for themselves. If they don't work long enough, then tough, they get to live on what they have managed to acquire, and if they need to work longer to get what they want, well good luck to them, let's not get in their way.

This idea of making life decisions for everyone else is not only another of those hare-brained ideas of the welfare addicted political class, but it is also a society destroying policy as it just takes away any incentive to think for yourself (Left/Progressives take note, you already have this problem in spades).

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- **Ruperts Phone Service:**

19 Jul 2013 6:46:40pm

Problem for you Charles is that your solution create more problems than it solves. Too many to list here but health would be one on the biggest.

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- **Charles:**

19 Jul 2013 7:39:15pm

Self sufficiency is the ideal here. not more spoon feeding. If we don't trust people to make their own decisions then all we do is create a generation or two of people who have a childlike dependence problem? What is there to like with that?

By the by, the way our health system is going it won't be affordable in few years, so then we will have to relinquish some parts of it anyway, so why not change now and avoid the sudden deprivation when it does happen?

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- **kevin madas brennan:**

19 Jul 2013 3:56:29pm

yes putting back the retiring age is good for some but I find it hard at 68 to do hard yaka any more.

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● **pc:**

19 Jul 2013 3:58:54pm

a good article there are lots of trades especially where its not possible to keep working into your late 60's.

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● **JoeBloggs:**

19 Jul 2013 4:00:07pm

"Support is needed for longer working lives"

Judging from the attached photo all they need is a good solid fence to lean on.

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● **Alison Cann:**

19 Jul 2013 4:08:26pm

Veronica,

Today, there is a grey area in Australian society and indeed it matters as the grey matter of an ageing brain has to be put to work if it is to work at all while the greys wait in God's waiting room to die.

Or you can dye the grey old hairs so they disappear but life's experiences and the wisdom still in the cortex needs action and all that life in a capsule is lost to society because the people who are younger and therefore incompetent don't want to use the experience of the elderly.

That is why we have the government we have got. They want to change horses mid-stream while feeding chooks.

A pox on their bloody stupidity. You cross the River Darling first. The next Federal government won't be any different that what we have got when voters want to improve the place. How can the polities in the trees improve things when the elderly are forgotten beyond the political subject that they are the recipient of a Super scheme that has been evolving since Keating the Great One was in power putting the edges on Australia's Superannuation Scheme?

Keating, since old Paul has gone, there hasn't been a politician like him. That was when politicians were men.

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● **amnesia:**

19 Jul 2013 4:08:54pm

I'm 65 and glad to be retired! I was a boilermaker/welder....very physical work that has left me over the years with various ills....scoliosis, tinitus( ringing in the ears), the odd burn and hernias.

Godness we need some time to enjoy life!

Right now Qld gov are asking experienced senior nurses to take redundancy... to give jobs to younger inexperienced nurses..... but want us to work longer at the same time?

Crazy!

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● **libell:**

19 Jul 2013 4:15:48pm

working in the building trade from 15 to 60 my body is worn out to that of an 80 year old my skin is melanoma country I have not been silly enough to smoke but my lungs have lovely asbestos lesions and to tie my shoelaces I have to sit down and the old blokes I used to work with loved saying hard work never killed anyone. perhaps true but certainly ages you faster. but! if the Menzies liberal government riding high on the sheep's back had introduced superannuation then people like me wouldn't be the burden on today's workers as we keep reading about. also the bullxxx some right wing bloggers write about Aussies not working hard enough then get out of your airconditioned workplace and travel from la la land to the real world.

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● **Trek:**

19 Jul 2013 4:17:44pm

Government should do everything possible to encourage people to provide for themselves. The problem is that Labor always does what 'feels good' never considering consequences of their misplaced 'self-righteousness'. Labor believes that taxing those who want to provide for themselves and giving to those who are happy to do nothing but demand for 'their rights to share in wealth created by someone else's hard work, is social justice. That is not any type of justice. It is 'feel good' misplaced care, encouraging people to welfare dependence. Such misplaced, 'self-righteous' policies will create ever increasing burden on the future taxpayers.

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● **roger:**

19 Jul 2013 4:19:13pm

Brilliant !!!!! From the age of 45 I felt uneasy and threatened.

I started out life as a management accountant in the 60's but "drifted" into sales where, of course your performance was easily monitored. I worked for a succession of companies always trying to keep ahead of the game as it became obvious that markets do not stay the same and you will perish if you hang around as management generally saw change and "youth" as the panacea for all it's ills. I left the full-time workforce at age 58 to look after elderly parents but my wife who worked as a senior manager for a local authority then suffered bullying and harrassment by the so-called director she was responsible to purely to force her to resign which she eventually did.

The achievement of retirement at age 65 or 67 whatever should result in the award of the Order of Australia as a compiliment for your survival skills.

Despite all the rhetoric experience is not generally recognized or rewarded in our current society and I doubt that will change any time soon.

All I know is that many of my acquaintances are so happy to be out of the daily grind !!!

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● **bobb:**

19 Jul 2013 4:20:12pm

A good article. I have never met any retired person who wants to go back to work. There are of course exceptions, those who live to work and those who have nothing to interest them when they retire. In my experience most persons over 60 years are resistant to change, new ideas and innovation and as such would not be able to make the necessary adjustments to changing work conditions. I would suggest that those who advocate later retirement are deluded and not in touch with the realities of the workplace

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○ **frangipani:**

19 Jul 2013 6:55:11pm

That's interesting. In my experience, older people are more amenable to change (because they've seen so much of it) and younger people are resistant because they figure they already know everything.

There's really no physical or mental reason that most (not all) of us can't work an extra couple of years, given the changes in longevity over the last half century.

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● **Steve P:**

19 Jul 2013 4:47:14pm

All these new schemes have to be paid for somehow and the savings the govt makes by pushing back the age for retirement frees up money for worthy things like new huts on Manus island and Navy personnel to save asylum seekers and the like.

Stop being selfish.

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● **GJA:**

19 Jul 2013 5:05:55pm

Pension or not, my circumstances are such that I will have little alternative than to work until I die, most affordably to die early. More likely, of course, is a disabling stroke, heart attack, or dementia, but I can hope for a clean break.

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● **greenspider:**

19 Jul 2013 5:06:38pm

Perhaps we are looking at this problem from the wrong perspective. We may need to revise the definition of "work". After serving in the Army for 16 years and suffering a post-traumatic stress disability following service in South Vietnam, in 1979 I found myself facing a future where I might not be "employable" in the normal sense of the word. I thus resolved to make myself capable of surviving no matter what, and spent my last year in service preparing.

I bought a sewing machine, a knitting machine, a small woodworking tool kit and, a rarity in 1979, a computer. I was not able to work full time for longish periods, due to inability to handle the stress, but nevertheless I managed to survive, if not actually flourish, working part-time, making my own clothes, including shoes, making my own bread (which I still do), my own beer (I swapped to drinking brandy in 1990 but make whiskey liqueur) and getting around town on a bicycle.

I sold my car in 1980 and have not bought one since, although in 1996 I bought a small motorcycle, and still ride when necessary. I've built two solar powered recumbent tricycles, and despite being unable to walk very far without assistance, I'm able to do most of my shopping by bicycle and trailer.

So ... by not buying another car, in today's terms I'm saving roughly \$40,000 (including finance charges, servicing, parts, petrol, registration etc). The old saw "A penny saved is a penny earned" would apply here in my view. I would submit that I have done \$40,000 of work here. I am still able to do about 8 hours (paid) work a week at the computer, but this is well below the threshold of eating into my service pension.

The fixation on seeing employment ONLY in terms of turning up at a particular place at a particular time and receiving a financial recompense from a particular person seems a bit, if you'll pardon the expression, old hat. Perhaps we need to promote concepts such as University of the Third Age to



help the older end of the spectrum to gain new, relevant skills, not "employment" skills, but "living" skills.

Why, I taught myself to play about 10 different musical instruments in my time, and even earned money busking, not much, but it was fun and I got to meet lots of people, and the whole way of life gave me a wonderful sense of freedom and satisfaction.

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● **OntheRun:**

19 Jul 2013 6:05:39pm

People need to work longer and longer as the basics such as a house become harder and harder to afford.

I am young (relatively) and not concerned about retirement. I am concerned about job security, then finding a house (two bed apartment) I can buy, then I will start looking at super.

My uni degree doesnt cut it in the job market and I know postgraduate study wont either. The courses are largely irrelevant to the market.

I suspect by the time I have paid of a house (probably when I am 45), I will need to work until I am 80. Due to the need of financial security, having children would be less likely and combined with other people more migrants would be needed.

What are the changes that are causing the retirement age to ever increase and Australians not to feel secure in raising children? No matter what support there will be, my body will give out eventually on either issue.

Have we effectively made unemployment (Unemployment for under 25's is currently 15%) and university the equivalent of retirement? There is a low income provided by the government and in the case of unemployment a general sense of uselessness. In University there is enjoyment, time to do be involved/study what you enjoy (not what will get you employed) and subsidised perks for being a student although you are forced into a modest lifestyle. That sounds much like retirement to me.

I think the best thing we could do is consider the path that we are encouraging children to go upon because there is increasingly little light at the end of the tunnel. If we are to have the defacto retirement for people in their 20's so they can become wiser, lets at least be honest about it.

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● **Tory Boy:**

19 Jul 2013 6:37:15pm

You are missing the point. These calls are nothing to do with encouraging or helping people to stay in work longer, they are about limiting access to social security payments. Can't wait for the super industry to start demanding all recipients are confirmed dead 2 years prior to receiving their money.

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● **Johnno:**

19 Jul 2013 6:43:18pm

The author makes some good points but does not address the fact that it must be the individuals responsibility to be "fit" to work.

As one gets older, one has to actually factor in staying physically fit.

If the body is allowed to drift into old age substituting pills for physical fitness, then the mind will hurry the ageing process up by stressing about health and financial security.

Competing for jobs is doubly difficult if there are self inflicted health issues.

Let's hope that more people in the demographic of 50-70 can figure out for themselves the benefits of working, in their own time, to keep fit and hold a job.

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● **Fairgo:**

19 Jul 2013 6:46:01pm

I'm 65, hated work, we own our home and we are happy to live a frugal relaxed life on the pension.

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● **mushroom:**

19 Jul 2013 8:00:05pm

Perhaps our pampered politicians should set an example and delay their tax payer funded superannuation until age sixty seven.

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● **RC:**

19 Jul 2013 8:09:23pm

The concept agreed to by "Centrist" governments throughout the World regarding retirement age is that where the age of retirement is at the same age as the average death age of males workers.

That means that the age of retirement in Uruguay, for example, where the average death age of male workers is at 45 years of age, and that's the retirement/pension start age.

Is this why there are strong manoeuvres afoot to have the pension start age at year 73 per male worker, here?

The better social policy for all workers in our Society is retirement at age 60.

This will free up jobs for our grossly unemployed youth.

However, for such to occur the pension would need to equate the ongoing wage, in these days of rapacious increases of the cost of living.

The good example of this other concept is that of the retirement conditions of our MP's and senior civil servants where they retire in the one case after 21 years as an MP on their previous years stipend plus travel and other perks, and in the other on the average of their last 3 years of service salary plus travel and other perks.

Now its the workers' turn, or not, to be so well cared for after 40 or 45 years of service, right?

Will the next government have the courage to be so social-minded?

I have my doubts!!

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● **RC:**

19 Jul 2013 8:21:57pm

What of the lot of Kiwis working here and paying taxes and compulsory "super" levies?

Are they to continue to be "regulated" as second class non-residents?

If so they will not have any rights to a pension at all, unless the government reimplements the CER Treaty which originally gave them and us equal rights and status in the others country.

To our shame this inequity continues even though such contribute more than \$2.5 billions per annum in taxes alone currently to our Federal coffers.

This shame also emanates from denying them the full rights that all other taxpaying workers in proud Ozzie have.

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