



Social Justice STOCKTAKE



Older Australians Discrimination and Hardship

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Were you surprised to see the concern Australians have for our elders?

Discrimination and hardship for older Australians was not a particularly commonly identified concern but it was identified by over 10 per cent of all respondents. As our population ages (it is expected that the over 65-year-old population will increase from 15 per cent of the total population to 22 per cent of the population after 2050) it will be important to ensure that any discrimination or hardship is addressed and does not increase.

It is worth noting that many of the issues that were identified more frequently also affect older Australians, including financial hardship, housing and homelessness (especially for women 55 years and older) and social isolation. It may be that respondents identified the general issue rather than the cohort of people they see it affecting.

How do you believe COVID-19 restrictions affected the elderly?

Older people face greater risks of serious illness if they contract COVID-19, particularly if they have existing health issues that compromise their health. Some elderly people have limited mobility and limited capacity to communicate verbally, including through digital technologies, in order to be able to access health information and seek assistance for their needs. Others might live alone without close social networks, or in aged care facilities that experienced significant strains on their staffing and resources during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For these reasons, elderly Australians are one of groups that have been most affected by COVID-19 restrictions, and one of the priority groups (together with young adults) that have been most vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation during the COVID-19 restrictions.

What are some of the concerns you see in elderly clients approaching The Salvation Army for help?

There are a wide range of concerns among older Australians approaching The Salvation Army for help.

We have found that older people generally want to live independently in their own homes and can be concerned that they may not be able to without extra support. We operate programs that support older Australians to live independently where they want to do so and provide support to combat exclusion and social isolation.

We also see concern around incidences of elder abuse towards older Australians, including financial abuse. Older Australians can also be experiencing lack of social connection and loneliness, so our work supports volunteering and social connection for and with older Australians.



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What are the main issues around discrimination of older Australians that we need to be paying more attention to?

Ageism can be a real barrier to opportunities for social and economic engagement, including workforce participation of older Australians, for example those over 55 years but in pre-retirement who are interested in entering or re-entering the workforce.

Older Australians can face assumptions about their level of ability, vitality and competence in many areas including their digital literacy, that can impede the realisation and full enjoyment of the rights of older people.

What does this tell us about how Australian's value older, vulnerable people in our community?

Older Australians have made, and continue to make, an enormous contribution to Australian society and we need to ensure they can live with dignity and on their own terms as much as possible. Stigma and stereotypes around aging, and being old, overlook the richness of experience and knowledge that older people's life experience can bring, and the richness of intergenerational connections.

At The Salvation Army many of our volunteers are older Australians and so we see firsthand the extraordinary contribution and immense value of older Australians.

What more can be done on a government level to assist the elderly?

The Federal Government is responsible for the aged care system as a whole and income support for older Australians. Adequate funding for the care of older people can be improved, including health, aged care and social services that provide wrap-around supports that allow all people to age 'in place' where they feel safe and connected.

All levels of government can invest in programs and services for older Australians informed by lived experience and evidence-informed research about the needs and preferences of older Australians. These might include education around digital literacy and safety, accessible transport, financial literacy training, protections against elder abuse, social connection and loneliness, training to (re)enter the workforce and increased volunteerism.