

MEDIA RELEASE

Older Australians Most Likely to Volunteer

7 May 2018 – During [National Volunteer Week \(21-27 May\)](#), The Benevolent Society would like to recognise the contribution made by older Australians. While we celebrate their contribution, there is also a concern that it serves to mask a significant social problem: older people who want to work but can't because of ageist stereotypes and attitudes.

The Benevolent Society, in a recent survey of 1,005 Australians age 50 and over from across the country, found that 60 per cent of respondents had encountered ageism on the job or while looking for work.

Says Dr Kirsty Nowlan, Executive Director strategic Engagement Research and Advocacy the Benevolent Society, "We have known for some time that people over the age of 55 have been experiencing age discrimination both in looking for work and in their workplace and our survey confirms that. We are very concerned about ageism and are advocating to change people's attitudes about age and what older people can contribute. After all, we are all getting older.

"We also believe that many older Australians have chosen to volunteer if they cannot find paid work because they have a lot to contribute in the community. Volunteering offers connection and a sense of purpose, as well as the chance to learn new skills. Additionally, we know from our respite care programs that many people who are retirement age are in a position where they are caring for others, usually family members, like their grandchildren or spouses. This is unpaid work, especially caring for little ones while their parents work, and it is in effect love combined with volunteering."

The [Australian Human Rights Commission](#) found that being over age 55 is a barrier to finding a job or getting more hours of paid work, and 35 per cent said they had experienced discrimination because of their age, which the results of The Benevolent Society survey confirmed. Older Australians still have a great deal to contribute. Marlene Krasovitsky, Director Campaigns – Older Australians, The Benevolent Society, says, "Many of us are living longer, healthier lives and we

want to, or need to, keep working. For many the idea of retiring at age 65 is an outmoded idea. It's heartbreaking, and ridiculous, that people are thought of as unemployable past age 50."

Rates of volunteering among the "baby boomer" generation – recently retired, healthy and wanting to contribute to their communities – are continuing to rise compared to previous generations. The Australian Institute of Family Studies says that about 25 per cent of those over age 65 volunteer and almost 20 per cent of those over age 65 care for others. This number rises to 25 per cent for those aged 70 or more.

The [Australian Human Rights Commission](#) determined that Australians aged 65 and older contribute \$39 billion each year in unpaid caring and volunteer work, and said they should be recognised for their role in building strong and healthy communities. Increasing paid employment of Australians over 55 years by five per cent would add \$48 billion to the bottom line of the national economy every year.

According to Volunteering Australia ([2015 report](#)), those over 55 years old volunteer 80 hours per year, whilst those over 65 volunteer 104 hours per year, an average of about 2.5 hours per week. Similar findings were determined by a Giving Australia [2016 report](#) where it was found that those over age 65 volunteered the most hours of any other group of Australians.

During [National Volunteer Week](#), The Benevolent Society acknowledges the outstanding work that older Australians are doing by volunteering to help others and agrees that they are changing a lot by giving a great deal of their time.

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For more information, please contact

Melanie King, Manager Media Relations & Public Affairs, The Benevolent Society

02 8262 3547 or 0414 341 328

Melanie.king@benevolent.org.au

About The Benevolent Society

The Benevolent Society is Australia's first charity, working as a catalyst for social justice and change for over 200 years. Founded in 1813, The Benevolent Society advocates for a better life for all Australians, and provides in-home services for older Australians, and people with disability, as well as providing programs in Family support and early intervention. We help people age well and live their best lives, staying in their homes wherever possible.

For more information, please visit www.benevolent.org.au, on Facebook/thebenevolentsociety or on Twitter - @BenevolentAU