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Australia well behind on mature age employment

A new report launched today has found Australia continues to lag behind international counterparts when it comes to mature age employment.

The report from the National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre, *Experience Works- The Mature Age Employment Challenge*, shows Australia ranked 13th in a list of OECD countries which measured labour force participation rates in the over 55s.

National Seniors chief executive Michael O'Neill said weak age discrimination laws, negative attitudes toward older workers and a lack of incentives for businesses were linked to the low participation rates amongst the over 55s.

"Australia ranked behind New Zealand, Scandinavia, UK, USA, Japan and seven other countries. This really shows how older people remain significantly under-represented here in the labour market," O'Neill said.

O'Neill said mature age employment had fallen off the agenda of government, business and unions.

"Australia's poor positioning on this issue compared to other countries has not changed in the last 10 years. If we are to break this stalemate, leadership is clearly needed."

"Looking beyond the current crisis, one of the biggest issues that we face is a major skills shortage with the forecasted ageing population. Australia cannot afford skilled over 55s who want to work being shut out of the workforce," he said.

"We already know that Australia loses a massive \$10.8 billion by not utilising the experience of older Australians who want to work and this will cost us hugely if we don't plan for the future."

ABS statistics show Australians 55 and over are generally unemployed for three times longer than young people.

"Australia needs to increase and improve employment opportunities for older workers and reduce the barriers which prohibit many from gaining work," O'Neill said.

"We hope the report acts as a catalyst for encouraging government, employer groups and unions to develop a more coordinated approach to this challenge and National Seniors intends to press all stakeholders on these issues."

National Seniors recommends a number of ways Australia can improve:

- Strengthening age discrimination laws
- Creating incentives to encourage mature age workers to increase their skills
- Reducing disincentives for employment from government income support.

For a full copy of the report visit www.nationalseniors.com.au

Michael O'Neill is in Canberra today and is available for interviews on 0448 125 898.

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