

Coming of Age: Breaking intergenerational barriers in Australia's workplaces

2021 Report



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Questions?

We'd love to discuss your diversity, inclusion and belonging initiatives. Please email aumarketing@indeed.com or reach out to your Indeed account manager to arrange a meeting.

Research methodology

The research in this whitepaper was commissioned by ThatComms Co on behalf of Indeed and conducted by YouGov. The study was conducted online between 11 - 17 February 2021, involving 2,060 working age Australians (aged between 18-64) currently in either full or part-time employment, or actively looking for work.

Age, gender and location quotas were applied to the sample and following the completion of interviewing, the data was weighted by age, gender and location to reflect the latest ABS Australian working age population estimates.

Sources:

1 comScore, Total Visits, March 2021

2 Google Analytics, Unique Visitors, February 2020

What is diversity, inclusion and belonging?

In Australia, the society we live in is made up of a broad spectrum of human demographics, so it makes sense that employers are becoming increasingly committed to supporting diversity and inclusion in the workplace. But what does it mean in practice and why is it so important?

Diversity is everything that makes us different

Diversity refers to the range of human characteristics that make us different from one another and there is no real exhaustive list of what these could entail. A diverse workforce that is truly reflective of wider society and its rich tapestry of cultural and social differences is not only important because it supports equal opportunity, but it can also bring many tangible benefits to companies.

By bringing together people with unique personalities, perspectives, and life experiences – who all think in different ways – diverse teams are said to be more innovative and better at tackling problems than less diverse teams.

Inclusion is what makes diversity possible

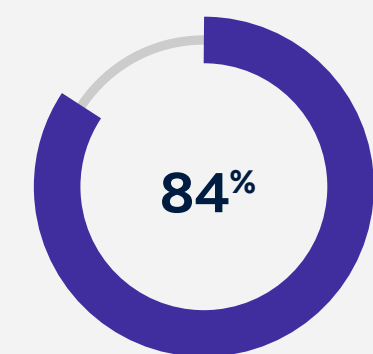
Inclusion refers to everything that makes achieving and maintaining diverse workplaces feasible. Inclusivity in the workplace is an enabler for diversity because it addresses the actions, behaviours, and social norms among employees that collectively create an environment where everyone feels accepted, respected, valued, and encouraged to participate.

Company hiring practices, the way people communicate, and strong shared values can all contribute to the extent to which people from different backgrounds feel included. Without inclusion, diversity in an organisation is neither sustainable, nor likely to yield the many positive business outcomes that diversity can bring.

Belonging is a feeling

People feel they belong when they experience a true connection with the workplace community, which includes all the people around them and the environment they work in. Belonging is about feeling free to ask questions while learning and growing alongside others regardless of your differences.

In collaboration with YouGov, Indeed has carried out one of the most comprehensive studies into diversity, inclusion and belonging (DI&B) within Australian workplaces. The Indeed/YouGov survey shows that an overwhelming majority of Australian workers (84%) think it's important to work for an organisation that promotes DI&B for everyone.



84% of people think it's important to work for an organisation that promotes DI&B for everyone.

State of Play: Spotlight on DI&B values across the generations

It's often said that along with age comes the wisdom of experience, and it looks like this hard-earned 'wisdom' might be driving our understanding of DI&B at work. The YouGov survey commissioned by Indeed found older generations are more likely than their younger colleagues to hold a firm belief in some of the key values underpinning DI&B in the workplace.

While the numbers are few, more 18-34-year-olds lean towards a cynical view of DI&B at work.

At the same time, while the numbers are few, more 18-34-year-olds lean towards a cynical view of DI&B at work with more than

one-in-ten (11%) saying it's about filling quotas and one-in-ten (10%) believing DI&B is just interference from HR. This compares to 8% and 5%, respectively, among people aged 50-64.

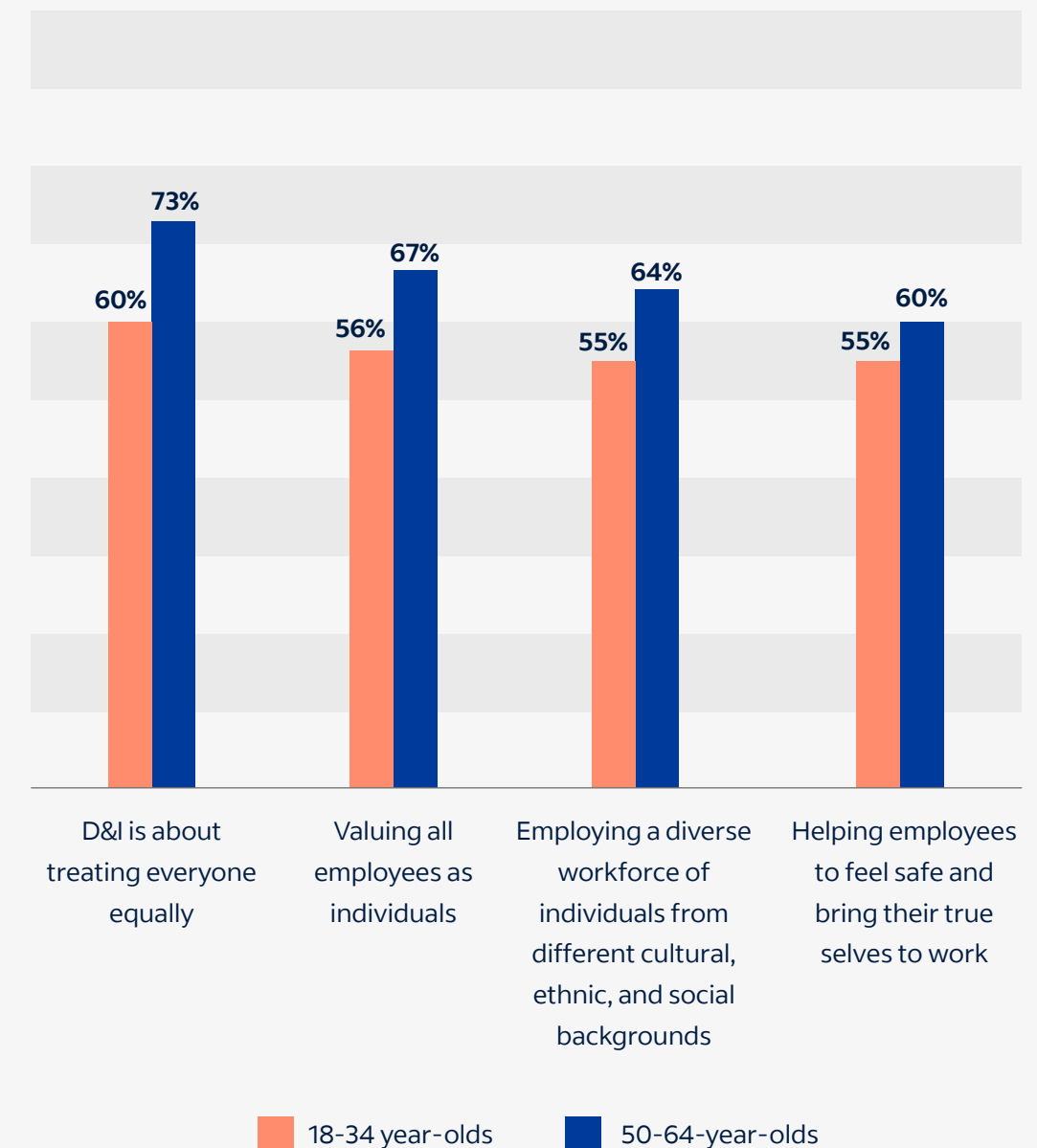
2x

18-34-year-olds are twice as likely to think DI&B is interference from HR than 50-64-year-olds.

"There are times where I disagree with decisions or directions that I believe do not match the value of the organisation. I want to defend those values as a key value of mine."

– Male, 48

What Australians think diversity and inclusion means



Younger workers are less likely to give their employer top marks for DI&B

Lower levels of confidence and certainty among younger people around what DI&B looks like might explain why far less 18-34-year-olds would give their organisation top marks for DI&B. The Indeed/YouGov survey shows just over two-in-ten (21%) workers aged 18-34 would rate their organisation 5 out of 5 stars for promoting diversity and inclusion, but this rises to almost three-in-ten (29%) for 50-64-year-olds.

With strong signs that many people are learning about the values of DI&B through their life and work experiences, organisations should do as much as possible to entrench these values across their workforce. Designing onboarding processes and ongoing training and support programs around the principles of DI&B, is vital to ensuring all generations are on the same page when it comes to recognising the fundamentals of DI&B.

“I feel as though I’m often underestimated due to my young age, however, I believe I perform above average for my age.”

– Female, 20, VIC

“I get judged based on assumptions and stereotypes and spoken down to because of my age, even though I have worked there longer than most other employees.”

– Female, 21, NSW

“The majority of my colleagues are from older generations and are more ‘traditional’, so they have outdated views and values. I have also heard and seen them make jokes about people’s ethnicity, sexual orientation and culture.”

– Female, 24, WA

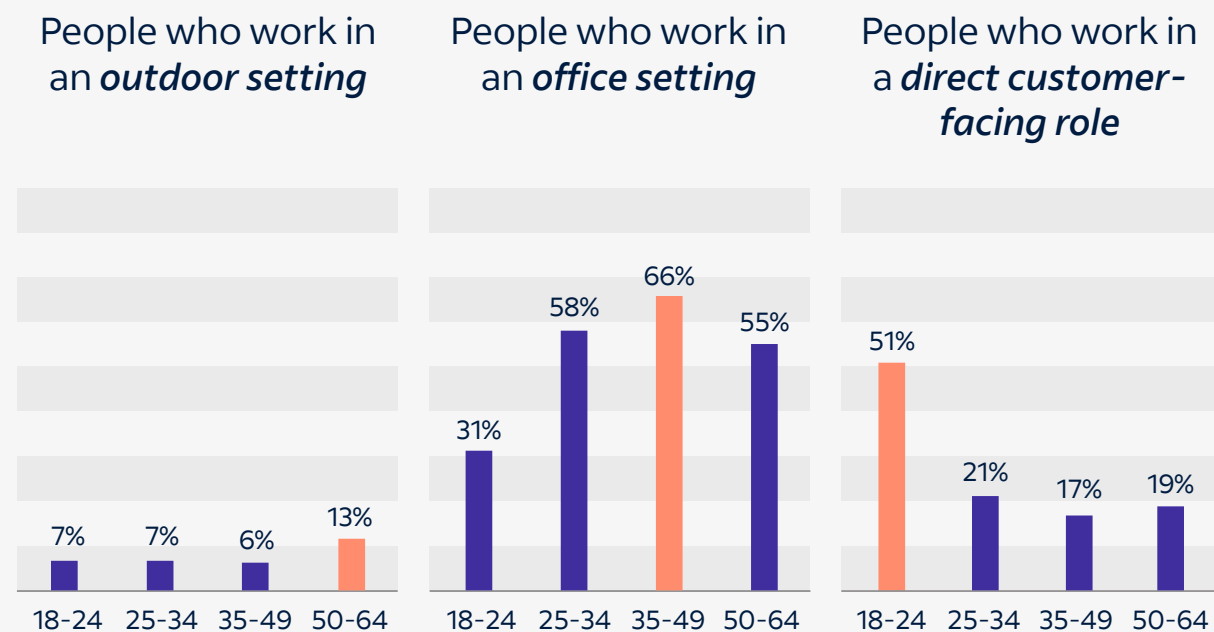


The relationship between age and where we work

Is equal representation of age groups possible in all workplaces?

The representation of different age groups varies substantially across different types of workplaces. Interestingly, people aged 50-64 are around twice as likely to work in an outdoor setting such as a trade, farming, or mining compared to other age groups.

On the other hand, while Australia's youngest workers aged 18-24-years-old are around half as likely to work in an office setting compared to all other age groups, they're more than twice as likely to work in a direct customer-facing role such as a retail shop or food premises.



A report by PwC emphasises that every generation has their own distinct expectations of work, driven by different motivations, behaviours, and beliefs – from the oldest valuing conformity, traditional values and hierarchical management styles to the youngest valuing independence, entrepreneurialism, and face-to-face communication.

All these intergenerational traits are likely to influence the type of environment and culture Australians choose to work in. Consequently, employers have scope to improve DI&B across the generations by offering experiences which recognise and cater for the diversity of working styles and values at play in multi-generational workforces.

Larger organisations are more likely to engage older workers

31% of 50-64-year-olds work in companies of over 500 employees, compared to 22% of 18-24-year-olds.

While employers can take steps to successfully build multi-generational workforces, it's important to understand there may be other uncontrollable factors influencing the representation of age groups in some businesses. For example, more younger workers may apply for customer-facing roles because they're typically associated with flexible hours which fit in with their studies.

Similarly, a higher proportion of Australia's oldest workers might be attracted to outdoor jobs which offer the opportunity to monetise hobbies, such as gardening or home maintenance. Meanwhile, more traditional jobs including some trades, mining, and farming may be less revered or coveted by younger workers.

The impact of age on our experiences during and post-COVID -19

Younger employees are more likely to have experienced change and uncertainty at work during the pandemic

The years 2020 and 2021 are likely to be remembered for the unprecedented levels of change and uncertainty experienced all around the world—both economically and socially. The pandemic has impacted people in different ways, and some more than others depending on a variety of factors. In this context, the Indeed/YouGov survey shows some age groups have been affected at work more than others during this time.

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of respondents aged 50-64 say they have not experienced reduced hours, been stood down, lost a job, or changed

jobs since the beginning of the pandemic. Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum, only just over half (53%) of 18-34-year-olds say their jobs haven't been impacted in any of these ways.

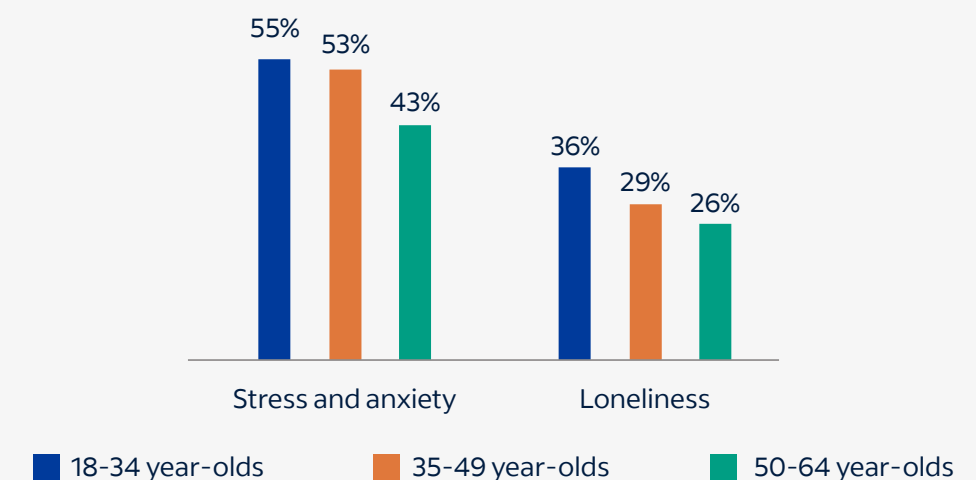
The results are perhaps unsurprising given that COVID-19 restrictions have disproportionately impacted industries such as the arts, entertainment, and hospitality where younger workers are heavily represented. The prevalence of casual workers in these industries also means that JobKeeper has had minimal effect on preserving roles.

Employers must do more to address the mental health impacts of COVID-19 on younger workers

It's a harsh reality—the pandemic and its consequences have taken their toll on the mental health and wellbeing of many people in Australia and across the globe, but modelling by the Brain and Mind Centre at the University of Sydney has reported that young people are some of the most at risk.

Specifically, experts suggest young people are more likely to be disproportionately impacted by fears of unemployment in the event of a continued recession. Unsurprisingly, the mental health impacts of COVID-19 on Australians appear to be increasingly prevalent among younger people.

“What have you experienced personally since the COVID-19 pandemic?”



As many companies navigate their recovery from the pandemic, employers should implement measures to mitigate the risks of their employees experiencing adverse mental health impacts. As part of this strategy, organisations should identify and address the specific issues and challenges faced by their youngest workers to ensure everyone feels equally empowered and supported as a valued team member.

Increased engagement and productivity are also key benefits of building resilience right across the board. [Guidelines by the Australian government](#) suggest open and honest communication, change management, and access to support are key steps to improving mental health and wellbeing at work in the pandemic environment. They also stress the importance of building in time to 'refresh and recharge' to help manage the extra mental load.



Australian workplaces are increasingly likely to allow work from home for older age groups

The pandemic made working from home a necessity during lockdowns, but your age might impact the extent to which this becomes a lasting trend. While a [separate PwC survey](#) suggests nearly three-quarters of us (72%) want to continue with a mix of remote and in-office work post-COVID-19, the Indeed/YouGov survey shows less than a quarter (24%) of 18-24-year-old workers are allowed to work from home, rising sharply to 38% of 25-34-year-olds and 48% of 35-49-year-olds.

The correlation between age and ability to work from home might indicate that older workers are more trusted by employers to stay focused and be productive in a remote environment away from management. At the same time, employers may consider that older and more experienced workers are less reliant on team support while junior employees will develop faster when surrounded by others. Though, it might also reflect that large portions of the younger population are employed in industries such as hospitality and retail, which aren't conducive to working from home arrangements.

2x

35-49-year-olds are twice as likely to be allowed to work from home than workers aged 18-24.

Does a lack of support present a barrier to remote work for senior workers?

Bucking the trend, the proportion of workers aged 50-64 who say they're allowed to work from home drops back slightly to 41%. What's more, while nearly seven-in-ten (69%) 35-49-year-olds say they've worked from home more since the COVID-19 pandemic began, less 50-64-year-olds (64%) will say the same.

With remote working practices growing in popularity and becoming more widely

accepted as part of the future of work, organisations must ensure they don't leave behind their most senior employees who haven't worked in the digital age through much of their careers.

As technology continues to advance, ongoing training and support across a range of remote working tools and solutions will be integral to ensuring workplaces stay diverse and equally inclusive for all generations.

"Only younger workers receive further training."

– Female, 37, WA

"Younger people seem to get the chance to move into different positions more with less experience."

– Male, 56, NSW

"I feel that older staff do not get the same opportunities and career advancement."

The experience they have along with life experience is extremely valuable."

– Male, 61, WA



How age is affecting our experience at work

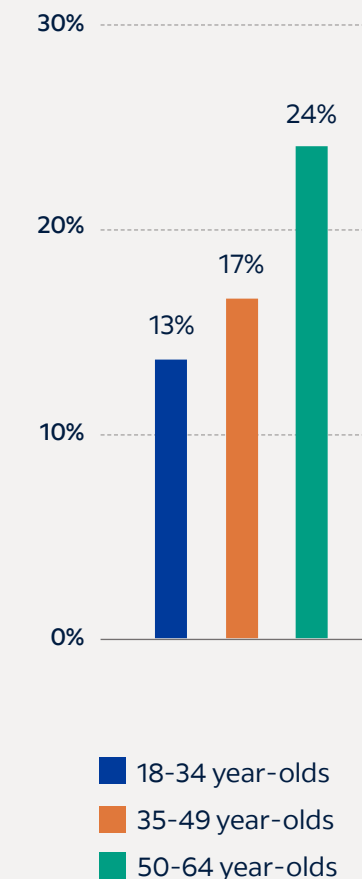
Are Australian workplaces ageist?

Australia is experiencing an ageing workforce. With the rising costs of living outstripping wage growth and the pension age set to continue to increase until 2023, many people are working for longer than ever before. But a [National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination against Older Australians and Australians with Disability](#) found older Australians experienced discrimination at various stages of the employment cycle from recruitment to professional development. It's perhaps not surprising, then, that in this environment the Indeed/YouGov survey shows many Australians feel it is necessary to hide their age at work as they get older.

As the workforce grows older, organisations must prioritise inclusive environments that embrace and nurture the unique skills, experiences, and perspectives offered by older workers in the context of a truly multigenerational workforce. Interestingly, the National Inquiry has since influenced the recent launch of a new training program, 'Upholding the Rights of Older Workers', developed by The Australian Human Rights Commission.

The program was designed to highlight age discrimination in the workplace, outline the benefits of employing older people, and provide practical ways of working with older employees to foster engagement and retention.

People who hide their age at work



24%

Almost one-quarter of 50-64-year-old workers say they hide their age at work.

"If they realise how old I am they may not give me shifts."

– Female, 63, Victoria

"I feel that I need to hide my age as it's a young company."

– Male, 46, Victoria

It's harder for older workers to find work quickly or secure new opportunities

As the National Inquiry points out, systemic ageism across our workplaces can have a negative impact on workers' abilities to find work quickly or secure new development opportunities. While nearly one-third (32%) of workers aged 18-24 have secured a job within as little as 1 to 3 months, only just over one-in-ten (12%) people aged 50-64 have found work in such a short time frame.

The survey also shows that over one-third (34%) of workers aged 50-64 have spent more than two years looking for work, but only one-in-ten (11%) of those aged 18-34 have experienced the same difficulty. Roughly twice as many workers aged 50-64 (65%) have worked for their current employer for more than three years compared to only 36% of

18-34-year-olds, which could indicate the lack of confidence older workers feel when it comes to seeking new opportunities or a career change.

Deciding not to hire older candidates could be causing organisations to miss out.

Deciding not to hire older candidates could be causing organisations to miss out, especially in the longer-term.

With Millennials expected to make up 75% of the Australian workforce by 2025, employers should recognise the critical role that older workers can play in the intergenerational transfer of knowledge – before it's too late.

“When seeking new roles, I feel my age is a negative factor in my selection.”

– Male, 55, NSW

“I hide my age because it can be seen as a negative because of the investment in a new employee who may not stay as long as a younger person.”

– Female, 41, NSW

Australia's most fortunate 'middle age' bracket

People aged 35-49 are least likely to be out of work and looking for a job – only 16% say they're currently not working but looking for a job. At either end of the spectrum however, the number of people trying to secure work is higher at 24% for 18-34-year-olds and 20% for 50-64-year-olds. But is this really a surprise?

It could be argued that in the eyes of employers, Australians in the middle age bracket often present as some of the most attractive job candidates. While younger candidates sometimes have less experience and require more training, older candidates might be held back by recruiters' unconscious biases around their tech savviness, ability to learn new skills, and time left in the workforce.

On the other hand, people aged 35-49 are most likely to be perceived to 'have it all' – plenty of experience to hit the ground running, but still at an early enough stage in their careers to be considered a good investment.

Despite the varying needs of new intergenerational recruits, particularly around training and support, having a diverse workforce which mixes different skills and perspectives from across the generations is a valuable business asset.

A multigenerational workforce can encourage open-mindedness, influence learning and development and skills sharing, and enhance the overall culture and vibe of an organisation.

To be true to the principles of DI&B when hiring new workers, employers should always explore candidates' soft skills and consider their potential to perform in a role, rather than being influenced by pre-conceived ideas around age.

It's also important not to make assumptions about people's willingness to commit to longer-term employment due to their proximity to retirement age.

“The age of invisibility is 50.”

– Male, 51, Victoria

“Age is often associated with not having a current skill set aligned with graduates in the same field. I hide it because it's no one's business and I don't want to be impacted by unconscious bias.”

– Female, 42, Victoria

Older workers may hide part of their identity when DI&B isn't taken seriously in the workplace

It appears that when organisations are not perceived to promote diversity, inclusion and belonging, the impacts vary in their severity depending on workers' age. Among the oldest working-age Australians (50-64) who say they don't think their workplace promotes DI&B, over a quarter (26%) say they hide part of their identity all the time. On the other hand, only 16% of the youngest working age Australians (18-34) hide part of their identity in environments that they don't believe effectively supports DI&B.

Sensitivity to a lack of DI&B in the workplace might be elevated among Australia's oldest members of the workforce because they may feel like a minority group among a majority younger workforce. It's important to build an organisational culture that 'speaks to' and champions all age groups, taking care that workplace values and activities don't inadvertently exclude or isolate the older demographic.

10%

Australia's oldest workers are 10% more likely to hide part of their identity in environments that don't support DI&B, compared to the youngest workers.

"I'm older than the people I work with and feel like I have to act younger to fit in."

– Female, 38, NSW

"I don't particularly agree with the activities and associations they share out of working hours mainly because of my age."

– Male, 48, SA

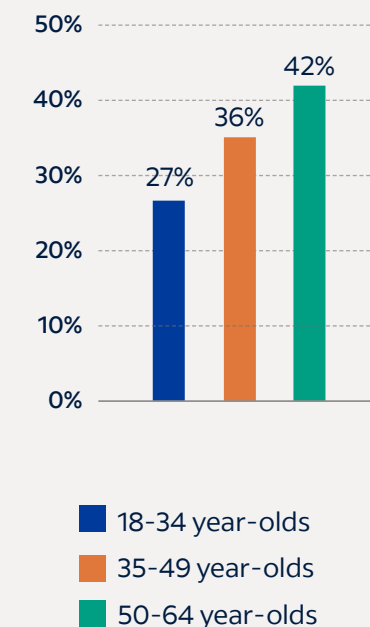
Confidence in knowing where to find support increases with age

An important part of improving DI&B is ensuring that everyone, irrespective of their background or social demographic, feels supported to be their best at work. But it turns out that younger workers are significantly less likely than their older colleagues to know where to get support if they need it.

Feeling unsupported at any time in a person's career could impact productivity, engagement, and even staff retention, all of which can have a flow-on effect on workforce diversity if certain age groups feel less supported in the workplace than others.

The Indeed/YouGov survey highlights the importance of organisations promoting DI&B and support measures when onboarding staff and ongoing, avoiding a situation where workers only learn how to get support through time and experience in the workforce.

Workers who strongly agree they know where to find support if needed:



Tips to make your workplace more inclusive for all generations

Age discrimination is rife in Australia's workplaces, and unlike other forms of discrimination, it affects absolutely everyone. From the youngest people in the workforce right through to the oldest, many people, at some point, have been subject to someone else's biases when it comes to their age.

Examples of ageism at work might include not employing someone because they're too young or old to 'fit in', refusing to provide training or promotions to older workers because it's thought that knowledge will be lost soon as they move into retirement, or younger employees being taken less seriously or overlooked in team meetings because they're perceived to lack maturity or insight.

Understanding how prevalent ageism in the workplace can be, and the many forms in which it can take place, is an important first step in moving towards a more age-inclusive environment.

Here are 4 tips to help protect against and deal with age-related discrimination:

1. Stamp out stereotyping

If you're seeing patterns emerge like more younger workers getting trained in new technologies, or most supervisory responsibilities going to the oldest staff members, ask questions about how decisions are being made. Always encourage managers to delve into people's individual qualities and capabilities when making calls about staff and the opportunities they're offered.

2. Ask questions

While some workers are happy to be vocal about their concerns, others might prefer to stay quiet or at best, seek the security of only those they trust. Encouraging open lines of communication between managers and individuals is an effective way to gain full transparency over any issues affecting workers of all ages, so that everyone feels supported.

3. Check your workplace culture

Are social occasions geared for younger workers, or does it appear to be acceptable to make age-related jokes in the workplace? If left unchecked, workforces can become siloed according to different age groups who each seek comfort in the commonalities they share. Address any subtle discriminatory behaviours against different generations, so they don't go unnoticed or become normalised.

4. Implement mentoring programs

Mentoring schemes which allow staff members to share their skills and learn from each other, irrespective of age differences, could encourage greater understanding of the challenges affecting different generations and how best to overcome them. At the same time, mentoring could offer a more organic way to build real empathy among age groups which, in turn, helps to promote DI&B for everyone.



CASE STUDY

Andrea Kirby

Director
Talent Table

It's very easy to put people into boxes

"I am yet to figure out what 'too experienced' actually means."

In a nutshell, what do you do for work?

I run [Talent Table](#) which is a community of interest and events for the talent acquisition (TA) and HR community.

How do you define D&I?

I define it more around belonging—does everyone belong in an organisation? Are we doing everything we can, no matter what that person is going through, or their characteristics, or all the things that make them human, to help make them belong in an organisation?

Why is it important to establish a diverse and inclusive workplace?

We're at work for such a long time and it's a big part of who we are. People often define themselves by what they do and how successful they are, so it's important they are

able to bring every part of who they are as a human being to work.

How does having a D&I strategy in place benefit a business?

From a recruiting and TA perspective, it's very easy to take the first person you see who can do the job—someone who looks like you, and who you immediately feel comfortable with. It is important in our field to challenge that and ensure we hire a diverse range of people. There are numerous studies showing that diversity in a workplace and a team brings greater profits, innovation, and success as a whole.

Did the idea of finding a 'culture fit' help to cement the ageism bias that exists in recruitment?

If you can define what culture looks like and select against it, that's great. It's very easy to say that a person's not a good 'culture fit'



for an organisation, without being able to articulate it. Every organisation has culture. It's about defining what that is and recruiting against it.

There are some good assessment products out there now that assess candidates against soft skills and the actual skills required to do a job. We shouldn't just assess via CVs. There's a lot of bias built into CVs. You would look at my CV and see that I finished school in 1983 and that I'm 55. It's then easy to knock me out of the race because I'm 'old'.

But to know me is to know that I've probably got more energy than most people on this planet—and a very young outlook on life. To be screened out just by looking at my CV isn't fair.

We need to challenge what is important to the job and challenge hiring managers who show bias against things that aren't important.

Have you experienced ageism in the workplace?

Yes. When I first came back to Australia from the UK, I was 50 and constantly told in interviews that I was 'too experienced'. I am yet to figure out what 'too experienced' actually means! They just wanted me to recruit people and didn't want to hear about all of the other things I could offer in that space. I thought to myself, I can do that faster, better and cheaper with some of the skills I picked up working overseas. There were also lots of questions about how I thought I would fit into certain work cultures.

Ageism is very big in Australia. One of the fastest growing groups of homeless people in Australia are women over 50. It's really hard for women over 50 to be considered for jobs, particularly because so many have had career breaks and a different career journey to men.

What benefits do older workers offer that might be being overlooked?

There's a perception that over 50s are coming to the end of their career and would like to slow down. That we're going to be too expensive for some roles. So much of it is just not true. Retirement age is 65 and looking to increase to 70. I started a new business at age 50 and I'm working harder than I have ever worked before.

It's what a lot of people my age do as it's almost easier than finding a job. If we've got 20 years left of work in us—those skills should be used. We're probably more resilient, we have more life experience, we look at things with a different lens, and people need to be considering these things when hiring.

Does ageism exist for younger generations in the workplace?

I think each generation has their thing and it's very easy to put people into boxes.

Our research shows that there is a disconnect between the perception of equal treatment of certain diverse groups in the workplace, and the lived experience of these groups themselves. Where are companies going wrong?

HR and marketing put together all this stuff about what it's like to work at an organisation, but that's often not what it's really like. The disconnect is often at the leadership level—not understanding what is important to your workforce and having that disconnect with what it means to be a diverse organisation, and that each individual has very different needs.

If you have a blanket, flexible-working policy, or a blanket maternity policy that doesn't

consider paternity, D&I just doesn't ring true. You almost need a smorgasbord of flexible working arrangements so people can pick and choose what is important to them at a particular point in their life.

What are the broader consequences on employees' mental health and wellbeing of not being able to be themselves at work?

If you are in the office or online for eight hours a day and hiding part of yourself, it has a huge impact on your mental health. We all have traits that make us unique, and they can be simple things. For example, I was always told I was too loud, too direct. When I was in England I had to be less 'Australian' and it means you're always second-guessing yourself and people's perceptions of you.

You run the risk of creating problems that aren't necessarily there based on what you think people are feeling about you. It's hard though, because we work with lots of different people. It all comes down to a lack of understanding of what makes people, people.

What have we learned about DI&B during this unprecedented time?

People will leave your organisation if you are not taking into account what they need to go to work every day. We are in a candidate market and people can move very quickly. Now is the time to be a good manager, to step up and lead and do it with everyone's differences in mind.

People know what is possible in the workplace now, we know we can work remotely, we have proven it. We know we don't have to be in a specific location to be successful. The next challenge is going to be how to manage hybrid workforces.



Can you talk a little about being an older woman in the workplace, your experience with menopause, and how that affects women during their careers?

I was very fortunate to be running my own company when menopause arrived, so I could work around any issues that I had—which was almost like a complete mental breakdown.

“We need to start having conversations about women's health in the workplace.”

do to make things better for women who are in their late 40s and 50s.

We can ensure things like flexible working arrangements are in place, turning the air

We have to raise awareness that menopause has a huge effect on a woman's life at this time. There are simple things organisations can

conditioning and heating down, and just being aware that there are going to be days that they're not operating at their full capacity. Forgetfulness is huge during menopause. We need to be looking at how to help women at this time in their life.

Can you imagine being a woman who has been feeling a bit forgetful, who hasn't been sleeping properly for nights on end, has annoyingly itchy legs, hot flushes, and who has a 35-year-old male manager? Can you imagine having to explain to him what's going on and how you're feeling?

We need to start having conversations about women's health in the workplace so women can be better understood and better supported. This is going to be the next big thing that we need to address in the workplace.

Promote your DI&B practices

Having an Indeed Company Page will allow your company further opportunities to promote its diversity, inclusion and belonging commitments to prospective talent, helping you attract the best applicants. To customise your page, you need to claim it first.

Visit au.indeed.com/hire/company-pages to do so.

