

# Painting a Picture of Australian Women over 50

Financial security, systemic barriers and workforce opportunities



## Purpose of the literature review

The intention of this literature review was to examine the availability of literature regarding is on Australian women over the age of 50, particularly in the areas of financial security, housing security and caring roles. Overseas studies were considered if they are able to inform recommendations or steps forward according to the Australia-specific findings.

## Overview

Based on this literature review, the report highlights that:

- 1 Women aged between 50 and 60 years are usually included in statistics or studies of women in the 'child rearing years' of the 20s, 30s and 40s.
- 2 Research on women in their 50s is intrinsically linked to the mothering or carer life cycle, that is, it is linked according to how much they need to care for their children.
- 3 Women over 50 do not have as much personal choice as we would like to believe - in fact, the impact of a lifetime of systemic and cultural barriers means that even when women get to make choices, what is on offer has been determined by others.

With these themes in mind, the following findings outline the importance of investing in a focus on this particular age group cohort and whilst it is important to look at this age group in the broader context of gendered barriers women face to seek preventative solutions around financial security, it is also important to acknowledge the need for solutions for their immediate experiences.

## Summary of key findings

- Women over 65 are the fastest growing homeless demographic
- Women's superannuation balances are grossly insufficient due to breaks in paid work during the prime reproductive and child raising years
- Informal (unpaid) care is at its peak for women in the 55 - 64 age group with just under 25% of women in this age group participating in unpaid care
- The average length of time job seeking for those unemployed over 55 was 68 weeks, largely due to age discrimination and a false set of beliefs that this age group is 'out of touch' or unskilled.
- Dominant industries in 2017 for women are Health Care and Social Assistance, Education and Training and Retail Trade which are some of the lowest paid sectors that also rely on shift work or hours that are not family friendly

## Policy recommendations in line with Global Sisters mission

- Missed income and therefore long term accumulation of superannuation need to be primary considerations for women in workplace and federal policy (including income support programs such as Newstart and NEIS)
- Housing affordability needs to be a priority in federal, state and community planning
- Government needs to work more closely with industry in addressing the gender pay gap, agism and shifting the commercial '9 to 5' mindset - with equal focus on enforceability and best practice leadership
- Access to Parenting Payment Single should be returned to being available to women whose youngest child is up to the age of 16 or 18 (rather than 8)
- Parenting Payment Single is also a higher rate than Newstart and recognises unpaid care work rather than invisibilising the unpaid work of sole mothers.
- It is important that the Child Support Agency is able to enforce collection of unpaid child support (either underpayment or non-payment) so that women can budget effectively
- It is recommended that further research is done regarding the interconnections of women's lives (family, work, housing, financial security, health, identity and geography for example) whereby some women are able to overcome systemic barriers to become financially secure while others aren't.

