'Building back better': A post-COVID outlook and opportunities for our mature-aged workforce

2nd GAP Virtual Business Roundtable

Thursday, 4 June 2020

Proceedings and Recommendations

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Global Access Partners Pty Ltd, 2020

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Building back better: A post-COVID outlook and opportunities for our mature-aged workforce

2nd GAP Virtual Business Roundtable
Thursday, 4 June 2020, 9:20am–12:30pm

On 4 June 2020, the independent not-for-profit institute for active policy Global Access Partners (GAP), in association with the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and the GAP Standing Committee on Productive Ageing, convened a virtual business roundtable to consider the post-COVID future of Australian workplaces.

A select group of senior representatives from government, the business sector, academia and the not-for-profit sector met for two virtual working sessions facilitated under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution.

Presenters and speakers included **the Hon. Geoff Lee MP**, Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education, Acting Minister for Sport, Multiculturalism, Seniors and Veterans, NSW Government, and **Martin Bowles AO PSM,** Chief Executive Officer of Calvary Health.

The Roundtable was co-facilitated by **Stephen Hayes MBE**, the National Defence Industry Workforce and Skills Facilitator and Executive Director of Gravity Consulting, **Prof Abby Bloom**, Non-Executive Director of the Sydney Water Corporation, the State Insurance Regulatory Authority, and the Sydney Children's Health Network, and **Kathryn Greiner AO**, Chair of the NSW Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing (MACA).

The aim was to gain insight from employers on how their companies have adapted to the 'new normal' of social distancing, how post-COVID workplaces should change, the opportunities for mature-aged people to uniquely contribute (as they did during COVID-19 restrictions), and how to stimulate their employment in new ways.

Disclaimer

The following report summaries proceedings of the Roundtable held under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution[1] and in accordance with the principles of the *'Second Track'* process[2]. The document represents a diverse range of views and interests of the individuals and organisations involved in the event. They are personal opinions that do not necessarily reflect those of the organisers and sponsors of the Roundtable. Given the different perspectives of participating individuals, it should not be assumed that every participant would agree with every argument or recommendation in full.

Participants of the 2nd GAP Virtual Business Roundtable, 4 June 2020

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Executive Summary

The Second GAP Virtual Business Roundtable discussed changes in work practices in the current health crisis and opportunities for mature-aged workers in the post-COVID economy. Technology, board-level leadership, accessibility and communications emerged as the main themes of the discussion.

The NSW Government is reopening the economy in a staged and responsible manner, and is aware of the needs of mature-aged workers, including mental health support, in its efforts to revitalise employment. Society has tackled sexism and is facing up to racism but has still to address ageism. Australia cannot afford to waste the human and economic potential of its senior citizens, especially as immigration will be on hold for some time to come.

The COVID-19 crisis has telescoped 10 years of progress in flexible, online and homeworking into 10 weeks. Despite initial management scepticism, office workers adapted well to home working, and productivity did not decline. Many employers and employees are likely to retain more flexible working practices when the pandemic abates.

The greater acceptance of online working should suit mature-aged workers and those in rural and remote regions. While older workers may struggle to find new jobs after a recession, employers and employees can take positive steps to ensure their skills meet changing market requirements. The important role of volunteers should be acknowledged, as well as paid employment.

Calvary Health, for example, adopted flexible working practices during the COVID-19 crisis, and will continue to do so as part of its overall strategy to remain viable after the pandemic. Bunnings remains an exemplar of mature-aged worker practices, and reaps commercial rewards as a result.

In general, mature-aged workers have adapted well to online working, although support will always be required. Senior workers do not identify as a group, as they do not wish to mark themselves as different, but new pathways for both employers and employees can help them continue to make constructive contributions.

Company boards and CEOs should take responsibility for creating and implementing age-friendly policies and practices in their companies, and government, business, individuals and other stakeholders should all cooperate and play their part in ensuring positive and tangible results.

Recommendations

For Government

- Government subsidy for broadband connections and computers or phones could bridge the digital divide and ensure every Australian can participate in online work and education regardless of location or disadvantage.

- The business case for recruiting and retaining seniors should be articulated more clearly through evidence and success stories, to ensure businesses see them as a benefit, rather than cost. Fact sheets, social media campaigns and information breaking outdated myths and stereotypes about older workers could be produced by DCJ and other organisations to encourage a more age-diverse workforce.

- Better coordination between local, state and federal government on ageing policies and public information would help increase overall outcomes. For example, a 'Retirement Navigator' could be offered to ease people's transition from work.

- More direct interaction between sector experts and policy makers could further strengthen existing co-design efforts.

- Segmentation of mature-aged people into cohorts with similar needs and interests would empower more targeted and effective policy-making.

For Employers and Business

- Employers need to identify specific, concrete and communicable pathways to increase age diversity in recruitment as well as retention. Skills development and succession planning should start earlier at 45 or 50, rather than 55 or 60, to benefit both employers and individuals.

- Employees and employers need to work together to keep their skills up to date, and pathways should be developed for them to do so. Training and support should be given to help older workers mentor younger staff.

- A modernised charter on principles for recruitment could help reduce age discrimination and include a commitment to workplace change and more lifelong learning opportunities to accommodate older workers. The concept of inclusive workplaces should include mature-aged people in deed as well as word, alongside ethnic, gender, disability and socio-economic backgrounds.

- Encouraging men, as well as women, to work part-time could ensure more equitable retention. Retiring workers might retain some degree of connection with their former firm, while retirement-readiness courses could smooth individual transitions.

- Company boards and CEOs should drive the implementation of these and other enlightened employment policies to ensure their adoption. Metrics for success could measure and encourage progress, but a broader commitment to an inclusive business and social culture is also required.

For Researchers

- A new research and start-up hub for telehealth and emerging technologies could develop user-friendly digital platforms and business models for telehealth and home care. This could encourage more older people to use virtual services in the future.

For Communities

- Local communities should be encouraged to take action themselves, rather than rely entirely on government policy actions.

These recommendations will be progressed through the GAP Standing Committee on Productive Ageing. They will also inform the new whole-of-government, whole-of-community ageing strategy, to be launched by the NSW Government in 2021. Global Access Partners will continue using its independent platform to work with business and the broader community to deliver on policy and empower older workers.

Welcome

Stephen Hayes MBE, the National Defence Industry Workforce and Skills Facilitator, Executive Director of the Gravity Group and Chair of the GAP Taskforce on National Resilience, acknowledged the traditional custodians of the land and welcomed the Hon. Geoff Lee, Acting Minister for Seniors, and participants to the Roundtable.

The GAP Cabinet – Global Access Partners' advisory body – was prophetic in choosing national resilience as its theme for 2020. COVID-19 has forced the rapid adoption of flexible home working, and many public officials and private firms are keen to continue videoconferencing in the future. Older people have also embraced technology. These developments should increase opportunities for seniors to work from home in the future, and firms like Qantas are looking to return call centre jobs to Australia.

Opening Address

The Hon. Geoff Lee, Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education, Acting Minister for Sport, Multiculturalism, Seniors and Veterans in the NSW Government, delivered the opening address. He stressed the need for public, private and non-profit employers to maximise opportunities for seniors to remain in or re-enter the workforce and break down barriers to participation.

NSW 'flattened the curve' of COVID infections after the State Government's robust measures to limit infection. Many businesses were forced to 'hibernate', plunging the economy into recession, and COVID-19 remains a potent threat, although there is little transmission in the community at the time of writing this report.

The Government remains cautions and is staggering society's return to normality to balance the needs of public health and economic recovery. Children have returned to school, while retail, sport and hospitality restrictions are easing, but the real unemployment rate remains between 15 and 20%, causing problems for many families.

The elderly and people with chronic conditions are more vulnerable to serious infection, as evidenced by the toll at nursing homes such as Newmarch House. While their greater use of the online world is welcome, they should still avoid unnecessary physical contact for some time, unless a vaccine is developed, or herd immunity is established.

Baby boomers are now nearing retirement, but as more people live longer, many want to extend their productive contributions to society, and industry should be willing to employ more seniors in meaningful work.

The Government is aware of age-discrimination issues and asked the MACA board to examine opportunities for improvement. The NSW Ageing Strategy 2016-2020 is now being reviewed to frame its next Strategy and welcomes suggestions from Roundtable participants and others. The Government should use all aspects of policy making to ensure NSW is an inclusive community and promotes employment opportunities for seniors.

Stephen Hayes MBE thanked the Minister for his address, acknowledged the Roundtable's sponsors and invited questions from participants.

Garden centres have boomed in the Southern Highlands, as people spend more time gardening in lockdown, and it was suggested that more seniors might be willing to work in this sector. Singapore is a 'city in a garden', rather than a 'garden city', and personal wellbeing would be improved by a greener environment. Trees are the second most important factor in a suburb's attraction after schools, and the government will plant a million trees in western Sydney to reduce heat stress and improve liveability.

Horticulture, however, is an arduous pursuit. Landscaping and street tree planting involve hard, physical labour, and older people might be better suited for other roles, although many bush regeneration projects are run and staffed by seniors.

Australia is now officially in recession, further complicating the search for work by over-50s. Payments to encourage renovation work will engage plumbers and other tradesmen in regional towns, and the Minister was urged to encourage the employment of older tradespeople in his conversation with state and federal colleagues.

Research in previous recessions shows 18–24 year olds to be the most vulnerable to retrenchment, but people aged 45–60 face the greatest struggle to return to work. If older workers are made redundant due to COVID-19, they may never find another job, and so the government is looking at ways to retrain older workers to enter new industries.

Bunnings is an exemplar of retraining older workers to make best use of their skills, and older sales assistants should always be sought for advice due to their likely experience. Bunnings employs many older ex-tradies in its stores, but some have suffered mental health issues through fear of infection or the higher workload during lockdown as customers worked on their gardens and homes.

The NSW Government has allocated an additional $70 million for mental health care for COVID-19, with the Australian Government contributing $40 million.

While most of the Roundtable's discussions have centred on paid jobs for seniors, there is significant activity in the volunteering sector. Older people often look for meaningful activities in later life, having left the workforce. The NSW Government encourages both more jobs and volunteering for older people to contribute to the community. Older people may not need additional income, but still want to give back to society.

Session One – Employers

"Post-COVID workplaces: Are you making the most of your mature-age workforce capability?"

Facilitators – **Stephen Hayes MBE** and **Kathryn Greiner AO,** Chair,
NSW Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing (MACA)

The importance of Australia's ageing population is not to be underestimated. Just as people aged under 21 are placed in many different cohorts – from infants and pre-schoolers, through school and university students to workers – so older people aged 60 to 81 should be similarly differentiated. Older people should be seen as individuals with their own needs, rather than seen as a homogenous group.

Society has tackled sexism and racism, yet is still to confront ageism. People over 45 who lose their jobs in this recession are unlikely to be re-employed, but a nation of just 26 million people cannot afford to waste this human potential. An influx of 200,000 people into Sydney and Melbourne every year drove the cities' economies, but the instant growth generated by immigration will be cut drastically for some time to come.

Thought Leader Address

Martin Bowles AO PSM
Chief Executive Officer of Calvary Health

Calvary Health is a $1.4 billion private health business which employs 12,000 staff and runs 15 private hospitals and 17 aged care facilities. It has improved workforce flexibility during the COVID-19 crisis, and will continue to do so to meet the needs of its ageing workforce. Over 80% of the workforce is female, which increases the need for flexibility.

Nearly a quarter of Calvary's workforce is over 55, and 14% is over 60. Over 700 employees are over 70, and were affected by government advice that over-70s should stay at home to avoid infection, as most of them worked in community care. Most of the affected employees wanted to continue to work, and Calvary was determined to facilitate their continued employment.

Calvary also has 1,200 volunteers, which has raised issues of them visiting Calvary's aged care facilities. Calvary executives discussed the COVID-19 twice a day at the height of the crisis and amended its advice every week. The government is now relaxing the restrictions it put in place to protect aged care residents, and Calvary is responding accordingly.

Initially, it expected half its office staff to work from home, but all of them were doing so a fortnight later without any disruption to their administrative operations. Calvary's use of WebEx increased by 500% over night, and its use of Zoom has been increasing, with 4,000 meetings conducted online in May. The transition has been largely seamless, with initial teething troubles overcome.

Calvary has not made any staff redundant, although the ban on elective surgery cut 70% of its private hospital business overnight. There was also a 50% drop in emergency department admissions, and a significant decline in other hospital admissions. Calvary planned its response to ensure it remains viable when all restrictions are lifted, and has retrained staff usually employed in theatre operations. Three hundred nurses were trained in ICU/HDU[3] duties, which has long been an area of staff shortage, and 19,000 online training modules have been completed across the workforce.

The crisis allowed Calvary to persuade people to work across their enterprise bargaining agreements if required. In ordinary circumstances, health workers do not cross from hospital to aged care or community environments, but Calvary had to be ready to move people from hospitals to aged care if a major outbreak occurred. Work flexibility negotiations which would have taken 10 years were completed in a week.

The uptake of digital communications across the company has been the other major gain, in addition to greater worker flexibility. Traditional ways of working will not return in their entirety, although government payments for telehealth consultations through MBS[4] will expire in September, meaning telehealth will be greatly reduced. Telehealth consultations have been 'rudimentary' at times, but constant improvements have been made.

COVID-19 has been the catalyst for much greater worker flexibility and online interactions, and while Calvary was already working in these areas, it will emerge from the crisis in a very different state from which it began.

Company management was initially nervous about unsupervised workers being less conscientious at home, but their fears proved groundless as productivity probably increased, rather than declined. Although the organisation has felt the loss of physical interactions between staff members, people engaged in different ways, rather than being disengaged entirely. Staff actually chatted more on their Friday afternoon virtual 'check-in', than they would have in the office. Many bureaucratic barriers to flexible working have been removed as a result.

Calvary retained its workforce because it thought about the future, as well as dealing with the immediate impact of COVID-19. It developed its services and strategy to improve worker flexibility, rather than abandoning them. Leadership and a positive attitude will be required to help all workers, and especially older workers, return to employment. Negative attitudes towards flexible and online work have not been supported by experience, and prioritising these approaches, leading them and offering role models can play a vital role in ensuring success.

Question & Answer

Participants were interested in the ways older staff have adapted to working remotely. Experience suggests they have done well, despite preconceptions that older workers struggle with new technology. Calvary's mature-aged workers adapted quickly, and there was no sign that age was a barrier – indeed, they may have proved better in some regards. Support mechanisms will always be required, as help desk enquiries did increase by 70%, but there was no resistance to the change, or problems associated with it.

Calvary recently surveyed its staff and found overwhelming preference for a mixture of home and office working in the future, rather than either extreme. A small percentage of people struggled mentally with the situation, and their needs should always be taken into account, but this was not caused by technological inability.

As noted by *The Economist*, COVID-19 has helped many firms better understand their business, but it has taken its toll on some 'non-essential' jobs. Calvary may find opportunities to increase its business after COVID-19, and other companies may want the government to further encourage more flexible labour relations. A research and start-up hub for telehealth and emerging technology is being contemplated, by Global Access Partners, and Roundtable participants were encouraged to express interest in the idea.

Calvary tracks patient experience and has seen its Net Promoter Score[5] increase significantly. Verbatim feedback shows that patients feel 'safe' due to instructions and temperature checks being given on entry to every facility. Temperature checking is more a reassurance than a useful health measure, as such monitors vary in accuracy between 2-3 degrees.

Calvary has a strong brand, and its standing has only been enhanced through the crisis. It sees opportunities in the integration of care and virtual care concepts to reduce the use of hospitals. It needs a business model to support telehealth but is working with another group to care for patients at home, rather than in hospital, supported by a clinical safety net empowered by remote monitoring. COVID-19 has forced Calvary to take a path it was already on, more quickly.

Calvary's relations with the health unions have always been comparatively positive, and the company's early decision to retain its entire workforce encouraged the unions to cooperate with more flexible working and training arrangements.

It remains to be seen how relations develop over the next two years regarding flexible working. While the world has changed forever, there will inevitably be regression in some areas, but progress will be maintained elsewhere.

Roundtable Discussion

'Post-COVID workplaces: Are you making the most of your mature-age workforce capability?'

Members were invited to discuss workplace changes for both employers and employees.

It was suggested that PhDs would be awarded for future studies of the effect of home working on productivity, and may find increases or decreases depending on the industry involved. Working from home suited most employees, although it was more of a struggle for workers with small children who were also trying to educate them at home. Not everyone has suitable computers or a fast-enough internet connection at home, although some firms paid to boost their employees' connections. Similarly, not every child had access to a laptop for home schooling, but some devices were provided to cater for them.

Questions about the cost of seniors' employment will always arise. It is important for individuals and the nation that senior employment increases, but the business case needs to be articulated more clearly for employers, particularly in this current recession. Ways must be found to encourage both workers and employers to think differently about work and the workplace.

The term 'retirement' should be removed from the lexicon, and this time should instead be seen as just another chapter of life. People once received a gold watch after a lifetime of work and spent their remaining years playing bowls or mending things in their shed. They now expect to remain more active in the workforce, although manual workers may have to transition to jobs with other skills.

The Australian Human Rights Commission is discussing the best way to handle the higher health risk faced by older workers in customer-facing roles, and employers' need to ensure a safe working environment. Some mature-aged employees are reluctant to return to work, but Calvary's managers allayed the concerns of workers over 70 by holding conversations with them about the safety measures they wanted, and instigated a range of workplace changes to help them.

If COVID-19 had infected an aged care facility, much more stringent protective measures would have had to be taken. While some workers were eager to return to work, others will be reluctant, and Calvary is staging the return to accommodate workers of all ages by talking to them and accommodating their needs. This is particularly important in national firms which operate in every state and territory, each of which will have their own stipulations.

Breakout Rooms

Participants were then split into groups to discuss the following topics and suggest actionable items to pursue with stakeholders:

- *How has COVID-19 changed workplaces from both the employer and employee perspective? What impacts, both positive and negative, have these changes had on mature-age employment?*
- *What is the business case for boosting senior employment during the post-COVID recovery? What are the commercial benefits for employers and new opportunities for mature-aged workers?*
- *How do we encourage employers to keep thinking differently about work?*

The first group agreed on the need for flexibility in working practices and capitalising on the changes wrought by COVID-19. They reported that productivity had not been reduced by home working, once IT equipment and communication platforms were in place.

A new or revised charter on principles for recruitment was suggested as a way to reduce age discrimination, including a commitment to workplace change and more lifelong learning opportunities. Support for employees is required to ensure workers feel safe, supported and connected after suitable IT infrastructure is in place. Having an inclusive process for all staff in regard to flexible working helps break down barriers and maintain productivity.

The second group stressed the increased productivity generated by home working and COVID's acceleration of digital strategies which were already in place. Major structure change always takes time, but the health crisis has forced companies to adapt more rapidly than ever before. Both corporates and governments have placed more value on employee choice and safety due to the health crisis, which are both positive steps for their employees.

COVID-19 has underlined the importance of including the needs of employees as well as clients and consumers in business decisions. Recognising the mental health and safety challenges faced by employees helps maintain their productivity and maximise their potential. Mature-aged workers may lack the public profile which other groups have, but employers can be encouraged to employ more of them by evidence that proves their capability with new technology. One organisation is looking at ways to use recently retired partners as mentors to help younger leaders deal with major challenges. The sharing of fact-based success stories such as these can be very effective.

The third group discussed the experience of large companies, the importance of mentoring schemes, and the value of paid 6-8 week internships for older workers, although these can prove difficult to organise.

It can be difficult to engage with older workers as a group on internal noticeboards, as older people do not identify as a social movement. For example, Westpac's action group for employees over 50 has found such workers difficult to communicate with, but has identified champions on key topics.

COVID-19 could entrench the view that mature-aged workers are more vulnerable to health issues, are less adaptable and less likely to return to work, and so advocates should be proactive in sharing stories to combat this impression throughout their organisations. Older workers want to make a positive contribution and can offer their experience and emotional intelligence by mentoring younger employees.

The fourth group identified four broad areas to work in, including the intersection of the future of work and reskilling older people for new tasks, although the need to reskill is an issue for all employees, regardless of age. Employers and employees share a responsibility to keep their skills up to date, and pathways should be provided for them to do so.

Mature-aged people vary in their preparedness for change, with some not interested in changing at all, and so a range of approaches will be required to include everyone. Employers may not need everyone to change, if there are processes which they wish to retain, but this may trap employees in a legacy niche they cannot escape from.

Finally, work on developing a curriculum for the new skills which will be required in the future should begin.

The fifth group noted that COVID-19 had brought age groups together to face a common threat, but might also have driven a wedge between younger people and seniors, given their greater vulnerability, although 70 is not 'old' or 'elderly'. Senior employees were helped by younger colleagues at Bunnings to use the new phone apps it provided. Leadership in schools played an important role in handling the rapid pivot to online education, and similar resolve is required in commercial companies. Some employers are encouraging a more open attitude to recruitment and are engaging more older workers in their firms.

In summary, the groups recognised that some aspects of work have changed for the better due to COVID-19 and that technological and retraining challenges can be met through organisational communications and digital mentors. Mature-aged workers do not identify as a group, as they do not wish to mark themselves as different, but new pathways for both employers and employees can help them continue to make constructive contributions.

Session Two – Employees

"How can employers capitalise on mature-aged workers' ability to add unique value to their organisation?"

Facilitators – **Stephen Hayes MBE** and **Prof Abby Bloom**, Non-Executive Director, Sydney Water Corporation, State Insurance Regulatory Authority (SIRA), Sydney Children's Health Network

Roundtable Discussion

Bunnings is regularly promoted as a paragon of senior worker inclusion, but this may highlight the failure of other firms to match it. Bunning succeeds by emphasising the need for its workers to adhere to its culture, but also recruits the right people to fit this culture, as well as the demographics it serves. Its flat management structure and strong company communication reduce hierarchical barriers – indeed, its managing director may be standing in a red shirt and apron in one of its stores. Every employee has direct email access to senior leaders, who in turn offer regular communication to staff. This ensures a positive culture is maintained, and that employees, suppliers and customers are cared for.

COVID-19 forced 10 years' worth of progress in telehealth into 10 weeks, and it would be a pity if this could not be continued. Clients, co-workers and customers will not see how old you are or where you are when you are working online, which could be a great benefit for mature-aged workers, although older generations can reveal themselves in emails by leaving two spaces after a full stop. The progress made on digital and remote working during the health crisis can be built upon in the future, as it allows people to earn a living regardless of age, location or ethnicity.

However, the digital divide between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' remains, as the latter lack the disposable income to buy the technology and retain the high-speed connectivity required for online work. Rural and remote areas can also lack physical access to affordable broadband. Government subsidy for digital services could help these citizens transition back into the workforce, as well as helping disadvantaged school children to study online and people with disability to find appropriate employment. Making digital connectivity a universal right could be very important to Australia's economic development as well as social equality. Subsidies to aid the purchase of a suitable laptop, phone or other device could also be offered to ensure everyone has access to digital communication. The digital divide should be closed as the first priority, with a subsidy made available to everyone in the mature-age cohort and not only those in paid

employment, as many older people contribute through volunteering or helping grandchildren with their school work to take the burden off parents working from home.

Just as drivers once had to be mechanics, so computer users once had to understand how to mend the machines they used. Now, most users of technology know little or nothing about their operation. Global Access Partners suggested the creation of a call centre, manned by volunteers and run at modest cost, to help older people and others navigate mobile apps and online communication. Helpful videos might also be produced to answer common questions or troubleshoot problems.

Many employers are not proactive in informing senior workers of the skills they will need in the future. There is a plethora of free skills courses available online and training organisations which such employees could be referred to. *Your 100-year life* is a start-up that aims to ease the 'ageing journey' for older people and their families, and similar organisations for mature-aged workers could develop their services.

Breakout Rooms

Participants were again split into groups to discuss the following topics:

- *How do we build on recent progress in digital and remote working to increase employment opportunities for mature-aged people?*
- *How should mature-age recruitment and retention change in the future?*
- *How will emerging post-COVID business strategies for workforce reskilling and upskilling affect senior employees?*
- *How do we increase mature-aged people's awareness of ways to be job-ready?*

The first group discussed how to increase mature-aged people's awareness of the need to be job-ready. Learning should be embedded as a requirement in work to change the mindset around lifelong learning, as older staff may not want to risk marking themselves out by asking for additional training. Younger managers can also be reluctant to handle older employees.

Better networking could reveal new job opportunities for mature-aged people, as the workforce is now more flexible due to COVID-19. The Commonwealth Bank, for example, has closed some branches and is redeploying staff from face-to-face roles to call centres. Employers need to step up and invest in change but should not underestimate the challenges involved in managing a more diverse workforce. COVID-19 has heightened these challenges, but also increased their need to be overcome.

The second group said innovations in the healthcare workforce could lead the way for other sectors, as care is dominated by older, female workers. Companies can recruit online staff from across Australia, regardless of their location, and this may create more opportunities for mature-aged workers. Digital inclusion could be encouraged by government partnerships with industry to deliver low-cost equipment and services to those on lower incomes. Subsidised schemes helped disadvantaged people with school-aged children access online learning.

The government could also coordinate businesses offering solutions to these problems. Reskilling mature-aged workers is important, but employers could also make more use of their existing strengths and experience by knowing more about them. *Be Connected* is an existing service which helps different generations cooperate within their firms to share and develop digital skills. Service NSW is another platform which could help older people bridge the digital divide.

The third group focused on digital and remote working, and agreed that most people of working age are able to use online technology with little additional support, although older people may need more help if they do not use it in their personal lives. Everyone has learned the need for reliable broadband at home in recent months, and robust, rather than state-of-the-art, equipment has proved the most important factor in enabling home working.

The difference in remote working between a customer-facing organisation such as Bunnings, and an office-based environment such as the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, was also highlighted. Most office workers found it relatively easy to work remotely. They enjoyed the experience and saw increases in productivity and wellbeing. Indeed, surveys show many office workers wish to continue home working, at least part of the time, in the future. Mature-aged people will likely be among this cohort, and enjoy the extra flexibility it provides, as well as the freedom from commuting.

Customer-facing firms such as Bunnings were forced to sell goods online or offer 'click and drive' services for goods to be picked up in store, to reduce face-to-face interaction. Customers also adopted well to these procedures. The job market will be more competitive than ever after COVID-19, and so the unique attributes which older workers can bring to a firm should be identified and emphasised. Fact sheets, social media campaigns and information breaking the outdated myths and stereotypes about older workers could be produced by DCJ and other organisations to encourage a more age-diverse workforce.

The fourth group discussed the importance of leadership in encouraging mature-aged recruitment and retention, regardless of what strategies are in place. Encouraging men, as well as women, to work part-time could ensure more equitable retention. Retiring workers might retain some degree of connection with their former firm. One West Australian manufacturer let their workers reconsider their 'retirement' after six months or a year during the mining boom, and many returned to part- or full-time employment.

Executive coaching or mentoring is another role which senior figures can play. It takes strong and focused leadership within an organisation to develop and maintain the strategies which retain older workers and develop pathways to people to exit into retirement as required.

The fourth group also looked at recruitment strategies and retention, and traced the correlations between all four questions asked. They noted the lack of self-identification by older workers, as people are reluctant to flag their age as over 50. Longevity plans and affinity groups can offer peer support, but older people should be encouraged to use them and take pride, rather than embarrassment, in their senior status.

This group also stressed that older workers do not necessarily have an innate ability to mentor younger staff, and may need training or support to do so. Executives should not only stress the advantages of an age-diverse workforce but demonstrate their commitment and market their firms accordingly. Finally, 'talent mapping' to understand the strengths of the whole workforce can break down communication barriers and highlight opportunities for mentoring as well as plan internal promotions.

Participants were thanked for their articulate and incisive contributions to the Roundtable. The importance of board-level leadership in ensuring that retention policies are effective was again stressed, in addition to inclusive management practices. Participants should work to get mature worker policies on the agenda at a board level, as action is more likely if CEOs are responsible for achieving firm targets.

The use of hard targets in government organisations for gender diversity prompted thoughts about similar quotas for older workers. Much of modern management is focused on metrics, which means that factors which are not quantified may be ignored or dismissed. However, while business culture is hard to quantify, it remains vitally important to overall success. Leadership is a skill which can be taught, and metrics and culture can be complementary ways to pursue positive goals in regard to senior employment.

The desired outcomes of mentorship should be articulated, and its outcomes should be measured, quantified and compared to these goals, for its value to be measured. Mentoring should also be considered in terms of what the recipient wants from the relationship, as well as the mentor. The skills and experience of the mentor should be matched to the needs of younger staff, to ensure that both sides benefit from the process.

Group Discussion Summary

Recent strides in digital and remote working due to COVID-19 restrictions have created a range of employment opportunities for mature aged people. 10 years of progress has been accomplished in ten weeks, and now individuals with the skills to do a job, regardless of their age, can look for employers willing to allow them to work remotely. It is incumbent on business and government to make the most of this opportunity, as it will benefit everyone involved.

Mature-aged recruitment and retention can be improved through changes to organisational culture and skills development. The Roundtable saw less mention of discrimination in recruitment than in previous events and offered a more positive focus by defining mature-aged workers as skilled people willing to work flexibly. Employers should not make assumptions about workers based on their age but judge them by their ability.

The success of business strategies for workforce retraining and other age-related issues depend on strong and effective leadership from the company's board and CEO. While the idea that only measurable metrics can be managed persists, efforts to change work cultures to become more inclusive are important.

Participants did not support making mature-aged people solely responsible for keeping their skills up to date in a changing job market. Not every senior worker is naturally able to coach and mentor others and may need mentoring themselves to learn these skills. Employers should identify specific, concrete and communicable pathways to increase age-diversity in recruitment as well as retention. Skills development and succession planning should start earlier at 45 or 50, rather than 55 or 60, to benefit both employers and individuals.

Roundtable Summary

The keynote address emphasised the importance of reskilling and upskilling in the workforce, and the ways in which organisations can survive and thrive in times of change by immediate proactive measures serving a long-term strategy. The important role of volunteers should be acknowledged as well as paid employment, and organisations as well as individuals should be willing to embrace more flexibility.

Technology and digital skills and access were a consistent theme in the discussion. There is a growing government responsibility to ensure that everyone has access to broadband and devices to bridge the digital divide in work, aged care and education.

Any change in any organisation is driven by its leadership, and executives need to realise the unique skills which older workers can share and contribute. Online working allows people of any age, location or ethnicity to contribute their skills without discrimination. Better communication by companies of their age-diversity will help boost their image and make the most of their older staff.

Catherine Fritz-Kalish, Co-Founder and Managing Director of Global Access Partners, thanked speakers, facilitators, advisors, sponsors and participants from government, business and other sectors for their contributions and drew proceedings to a close.

Speakers & Facilitators

Prof Abby Bloom
**Non-Executive Director,
Sydney Water Corporation
State Insurance Regulatory
Authority (SIRA)
Sydney Children's Health
Network**

Abby is an experienced company director and former senior executive and corporate advisor in health care, insurance, utilities, water and wastewater, occupational health and safety, and ageing. Her work in epidemiology included a landmark study that examined the psychosocial impact of relocation, and stress, on older people in three cities. Abby was a member of the NSW Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing (MACA) for over five years; is a respected expert and advisor health and ageing in NSW, Australia and internationally; and is the founder of a digital portal aimed at simplifying and coordinating the management of ageing within families. Abby is a Non-executive Director of the Sydney Water Corporation, the State Insurance Regulatory Authority (SIRA), and the Sydney Children's Health Network. She is a member of the advisory boards of Griffith University Enterprise and ID Exchange, a digital identity management company. An accredited independent risk and audit specialist, Abby chairs SIRA's Audit and Risk Committee (ARC), and serves on

the ARCs of boards of Rookwood General Cemetery, Southern NSW Local Health District, NSW Department of Communities and Justice and the Luminesce Alliance. She is the founder of four start-ups, including three medical devices companies, and has advised numerous companies and organisations, including CSIRO, on innovation. Abby received her BA and Master in Public Health from Yale University, her Masters in Anthropology from Northwestern University, and her PhD in Medicine (Public Health) from Sydney University. She is currently an Adjunct Professor at Sydney University. She has worked on health and ageing in over 20 countries, and has advised numerous global organisations, including The World Bank, the International Finance Corporation, UNICEF, AusAID (now DFAT), and USAD the US Foreign Aid program.

Martin Bowles AO PSM
**Chief Executive Officer, Calvary Health
Chair, Australia's Health 2040 Taskforce**

Martin Bowles AO PSM is the National Chief Executive Officer of Calvary Health Care, responsible for more than 12,000 staff and volunteers, 15 Public and Private Hospitals, 17 Retirement and Aged Care Facilities and a national network of Community Care Centres. Martin joined Calvary in November 2017 following an exemplary 40-year public service career spanning a diverse portfolio of industry sectors in the Commonwealth, Queensland and NSW Governments. In the Australian Government, Martin was Deputy Secretary in the Departments of Defence and

then Climate Change, and then Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. Martin's last appointment was as Secretary of Health from October 2014 to September 2017. During his public service career, Martin played an integral role in changes across the health sector, including the significant recent reforms to government funding for public hospitals in Australia, to generate greater efficiency, safety and quality in our hospital system. Before joining the Australian Government, Martin held senior executive positions in the education and health portfolios in the Queensland and NSW governments. Martin's exemplary public service careered was acknowledged in 2012 with the award of the Public Service Medal for delivering highly successful energy efficiency policies and remediation programs for the Home Insulation and Green Loans programs. In June 2019, Martin was awarded the Order of Australia for distinguished service to public administration at the senior level, and to policy development and program implementation. Martin is currently also the Chair of Australia's Health 2040 Taskforce, an initiative of Global Access Partners; a board member of the Australia Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care and participates at the Commonwealth Fund in Washington DC. He is a Fellow of the Australian Society of Certified Practising Accountants.

Catherine Fritz-Kalish
Co-Founder & Managing Director
Global Access Partners (GAP)
Director, International Centre for
Democratic Partnerships (ICDP)

Catherine is Co-founder and Managing Director of Global Access Partners. Over the last 20 years, GAP has grown to be a proactive and influential public policy and implementation institute, with over 1,000 active members and a 4,000-strong broader network. GAP initiates and facilitates high-level discussions at the cutting edge of the most pressing commercial, social and global issues of today. Catherine is also a member of the Board of Directors of the International Centre for Democratic Partnerships (ICDP) – an independent not-for-profit organisation established by GAP in 2017 to forge stronger relations between Australia and the Pacific. Catherine's broader business experience includes coordination of a number of international initiatives as part of the annual programme for the SME unit of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)in Paris; marketing and brand management within all seven divisions of the George Weston Foods Group; and working within the TCG Group on start-up incubator establishment. Catherine chairs the Board of social justice charity Stand Up and is a member of the advisory board for the Social Impact Hub. She has co-founded Thread Together, a charity that provides brand new clothing to those in need across Australia. Catherine is a member of the Board of the Fritz Family Office and is part of a significant giving circle that engages whole families in the act of giving to those in need. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree from UNSW and a Masters of Business in International Marketing from UTS.

Kathryn Greiner AO
Chair, NSW Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing (MACA)

Kathryn Greiner has contributed to a wide range of leadership positions in public and private companies, government bodies and non-profit organisations. Her professional career has focused on Health, Education and Community Development. Kathryn has been asked on a number of occasions to participate in or lead reviews of a number of organisations. These have included the Review of Funding for Schooling in Australia (The Gonski Review); a Review of Governance Structures and System Funding of Catholic Schools for the NSW-ACT Bishops and a Review into Retirement Villages in NSW. She also chairs the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Ageing for the NSW Government; Chairs Lifestart Co-operative Ltd and is a director of Paul Ramsay Foundation; Loreto College Coorparoo; the Sydney Opera House Trust; Relationships Australia (NSW) amongst others. She was an elected Councilor to the City of Sydney Council (1995-2004). Kathryn has held Directorships for Australian Hearing; Pacific Power, John Singleton Advertising; the Financial Planning Association and been a member of the Bond University Council as well as a member of the Advisory Council of L.E.K. Consulting Ltd. Her non-profit activities have ranged from Chair of

the Salvation Army Red Shield Appeal; to the Chair of Save the Children NSW and then Save the Children Australia. Kathryn holds a Bachelor of Social Work (UNSW), was appointed an Officer in the Order of Australia (2001) and, in 2014, was awarded a Doctor of Letters (Honoris Causa) from the University of New South Wales.

Stephen Hayes MBE
Chair and Executive Director, Gravity Group
National Defence Industry Workforce and Skills Facilitator
Chair, GAP Taskforce on National Resilience

Stephen Hayes MBE was appointed as the National Defence Industry Workforce and Skills Facilitator by the Minster for Defence Industry in May 2018. In this role, he works across federal government portfolios, with the state and territory governments, industry and academia to help resolve any workforce and skills issues that could impact defence industry's ability to effectively deliver the Government's $200 billion investment plan. Stephen is also the Chair and Executive Director of the Gravity Group, a global innovation company focused on digital transformation of strategy, execution and visual reporting in support of boards and company executives. Previously, he was the founding Managing Director and Chief Executive of the International Centre for Complex Project Management and the founding Chair of the International Complex Project Management Research Council. Through his extensive work in international communities, government agencies and

high-profile organisations throughout Europe, Brazil, China, Russia, North America and Africa, Stephen has become internationally recognised as a leader in the fields of complexity and program management. He has oversighted complex program management advice and support to numerous organisations, including the UK Ministry of Defence, Hitachi Rail, the Canadian Department of National Defence, the Australian Department of Defence, Air Services Australia, Australian Aerospace, Victoria Police, BAE Systems, Lockheed Martin, Thales and Boeing. In 2012, Stephen chaired the International Task Force that developed the internationally acclaimed report 'Complex Project Management – Global Perspectives and the Strategic Agenda to 2025'.

The Hon. Geoff Lee MP
Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education, Acting Minister for Sport, Multiculturalism, Seniors and Veterans, NSW Government

Dr Geoff Lee was elected to Parliament as the State Member for Parramatta in 2011. Dr Lee served as Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier, Western Sydney and Multiculturalism, before receiving his Ministerial appointment as Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education in April 2019. Dr Lee has both Australian and Chinese ancestry. His paternal grandfather originated from the providence of Zhongshan, Southern China and moved to Australia in the 1920's. His maternal ancestors are of English and Scottish descent arriving in Australia early in the 1800s. Prior to entering politics, Geoff was an award winning business owner, then TAFE teacher, lecturer and later the Associate Dean at the Western Sydney University. His research and publications cover small business, online learning and adult education. As a past business owner, Dr Lee continues to champion small business as a key driver of innovation, economic growth and local jobs. His academic career has also reinforced his passion and strong advocacy for lifelong learning. Dr Lee holds a holds a Bachelor of Applied Science (Horticulture) from Hawkesbury Agricultural College, a Master of Business Administration and a Doctor of Business Administration from the Macquarie Graduate School of Management.

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Endnotes

[1] When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule**,** participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed; https://www.chathamhouse.org/chatham-house-rule

[2] The *'Second Track'* is an innovative process of group collaboration that focuses on positive thinking, deep long-term engagement, and a strong personal interest in achieving practical results. It has its origins in international diplomacy (Joseph V. Montville, 1981).

[3] ICU – intensive care unit; HDU – high-dependency unit

[4] MBS – Medicare Benefits Schedule

[5] The Net Promoter Score is a metric used in customer experience programs.