



Better Access for Women, Nonbinary and Gender Diverse People over 50



AN INFORMATION
BOOKLET FOR COMMUNITY
ORGANISATIONS

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Funded by the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation

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We acknowledge the First Nations people as the traditional custodians of the lands and waters throughout Australia.

WIRE is a service for women, nonbinary and gender diverse people.

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1 Introduction



We've created this booklet for community organisations interested in assessing and improving access to services for people over 50. We hope the information on these pages will help inform your work towards justice and equity for older women, nonbinary and gender diverse people.

The origins of this booklet

A growing number of older people are seeking support through the community sector.

In 2019 WIRE received a grant from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation to assess and improve access for people over 50 who engage with our organisation. One of the outcomes of this project was to create a document to share our findings.

We hope that by sharing this information we can contribute to supporting access for older people across the sector as well as continuing to remove barriers to access within our own organisation.

We acknowledge that this project was conducted by white citizen-settlers who benefit from their whiteness within society as well as within WIRE. We also acknowledge that this is a work in progress and that while

we are working towards justice and equity, we still have a long way to go.

Our work with people over 50

This work is an extension of our work with women, nonbinary and gender diverse people over 50, who have been a vibrant and important part of all areas of WIRE for many years.

WIRE is continuing our work to remove barriers within our organisation. We recognise that women, nonbinary and gender diverse people are marginalised through bias towards a cisgender, able-bodied, ageist, heterosexual, colonial, capitalist world view, and this impacts who is included, listened to and given power throughout society as well as within WIRE's organisational structure.

About WIRE

WIRE is a Victorian organisation with a vision of a just society where all people can thrive. We provide information, resources, support and referrals for women, nonbinary and gender diverse Victorians on any issue.

We provide support through a telephone support line, by email and web chat, as well as face-to-face in our Walk-in Centre located in inner Melbourne. We also deliver a range of programs and services including job coaching, employment workshops, and financial and legal clinic.

We undertake projects and provide education and resources to

individuals, organisations and the community to build capacity and capability to counter gender bias, discrimination and family violence. This includes training and programs focused on increasing women's financial capability, addressing family violence, dealing with difficult calls and working more effectively with women.

We are a small organisation but our impact ripples throughout Victoria. With more than 50 active volunteers and 20 staff, we provide services to Victorians that change lives. We are proud of who we are, the service we provide and what we have achieved.

2 Taking an intersectional, feminist approach

We assess barriers to access through an intersectional, feminist lens, with the goal of justice and equity, rather than diversity and inclusion. This approach recognises that barriers are created by a failure of societal systems and structures.

The social model of disability describes the idea that it is not a physical, mental or psychological impairment or difference that creates a barrier to equitable and just participation in society, but the failure of our systems and structures to accommodate these differences.

Through an intersectional lens, we recognise that barriers are created not only due to physical, mental or psychological difference, but also wherever a person differs from the colonial, capitalist, patriarchal ideal of a cisgender, heterosexual, capital-owning white man.

These barriers exist in many implicit and explicit ways, from steps that block access for a person who uses a wheelchair and bright lights that hurt someone with a visual sensitivity, to a lack of translated resources for

someone who doesn't speak English, and a room full of people under 40 when an older person walks in.

We must take privilege into account

Our privilege in one area often blinds us to these barriers and their impacts. As a service that is working towards removing these barriers, we must find ways to become aware of them and make changes to remove or minimise them.

To become aware of these barriers we must consult with and believe people who face these barriers, critically assess all aspects of our organisation, be genuinely open to criticism and continue to do this as we make change.

Justice and equity is the goal

In their article 'Language of Appeasement', Dafina-Lazarus Stewart critiques the use of diversity and inclusion and the way it undermines substantive change.

Stewart says, "...diversity and inclusion rhetoric asks fundamentally different questions and is concerned with fundamentally different issues than efforts seeking equity and justice."

Below are some of the ways that diversity and inclusion differ from justice and equity (Stewart 2017):

- » Diversity asks, "Who's in the room?" Equity responds, "Who is trying to get in the room but can't? Whose presence in the room is under constant threat of erasure?"
- » Inclusion asks, "Have everyone's ideas been heard?" Justice responds, "Whose ideas won't be taken as seriously because they aren't in the majority?"
- » Diversity asks, "How many more of [pick any minoritised identity] group do we have this year than last?" Equity responds, "What conditions have we created that maintain certain groups as the perpetual majority here?"

The questions Stewart poses can help inspire the type of enquiry we need to critically assess organisations and the barriers to access within them.

The aim of accessibility is not simply to have a representative sample of diverse people included, but to ensure that participation is just, equitable and beneficial to those different people.

Why exploring the older person's experience of your service is essential

The key findings from the Australian Human Rights Commission research into ageism (2013) are a grim read and highlight how prevalent ageism is and its impact on older people.

- » More than a third of Australians aged 55+ years have experienced age-related discrimination
- » 35 per cent of Australians aged 55-64 years and 43 per cent of Australians aged 65+ years have experienced discrimination because of their age

The most common types of age-related discrimination, experienced by over 50 per cent of older Australians are:

- » Being turned down from

a position (67 per cent of Australians aged 54-65 and 50 per cent aged 65+)

- » Being ignored (59 per cent of Australians aged 54-65 and 66 per cent aged 65+)
- » Being treated with disrespect (51 per cent of Australians aged 54-65 and 64 per cent aged 65+)
- » Being subjected to jokes about ageing (53 per cent of Australians aged 54-65 and 53 per cent aged 65+)

Many older Australians also report being treated as invisible through poor interactions with service staff, a lack of products and services that cater to their needs, feeling like a burden to family and friends, and a lack of cultural representation leading to a feeling of being overlooked, devalued or ignored.

Age discrimination and invisibility result in a strong and negative emotional response.

- » A result of age discrimination and invisibility is that older Australians feel a sense of shame, anger or sadness
- » There is also a direct impact on personal perceptions of self-worth and an impact on how older Australians define their experience of ageing

From these statistics it is clear that most older people will relate to and experience ageism. Ageism, in its simplest form, is the prejudice and discrimination faced by someone because of their age. The impact of ageism is brutal.

Through cultural expectations and structures including established work practices, messages communicated through the media, and what we consider important when we design public spaces, housing and transport, our society makes it clear that it values fit, able-bodied, good looking, well off, young, white, heterosexual, cisgender men above all others.

Negative stereotyping and the denigration of older people sees their contribution and value erased in most parts of our society including the workforce, family, home, community activities and social services. The impact can include, but is not limited to: loss of financial wellbeing, loss of agency in decision making, vulnerability to elder abuse, and internalised ageism which attacks the older person's sense of self-worth and value. It is with this societal baggage that older people use our services. Our services also carry the baggage. We are all part of a society that discounts older people and it would be hard for it not permeate the structure and culture of our

community services. By turning our attention to how ageism may be occurring in our services, and where the points of exclusion may be, we

can turn the tide, combat ageism and create a better experience for more older people when they use our service.

THE EXPERIENCES OF OLDER PEOPLE ACCESSING SERVICES

“When I walk in the door, I do not expect to be noticed”

From a combination of what we know from research and our experience working with older people, as well as what we have been told throughout this project, older people have a wide range of experiences, including:

- » Competing demands on their time such as caring for older relatives, caring for grandchildren, working or looking for work, personal appointments, hobbies, socialising, etc.
- » Age-related discrimination, including exclusion from (and reduced power in) the workforce, finance, family, support services, technology and healthcare
- » A variety of physical, psychological and psychosocial states which include experiences such as fulfilment, loneliness, physical decline or disability,

personal growth and menopause

What you might hear from older people

These are examples of the experiences older people shared with us as part of the project:

- » “I feel invisible to younger staff”
- » “I don’t want to be perceived of as wise because I am older”
- » “I can’t see myself there. There is no one I can relate to”
- » “I don’t feel like the information in the booklet includes someone like me”
- » “Technology is a nightmare”
- » “What does LGBTQI mean?”

3 Assessing your organisation

Gathering information

In terms of what older people experience when they access your service, **the best information will come from the people who are currently involved in your organisation or those you hope to be in the future.**

You can get this information in a variety of ways. Primary sources might include surveys, interviews, feedback and complaints made by older people themselves. Secondary sources might include demographic data, data about the types of referrals given to service users, and observations made by team members.

Before talking to older people about their experiences it is important to determine the following*:

- » What, why and who are we asking?
- » How will we ask? What method will we use?
- » Where and when will we ask?
- » How will participants be

recruited? What about older people who experience multiple points of discrimination, e.g. racism?

- » What access needs should we take into consideration?
- » What benefit will this have for the people we recruit?
- » What assurances can we provide regarding how their information will be used?
- » What level of confidentiality are we offering?
- » What may be preventing participants from giving frank feedback?
- » What can we do to create a safe place for frank feedback?
- » Are there any risks we need to consider? How can we reduce those risks?
- » How will we collect the information, record the session, or take notes?
- » What feedback will be provided to participants at the end of the

process?

- » How will we acknowledge the emotional labour involved in participating?

* This list was adapted from the HOW2 Consumer participation strategy.

One strategy you may wish to explore is having a consumer reference group of older people that will help guide and shape your approach. If considering this strategy, it is important to reflect on who is and is not in your reference group. Whose voice is still not being heard?

Broad questions for your organisation

Before posing questions, list all areas of the organisation. For example: telephone support line, website, complaints, training, publications, employment, board appointment, etc.

Ask the following questions in regards to each area:

- » What might older people who engage with our organisation be experiencing?
- » What might get in the way of older people engaging with our organisation?
- » Which older people are accessing the services and which are not?

- » What can our organisation do to help older people feel safe and included when engaging with the organisation?
- » Do we model positive ageing in our service?

We suggest further breaking down each question into different types of access.

Breaking your questions down

Psychosocial access

- » How friendly, welcoming and prejudiced or biased might the environment or context be?
- » How are older people represented in physical spaces, online and in materials?
- » Is the organisation and individuals within it working towards understanding and eliminating blind spots and biases?
- » What financial burden do people have to accessing your service? Do you charge fees? Is transport expensive? Are costs and discounts clearly communicated and easy to understand?
- » How long do meetings and events go for? Do they include breaks?

Food and drink? Can people sit down?

- » Are staff flexibly supported to manage breaks and workload?
- » What are your hours of operation? Time of board meetings?
- » Are older people already involved or able to see themselves represented in the service?

to people with a variety of access needs? Are there accessible toilets, parking, unimpeded walkways, heavy doors, appropriate lighting, etc.?

- » Are online and remote spaces accessible to people with a variety of needs? Do staff know how to communicate using the National Relay Service, or with people who do not have access to a safe space to engage with the organisation?

Information access

- » What is required to get the information that people need? Is information available in a variety of formats? E.g. large print, screen reader compatible, aural, simple English, translation or interpretation, etc.
- » Is information access transparent? When it is not, is the process of accessing this information clear?
- » How are the needs of older people considered when developing information resources?
- » Is prerequisite knowledge or access to certain technologies required to access services and information? Do older people need to understand jargon or access the internet?

Physical access

- » Are physical spaces accessible

Expect discomfort

Be prepared for the information you gather to be critical or show that you have a lot of work to do. It can be uncomfortable to be shown the areas where our organisations are lacking. This can be a chance to focus on how your organisational strengths can be used to address these shortfalls and move towards equity and justice.

This is where you take the opportunity to connect with people who have barriers to accessing your service for whatever reason. It is important to also consider that there are many reasons that someone may feel more or less comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings with you, including experiences of discrimination, your behaviour and past experience. Using a variety of information sources that include both personal experience and research will help you build a rich

picture of how older people experience your organisation. If efforts to improve accessibility are successful, those who have not felt safe to contribute will begin to do so, which will strengthen your organisation's capacity to do this ongoing work.

When you engage older people and are asking for their emotional labour, be clear about what you are expecting from them and how the information will be used. You may want to consider providing an honorarium payment to compensate people for their time and knowledge.

Look to other experts

This guide is based on our expertise in working, volunteering and delivering services at WIRE. We are not accessibility experts and have relied on the expertise of others. We encourage you to pair your experience with the expertise of others in the same way.

The following assessment tools have guided us and you may also find them helpful:

- » Accessibility information for events: a tool developed mainly by disabled and chronically ill, queer, trans and nonbinary people www.undercurrentvic.com Choose Resources > Accessibility information for events

- » Ways to welcome, self-audit tool: a tool developed by culturally and linguistically diverse disabled people from Geelong www.waystowelcome.org Choose Learn > Tools > Self Audit Tool
- » Aged Care Diversity Framework action plans: developed by the Australian Government Department of Health www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/aged-care-diversity-framework-action-plans
- » Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Framework: published by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services www.dhhs.vic.gov.au Choose Publications > Framework > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework
- » Technical Information regarding physical disability access: published by WA Department of Communities www.disability.wa.gov.au Choose Business and Government > Disability Access and Inclusion Plans > Implementing your DAIP > Access and Inclusion Resource Kit
- » 2013 SA Health Guide for engaging with Consumers and the Community.

4 What else might get in the way?



Many older people's experiences are influenced by a variety of factors outside of their age. These additional aspects of an individual's identity alter the ways that their age impacts them and their experiences. In many cases, society's failure to adequately accommodate these experiences results in further barriers.

Not all barriers are age-related

Another way to talk about what might get in the way of older people engaging with the organisation is to talk about barriers or needs that are not accommodated. Some of these will be related to a person's age but often, it is a barrier that is not specifically age-related but is exacerbated by ageing. For example, limited financial access is common but it can get worse with age and is more common for older people. It is also important to acknowledge that the experiences and identities of older people vary widely and that the barriers they experience are diverse and often interact with one another.

Some barriers are hidden

Sometimes these barriers can be

viewed or named, e.g. a narrow hallway or inexperience with computers and the internet. These barriers may be simple to overcome. For example, by removing storage cupboards from a hallway, access for wheelchair users can be made possible.

Other times, barriers will be hidden or difficult to describe, such as difficulty processing spoken language or fear that someone won't be taken seriously because of how they have been treated in the past.

These barriers can exist at all levels of the organisation. It could be in the avenues the organisation uses to promote itself, the pool used for recruitment of staff and board members, meeting times or length and physical location.

A CASE STUDY

One service user is a woman over 50 who runs her farm more than 100km from the CBD. She wanted to access separation and property legal support and was frustrated that WIRE only provided a face-to-face legal clinic in the city. She explained that it would be an entire day for her to drive into the city, have the appointment and drive home again. Talking this through with her, it was clear that the barriers to her accessing the support she needed were: work responsibilities, time, finances, limited rural resources and physical distance.

For example, to support more diverse representation on a board, the organisational rules may need to be changed to require that board vacancies be advertised for a specified minimum time to certain audiences, as well as requiring a set number of positions for those with certain lived experiences.

By identifying the underlying reason for a person's difficulty accessing your organisation, you can start to identify the barriers that might be getting in their way.

The questions you can ask to identify the barriers to access to the organisation are informed by the questions posed by Dafina-Lazarus Stewart in their article 'Language of Appeasement'.

- » "Who is trying to get in the room but can't?"

- » "What is stopping them?"
- » "Whose presence in the room is under constant threat of erasure?"
- » "Whose ideas won't be taken as seriously because they aren't in the majority?"
- » "What conditions have we created that maintain certain groups as the perpetual majority here?"

From reading the case study above and asking the questions we can pinpoint several ways this older person was excluded from access. Once this information is gathered, it is important to do something with the information to make a difference.

5 Planning successful change

If organisations are to be truly accessible to older people, they need to accommodate accessibility as broadly as possible. Once barriers have been identified there must be a commitment to remove barriers and engagement with how this can be done in a way that truly supports those who are impeded by them.

It is also important to note that, given the diversity of needs and barriers experienced by older people, what is a barrier to one person may improve accessibility for another. There isn't always a clear solution to this. Where possible, offering multiple options can reduce this impact, e.g. steps and a ramp to enter a building or space.

Where changes aren't possible, **the respectful way to move forward together is to be clear about the situation, be as flexible as possible and ask the person who is experiencing the barrier how they would like to navigate the situation.**

For example, board meetings cannot occur before 6pm but an older board member, Sara, has poor night vision and cannot drive at night. The rules can be changed to allow for online participation so Sara attends most

meetings virtually, allowing her to stay safe by avoiding night driving.

Action planning

After gathering information, analysing the data you have received and identifying gaps for older people, it is important to develop an action plan. This action plan will enable you to plan change that will improve access. It may not be possible to do everything at once but you can develop a realistic time frame for implementation ensuring that the most important information gets addressed first. Action plans can take many forms but should include the following:

- » What is to be addressed?
- » How?
- » By whom?

- » By when?
- » When it will be reviewed?

One outcome may involve several elements. You may have a goal that includes attracting more older service users. This one goal may require several actions including adapting promotional material, developing a connection with local community services for older people, educating staff around the needs of older people and creating a space for them to address biases they may have about older people. It is important to map out all the actions required to achieve the change you are after.

Evaluation and monitoring

“Has your action plan worked?” is a vital question. If you set out to have more older people use your service you must develop a strategy to measure this. Many of these types of questions can be addressed by benchmarking. Benchmarking involves establishing the rate that something is occurring at a particular point in time and then reassessing after a change has taken place.

The best evaluation occurs when it is considered at the beginning of a project and involves deciding what your desired outcome is. Once you

know your desired outcome you can tailor your action plan to address the change you want to see and decide how you are going to measure success.

Examples of change you may wish to evaluate and monitor could include:

- » Increased participation of older people in the service
- » Reduced number of complaints from older people
- » Increased number of employees over 50
- » Increased satisfaction of older service users
- » Increased engagement with older community members

Examples of success measurements could include:

- » A 5 per cent increase in older people accessing the service over a 12 month period
- » Modified demographic data collection so that you collect data about the age of service users
- » A reduced number of complaints from older people regarding accessing the website
- » An increase in older people on the board of the organisation

Notes

Call us:



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Weekdays 9am to 5pm
(mobile costs may vary)



Visit us:

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Contact us:

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Chat online, download resources
and book into events:

wire.org.au

(Chat weekdays only)



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