



Expression

Bulletin of the National Advisory Council on Aging

Seniors at work

While television and magazine ads promise early release from work to a life of travel and leisure, the number of working seniors is quietly growing.

Between 1996 and 2001, the ranks of working seniors rose from 255,000 to 305,000. These numbers would be higher if mandatory retirement policies did not apply to about half of Canadian workers – up to 20% of whom would like to work beyond the age of 65.

So why are more seniors working longer? Everyone has their own reasons, but the fact that people today expect to live longer and enjoy good health well past age 65, plays an important part.

For many seniors, leaving a job they love because of their age just isn't an option: they choose to work as long as they are able. Others remain at a job to earn money: lifetime events can prevent a person from earning sufficient pension and

many find it difficult to live on public pension and Old Age Security benefits alone. Still others retire from their jobs, but don't stop working! Their volunteer activities make contributions to their communities that are valuable beyond price.



Fortunately, the traditional pattern of an “overnight” retirement event is gradually being replaced by flexible transitions to full retirement. With baby boomers entering or nearing retirement, and fewer young people entering the labour market, growing numbers of employers are happy to keep the skill and knowledge that their senior employees bring. This attitude and policy shift is good for all seniors – those who love to work, those who have to work, and those who want to remain productive in both the volunteer and paid workforces.

Don Holloway

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NACA Member





NACA

The National Advisory Council on Aging consists of up to 18 members from all parts of Canada and all walks of life. The members bring to Council a variety of experience and expertise to advise the federal Minister of Health, his colleagues and the public on the situation of seniors and the measures needed to respond to the aging of the Canadian population. Current NACA members are:

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■ Views on retirement

Whether we like it or not, retirement lifestyles are linked to the economy, politics and social attitudes as well as a senior's personal finances, health and family and social networks. While these factors can change over time, there are three attitudes towards aging workers and retirement that dominate peoples' thinking today:

The weary warrior

According to this view employees work most of their lives, and at 65 expect to enjoy only a few years of rest and leisure before the onset of serious health problems or death. Employers who hold this attitude may practice ageism by refusing to hire mature workers and/or imposing mandatory retirement as a way to remove employees believed to be "older" or "less productive" in order to hire or promote younger workers.

Freedom 55

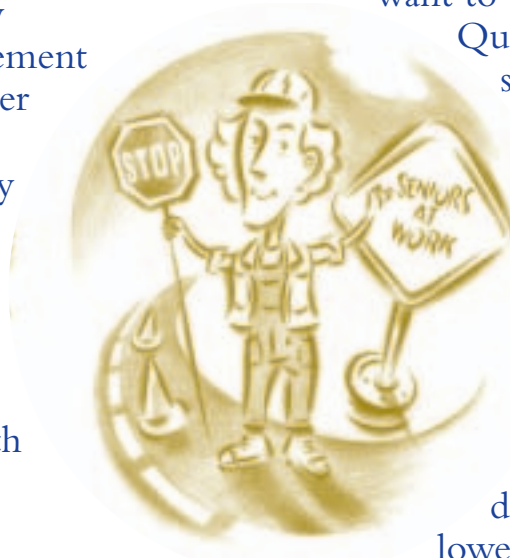
Pictures of seniors on cruise ships, golf courses and sandy beaches have influenced many Canadians' idea of retirement. As one ten-year old put it, "I want to be retired when I grow up." Public opinion bought into the "retire early and enjoy life" myth created by financial groups selling investor-directed pensions – and many dreamers expected to become market-made millionaires during the Stock Market boom of the late 1990s.

Selling this vision of retirement was made easier by government decisions to lower the age for receiving Canada Pension Plan (CPP/QPP) benefits from age 65 to 60 and by certain public and private employers introducing generous early retirement packages when the public debt or a weak economy forced them to downsize.



Retirement: what's that?

Traditionally, retirement was simple. You turned 65, emptied your desk or locker, said goodbye and left the job-site and the labour force. While many Canadians still enter retirement this way, a growing number of older workers work beyond age 65. Many stay in jobs they love, while others change careers or take a “bridge job” between their career and retirement, for as long as they choose or their health permits.



■ Reality check

Rightly or wrongly, forced retirement was long thought to be the best way to open jobs and promotion opportunities for young workers. But low birth rates and retiring baby boomers mean that Canada faces a workforce shortage especially in health care, education and construction. So, to force willing, skilled and experienced workers to retire, or refuse to hire qualified people based on age when there are fewer young workers entering the workforce, is poor economic policy.

The Government of Quebec has looked at the numbers, and doesn't like the way they add up. On one hand, by 2015 one half of its public servants will be, or will be able to be, retired.¹ On the other hand, the birth rate continues to drop – leaving the

workforce of 2020 seriously small. During Quebec's *Forum des générations*, Premier Charest promised to encourage progressive retirement options for older workers who want to stay on the job and to renew Quebec's program of income supplement for seniors. This will help seniors who want to work, as well as give financial help to those who want to retire.

By making these changes, Quebec responds to its need for experienced workers and to many seniors' desire to stay productive, while lowering the number of vacant positions in both its public and private sectors. A number of other provinces are considering similar initiatives.

■ Today's working seniors

Job holders

According to the 2001 Census², today's senior workers are:

- generally better educated than earlier generations – 17% hold university degrees.
- self-employed for the most part. Working seniors are four times more likely than people aged 15 to 64 to be working owners of a small business with no hired help.
- increasingly concerned about money. If a senior had a job that didn't include a

¹ Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Données sociodémographiques en bref, juin 2001*, #3. www.stat.gouv.qc.ca

² Statistics Canada, *The Daily*, Wednesday, February 25, 2004, *Seniors at work: An update*.



good pension (and many employers offer no pension), or earned less than \$40,000 per year, the fear of living in poverty is real.

Workers in transition

Many seniors are making a transition to retirement over several years. For them, leaving the labour force is a process – not a single event. Whether they continue to work because they have the desire and drive to remain actively employed, or because they can't afford to stop, this process is unique to each person. For example, some workers choose to work part-time or on short-term contracts that allow them to continue to earn money, but enjoy more time for friends and family, and for hobbies, travel, community service and other activities.

Volunteers

Senior volunteers make a huge contribution. According to Statistics Canada's 1998 *General Social Survey* on time use, 3.2 million retirees spent about 5 billion hours doing unpaid productive work. The economic value to our communities is thought to be \$60.2 billion each year!

■ Upcoming trends

Looking at the attitudes of workers aged 45-59 (the babyboomers), we see that most

Some 35% of Canadians spend an average of 2 hours a day in civic and volunteer activities. This generous spirit is led by the 42% of Canadians aged 55-64 and 44% of Canadians over 65, who spend an average of 2.2 hours a day as volunteers.³

would work past the age of 65 if they enjoyed good health and could do work they love. Some would stay in their job until they were ready to leave, others would find another job – such as turning a hobby into a way to earn money. They also feel that retirement should be an active lifestyle – and plan to fill their lives with hobbies, family and volunteer activities.⁴

When asked about their retirement plans:

- 22% plan to retire before 60
- 22% plan to retire between 60-65
- 23% plan to retire at 65
- 3% plan to retire after 65

Of the remaining, 13% don't know when they'll retire and 18% don't plan to retire. People in these groups have lower incomes, may be immigrants who arrived in Canada since the early 1980s, are most likely single (widowed or divorced),⁵ and are worried that they cannot afford to stop working.

³ Statistics Canada, *Overview of the Time Use of Canadians in 1998*.

⁴ Policy Research Initiative, *Views on Life-Course Flexibility and Canada's Aging Population*, July 2004.

⁵ Statistics Canada, *The Daily*, Tuesday, September 2, 2003, *General Social Survey: Social support and aging*.



■ The health connection

Studies show that working after age 65 can be good for your health. Why? People need satisfaction in their lives – and the satisfaction work brings to many seniors is one factor that helps keep them healthy. Being able to plan and control the shift from much work and little play, to little work and much play, is another. On the other hand, people who lose their jobs late in life or are forced to retire, have stress from lost income and control that can have a serious impact on their mental and physical health.⁶

■ Giving choice a voice

What employers want most from their workers is skill on the job. While older workers might not be able to stay in jobs that require strength and endurance, in most cases there is no difference between the quality of work done by younger and older workers. In fact, older workers have proven to be as productive and more dedicated, experienced and stable than younger workers.⁷

Because most people will live in good health past the age of 65, people can live up to one-third of their lives in retirement. When you look at these statistics, forced retirement at age 65 adds up to throwing away a valuable part of the labour force. Employers need to wake up to the fact that pushing older workers into retirement is a costly mistake.

Did you know:

- If you are retired and are between 60 and 65, you can apply and receive your CPP/RRQ pension at any time, but at a lower rate than if you apply at 65.
- Once you receive your CPP/RRQ pension, you can work as much as you'd like without affecting your pension payment – but you cannot contribute to CPP/RRQ on any future earnings.⁸

When **Richard Evin**, president of a Montréal-based company that specializes in uniforms, looked for a head shipper 12 years ago, he didn't set out to hire a mature worker – he set out to hire the best possible worker. He met Israel Levine, aged 63 – a man with 21 years of experience in the textile industry, through the **Jewish Vocational Service's** mature worker program **Access 45+**. Evin, like a growing number of employers, recognizes the huge benefits that seniors' experience can bring to business, while Israel, still working at 75, credits the satisfaction his work brings for his continued health and happiness.⁹

⁶ Marshall, Victor W., *Life Course Perspectives of Work and Retirement Transitions in Relation to Health*.

⁷ May, Kathryn, *The Ottawa Citizen*, *A Solution to the skills shortage: Let older workers stay on job*. August 30, 2004.

⁸ www.hrmanagement.gc.ca, Human Resources Management – Older Workers, *HR Planning for Older Workers*

⁹ globeinvestor.com, News from The Globe and Mail, *Older workers often prove to be huge asset*, October 20, 2003.



■ Focus on the future

Getting rid of forced retirement laws and policies does not mean that most people will keep working, or that they can be forced to work, past age 65. These changes will simply give people more choices about how to live during their later years. As labour laws change, so must government programs, employer policies and seniors themselves. For example:

Government

Local, provincial and federal governments can offer more job training and job placement services to seniors who want to stay in or re-enter the labour market. The federal government, through **Human Resources and Skills Development Canada** (HRSDC), already runs and funds programs that help unemployed workers over 45 find new work. These programs, designed to help older workers learn new skills and develop confidence, enjoy a placement rate of 71%. With the growing concern about workforce shortages, the scope of these programs should include helping all seniors – even those receiving CPP/RRQ benefits – who want to find a job.

Employers

It is in the best interest of employers to find ways to help their older workers who want to keep working. For example, they can discuss transitions to retirement that meet the needs of both the business and the worker. These arrangements can include job sharing, part-time work,

working from home, having fewer responsibilities or taking on a new role such as becoming a mentor for younger and new employees.

Employers can provide skills development opportunities to all of their employees, no matter what their age. This will prevent dependable mature workers from being left behind as workplace practices and technologies change.

Employers can also actively seek older workers to fill positions needing their skills and experience. Advertising job openings in senior citizens' centres, local/national publications for seniors or Web sites that match seniors to jobs, are ways of letting seniors know that they are welcome to apply.

A number of Canadian businesses already understand and appreciate the value that older workers bring to their operations. They have made the choice of keeping or recruiting older workers. To celebrate their efforts, the **Canadian Association of Retired Persons** (CARP) offers a new annual recognition award – *Best Employers of Fifty-Plus Canadians*. The first winners are:

- **Avis Rent a Car** – recruits senior “mall walkers” as shuttle drivers
- **Royal Bank of Canada** – hires back its retired workers to mentor younger workers in its global banking service
- **Home Depot** – welcomes applications from “mature” Canadians with the skills and knowledge to give



practical advice or offer workshops to customers

- **Merck Frosst Canada Inc.** – helps their workers save and plan for retirement.

Seniors

Most employers know that the workforce is getting older, but won't do anything about it until it touches them directly. If you want to stay in your workplace past age 65, approach your supervisor.

Explore training opportunities through your workplace or HRSDC centres that will keep you in step with the skills that will be required in your job in the coming years. Increasing your value to your employers by being an active learner is a good way to make it very easy for them to agree to have you stay for as long as you choose.

If you don't have a job and want one, don't be afraid of learning new skills. A recent survey reports that 71% of human resource directors consider that workers over 55 are able to learn new skills just as well as younger workers.¹⁰ In fact, **Jean Davidson** of *Humber College's Centre for Experienced Workers* says "The main barrier to employment is attitude."¹¹ Learning new skills or technologies can have a huge impact on confidence levels. She sees a number of seniors enter computer workshops thinking that they can't keep up with the young people. But when they

A recently released study by Canadian Policy Research Networks debunks dire predictions of looming skills shortages as unfounded and overblown, arguing that Canada could have plenty of workers, as long as employers and policy makers change their attitudes about older workers and encourage them to stay on the job.

Ottawa Citizen, August 30, 2004

leave, their confidence and self-esteem are high.

With industry and government's renewed appreciation for the skills and knowledge of its older workers, if you're age 50 and older with a positive attitude, you're in a good position to arrange a retirement strategy that meets your needs.

■ Are you ready for WORK?

Volunteer work:

All types of organizations in your community need volunteers. For information on needs and opportunities:

- contact your local Volunteer bureau
- check your local newspaper, which may list openings for volunteers
- call your community centre or school board.

¹⁰ The Alliance of Sector Councils, *The Aging Workforce and Human Resources Development Implications For Sector Councils*. February 2003.

¹¹ *Labour Market Trends – Edmonton and Capital Region*, Volume 3, Issue 9, June 2003. "Retirement: it isn't what it used to be."



You may also wish to visit these Web sites:

Charity Village – Volunteer Bulletin Board www.charityvillage.ca

A site that exists to encourage, support and serve Canada's 175,000 registered charities and non-profit organizations.

Volunteer Opportunities Exchange
www.voe-reb.org

The VOE is a free online service that uses the Internet to connect volunteers to voluntary organizations of all types and sizes.

Finding the right volunteer position may be as easy as turning on a computer!

To find a job:

JobsEtc

www.jobsetc.ca

A government of Canada Web site that has helpful information on employee rights, transition to retirement and work after retirement. Find the "What if I..." section, and choose "I am an older worker" from the drop down menu.

The Retired Worker

www.retiredworker.ca

A Web site that "connects older workers who want to work on a part-time, temporary or project basis with employers who are looking for the experience, broad skill base and values seniors deliver."

Emplois Quebec

emploiquebec.net

A government of Quebec Web site that has information relating to employment opportunities and strategies to help workers over age 45.

Other resources

Canadian Association of Retired Persons

www.50plus.com

Experienced Workers Employment Bureaux in Canada

www.crm.mb.ca/options45+/bureau

A Guide to Midlife Career Moves is

a handbook about career planning and looking for work in midlife or mature years. It's available online at:

www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop

Enter "Guide to Midlife Career Moves" in the Product Search View by Keyword textbox.



Don Holloway has worked in the interest of seniors for many years. He is the past President of the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation

(NPSCF), and a trustee on the Health Care Board of Regional Hospitals in Newfoundland. His work with the NPSCF includes aiding the development of Canada-wide programs such as "Reducing the Risk of Medication Misuse and Overuse by Hard to Reach Seniors"; "Learning to Prepare for the Issues of Leaving One's Life"; and "Active Living". Mr. Holloway lives in Marystown, Newfoundland, and has been a NACA member since 1999.