
Managing growth pressures

October 23, 2007

Government launches public consultation on aging workforce

Edmonton... A new online consultation is giving Albertans a chance to share their feedback on the issues and opportunities related to Alberta's aging workforce.

The consultation runs until December 14 and results will be compiled into a summary report to support the development of future policies.

"Before any policy changes are made, I am interested to hear Albertans' ideas on how government, employers and labour organizations can best prepare to meet the needs of mature workers, and at the same time maximize opportunities for social and economic growth," said Iris Evans, Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

The consultation follows *Mature Workers in Alberta and British Columbia: Understanding the Issues and Opportunities*, a discussion document including information from 14 large employer and labour groups plus small and medium-sized businesses in Alberta and B.C. This document is a resource for employers and policymakers in the public and private sectors. It provides a profile of mature workers in Alberta and B.C., factors that influence work decisions, and approaches taken by various stakeholders, governments and countries in response to the labour market challenges of an aging workforce.

Alberta and B.C. are both facing labour supply challenges that are expected to intensify in the coming years. In Alberta, mature workers - aged 45 and over - account for more than one-third of the workforce. While the prospects of an aging population and mass retirements raise concerns, many experts predict that people will continue to work, both for economic reasons and personal fulfillment.

The document and online consultation survey are posted on the Government of Alberta website at www.alberta.ca in the section titled *participate in public consultations*.

Addressing changes in workforce demographics supports Premier Ed Stelmach's plan to manage growth pressures. Other priorities for the government are to build a stronger Alberta, govern with integrity and transparency, improve Albertans' quality of life, and promote safe and secure communities.

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Attachment: Background on discussion document

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Mature Workers in Alberta and British Columbia: Understanding the Issues and Opportunities

Who is a mature worker?

According to employment statistics, this group includes people between the ages of 45 and 64. However, there are increasing numbers of people working into their 70s and 80s depending on individual circumstances and overall health.

What is the issue?

In Alberta, the number of mature workers in the labour force grew by over two-thirds, nearly 67 per cent, between 1996 and 2006. Mature workers currently account for over one-third of Alberta's labour force.

Over the next 10 years, more than 140,000 workers are expected to retire in Alberta. Because of the decline in birth rate following the baby boom generation, there will be fewer younger workers entering the labour force to replace the retiring workers. Increasing mature workers' participation in the labour force is an important part of a balanced strategy to help ensure continued economic growth in Alberta and B.C.

In Alberta, forecasts indicate that in the next 10 years 400,000 new jobs will be created. However, the forecast net increase in the number of workers will only be 291,000, leaving a shortfall of 109,000 workers.

What is being done?

Increasing the involvement of mature workers in the labour force requires planning and new initiatives to encourage them to remain in the labour force; to re-engage mature workers who have left the labour force; and to maximize the contribution of mature workers in the labour force. Alberta's plan of action is to sustain economic growth through an adequate supply of skilled labour, which includes mature workers. The overall strategy for Alberta's workforce, *Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce*, is about developing a labour force where there are more workers, better trained and educated people, and high performance innovative work environments.

The actions of individual employers will have the greatest effect on mature workers' participation in the workforce. As mature workers approach retirement age, their focus shifts to different interests or spending more time with family rather than working full-time. They look for flexible work arrangements that provide them with more work-life balance, such as telecommuting opportunities, part-time or contract work, or modified work weeks and work duties. Many employers have begun to offer such arrangements, not only to their older workers, but to all staff, as a way of retaining valued employees.

These efforts have resulted in a number of benefits, including increased labour to support economic growth; improved public finances through reduced public spending on early retirement; and maintained skill and experience in the workforce with a more gradual turnover.

Find the *Mature Workers in Alberta and British Columbia: Understanding the Issues and Opportunities* survey and document on the Government of Alberta website at www.alberta.ca in the section titled *participate in public consultations*.

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