

# Identifying and Understanding Innovations in Labour Market Adjustment Programs for Older Workers

Final report for the Ontario Human Capital Research Innovation Fund

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Once unemployed, older workers (those 50 and above) are among those who experience the most obstacles in finding new employment. In the next decade, the number of older workers will increase significantly, and many will require labour market adjustment assistance to remain in the labour force.

This report identifies and analyzes innovative programs and services in Ontario that assist with labour market adjustment, professional development and the transition into new employment for older workers. The report also examines challenges to program innovation, including steps that can be taken to foster program and service innovation.

Data for this report was obtained primarily from an on-line survey of sites delivering the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TIOW) in Ontario as well as in-person interviews and focus groups of clients and service providers at 11 sites across Ontario.

Overall, the findings reveal innovation in all aspects of program delivery, but also considerable barriers to more widespread innovation. Service providers were clear that undertaking innovative approaches requires additional programming time, and may require additional resources. However, the level of funding, on its own, is not a driver for innovation, but is a key component in enhancing innovative approaches to programs. Service providers are generally of the view that TIOW program guidelines place limitation on enhancing innovation.

In making and maintaining connections with employers most program sites noted a lack of staff and insufficient time to undertake innovation in building more linkages with employers.

With regard to using technology in innovative ways (such as social media, electronic outreach, website services, on-line resources, and others) there are pockets of innovation, however there is considerable scope for more. Although technical and computer training for clients was identified as a critical service, such training was limited in the innovation that was utilized.

There appears to be limited coordination and collaboration among programs servicing of older workers. A number of respondents and interview participants noted that there is no organized means to share best practices and innovation.

There are six specific policy recommendations:

- 1) Additional funding or reallocation of existing budgets to support a stronger web presence for programs serving older workers, including electronic outreach and networking with potential employers.
- 2) The provision of more tools, techniques, models and best practices on innovations related to involving and engaging with potential employers, industry and the business community more generally.
- 3) More means for programs to share innovations amongst themselves and to link with each other, as well as networking opportunities for services providers in different locations and regions.
- 4) Stronger linkages to post-secondary institutions among programs and services so that older workers can obtain credentials and explore diploma programs.
- 5) Additional computer training, as well as more assistance with identifying transferable skills concurrently with job placement opportunities.
- 6) Ensuring greater awareness among employers, professional organizations and other local organizations of the strengths and benefits that older workers bring to workplace, as well as more community awareness of programs and services for older workers.

## FOCUS GROUPS WITH CLIENTS

The focus groups across Ontario identified several key factors related to employment transitions. The focus groups highlighted issues related to being an older adult job seeker and the emotional aspects of job loss, as well as the changing nature of work and workplaces. The innovations surrounding the development of a social network, lifelong learning, program design and several other program characteristics were emphasized.

There were also suggestions made by older workers who wanted to see some changes made to programs and services. They stated that these suggestions would better meet their needs. The suggestions were categorized into: Program or workshop content, education and learning, program length, employers and security of program funding.

Suggestions related to education, skill development and training are emphasized below because lifelong learning is required in today's society. Focus groups participants explained that professional development, training and educational credentials are of interest to older workers. They were also very interested in seeing an expansion of educational content to include specific topics.

### *Suggestions related to education and learning*

First, some additional program and workshop content was suggested. Topics were: self-employment, social enterprise, the creative economy and creative problem solving related to community economic development, workplace shifts and the changing nature of work.

Second, older workers need more opportunity for post-graduate education and the completion of certifications. They stated that while they have many soft skills and a lot of experience, they are missing certificates or diplomas to obtain employment. Educational requirements have changed. Older workers highly value credentials from public universities and colleges over and above other options.

Relatedly, they would like to see flexibility of eligibility with regard to gaining enhanced education and learning. A less rigid approach is required because lifelong learning is necessary today and older adults are capable learners. There is a need to facilitate learning and access to post-secondary education options.

Finally, older workers suggested lengthening the program. A longer time frame would provide more application of new information and knowledge. This would facilitate more fieldwork, skill development and the transferring of skills as well as additional job placements to gain industry-specific experience.

A longer program would also benefit individuals who identify learning disabilities in later life that went undiagnosed for years. In addition, it would assist individuals who have learning anxieties from previous formal education experiences and need to adjust to becoming a learner.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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