

Speaking Notes

for

**the Honourable Diane Finley,
Minister of Human Resources
and Skills Development**

at

***the National Conference on Maximizing
Employment Opportunities for Mature Workers***

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Ottawa, Ontario

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It's a pleasure to be here, and to see so many people we've worked with in the past.

We've certainly heard a lot of interesting presentations about older workers.

I'd like to put our discussions about older workers in a larger context.

Canada's population is aging.

We all know that we're facing emerging skills shortages in key sectors of the Canadian labour market.

We all recognize the fact that it is critical that older workers play an active role and participate in the labour force.

Our government is helping to meet this challenge by making huge investments in skills development and training.

As part of this effort, the Government of Canada is giving the provinces and territories approximately \$2.4 billion annually for labour market development agreements and labour market agreements.

As part of this investment, each year, approximately 100 000 unemployed workers aged 50 and over participate in EI-funded employment programs.

In addition to these agreements, our government, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, has invested \$220 million in the **Targeted Initiative for Older Workers**.

This program provides a range of employment services to older workers who live in economically vulnerable communities and have lost their jobs.

Through training and job counselling, participants are gaining new skills and renewed confidence.

I am pleased to report that all provinces and territories are now participating in the Initiative, with 253 projects already approved.

These projects will help more than 13 600 unemployed older workers through training, income support and job placements.

One such project, delivered by the Shelburne Campus of Nova Scotia Community College, helped eight older workers improve their employability skills.

Over a 17-week period, participants took courses on résumé writing, job searching, basic computer skills and occupational health and safety.

They also benefited from four weeks of relevant work experience.

I am pleased to note that all eight participants were employed within weeks of completing the program.

One participant even described the program as “a lifeline given to me in my deepest, darkest moment.”

But measures for training and re-training won't be enough to sustain our labour force if we don't do more to keep our skilled older people on the job.

More employers need to realize that older workers are a valuable resource.

Their skills have been honed over a lifetime, and they can mentor younger employees.

I'm glad to see that attitudes are changing.

Some employers actually *prefer* to hire older workers.

Lee Valley Tools of Ottawa has 800 employees in an operation that stretches from Halifax to Victoria.

Currently, nearly 20 percent of those employees are 59 or older.

When owner Leonard Lee is asked why he likes older workers, he says: “*Because they know something.*”

A lot of older people want to keep working.

Earlier in this conference, we heard some results from the Statistics Canada Survey of Older Workers, funded by our department.

Our other research is consistent with those findings.

For example, in one of our surveys, working Canadians were asked what they would like to do when they reached retirement age.

Fifty-three percent said that they would like to continue working in either their current job or in a different job.

We are living in a knowledge economy, and knowledge is precisely what older workers have in abundance.

There is such a high demand for experienced workers that employers are now making a greater effort to retain their workers past retirement age, or encourage them to return.

For example, the City of Calgary has set up an internal employment agency that connects managers with retirees who are interested in working on short-term assignments.

We need to create more age-friendly workplaces.

Many older workers need or want some type of accommodation—such as flexible hours or part-time employment.

They may wish to ease into retirement or take some time off and re-enter the labour force at a later date.

In the future, what we now call retirement may be a gradual process rather than an abrupt change.

Older workers may also want a change in the nature of their job.

To some, retirement will not be the end of paid work, but the beginning of a *new* career.

Forward-looking employers are taking the wishes of older workers into consideration.

Let me take a moment to congratulate one of those forward-looking employers—CH2M HILL Canada—an engineering consulting company that recently won an award as one of the *Top Employers for Canadians Over 40*.

I am very pleased that they are here at the conference today.

CH2M HILL actively looks for older workers with experience.

Among other benefits, the company offers employees a full-time teleworking option, which many older employees appreciate.

We look forward to learning more about their experience later this afternoon.

Another winner of a Top Employer Award is the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, or CSIS, which hires older workers and counts previous work experience toward their paid vacation allowance.

CSIS employees can also take advantage of flexible work arrangements, such as compressed work weeks, as well as phased-in retirement and a self-funded leave program.

Organizations like these ones—in both the public and the private sector—are showing what can be done.

Let me conclude by saying this: we want and need our older workers.

And many of them want and need to stay in the labour force.

So we should put our heads together to find ways to make it worthwhile for them to do so.

Working in collaboration, we can give older workers more choices and opportunities, and give the Canadian economy a big boost.

Thank you.

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