

AGE-FRIENDLY BUSINESS

GENERAL INFORMATION

Negative stereotypes don't only discriminate against older people, they cost retailers a significant market share.

The Hon Susan Ryan AO, former Age Discrimination Commissioner

What is an age-friendly business?

Many businesses already strive to be an age-friendly business without necessarily naming it up, because, at their core, age-friendly businesses are simply about respecting customers.

By actively aiming to better serve older members of their community, age-friendly businesses are places where all customers, regardless of age, mobility, background or circumstance, feel valued, respected and safe. It's a place where customers want to return to shop, not only because the business stocks items relevant to their needs, but because they feel safe and can easily negotiate clear and comfortable environments, receive professional and knowledgeable service, have an opportunity to rest, and can complete their business quickly.

Age-friendly businesses benefit **everyone** — not just people who are older.

Many of the principles of an age-friendly business support families with young children, pregnant women, people living with disability, culturally diverse people and anyone who wants an efficient and enjoyable shopping experience.

Why is an age-friendly business important?

Businesses that attract older people will have a significant edge over those that don't, both socially and financially.

People over 65 already are, and will continue to become, a powerful economic force in Tasmania and losing this customer base could be catastrophic for businesses. Older people tend to shop locally and are happy to spend money on quality products that support their lifestyle. In 2016, 19.4% of Tasmania's population was aged over 65 years¹. This number is expected to increase to 25% by 2030². But it's not only local populations that are ageing — numbers of older tourists are also increasing. From 2016 to 2017, 17.8% of Tasmanian visitors (just over 225,000 people) were aged over 65 years, and 40.2% (just over 500,000 people) were aged over 55³.

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics: 2016 Census QuickStats Tasmania

2 Facing the Future, A Baseline Profile on Older Tasmanians (2012) COTA Tasmania

3 Tasmanian Visitor Survey (September 2017) Tourism Tasmania

While most Tasmanian businesses already offer good customer service, there are still ways to improve understanding of the needs and wants of older customers. COTA has heard first-hand stories of older Tasmanians feeling 'invisible' in shops and services as their 'hair becomes greyer'. Many businesses and staff, even those who generally provide good customer service, still seem to have negative perceptions of older people, viewing them as mentally deficient, deaf, blind, poor, inflexible or old-fashioned. Many of these perceptions are unconscious biases that have developed over a lifetime of living in a society that desires youth and dismisses the value of age. Simply raising awareness about, and actively challenging, the societal stereotypes that many of us possess can go a long way towards creating an age friendly business culture.

Common behaviours that turn older Tasmanians away from businesses include having staff speak unnecessarily loudly and slowly to them, being patronised by being called 'sweetie' or 'darl' or being blatantly ignored. These behaviours belittle and disrespect older people and can significantly affect their self-worth and identity. Older customers are less likely to use that business again, and share their experiences with others who will be unlikely to try that business.

There are also, unsurprisingly, financial benefits of being an age-friendly business. Businesses that adopt universally accessible environments can have a 20 to 25% increase in turnover compared to non-accessible environments, and a potential return of

\$13 for every \$1 of investment⁴. Add to this increased customer satisfaction and improved reputation through word-of-mouth, and age-friendly businesses can have an impressively loyal customer base while also being socially responsible and supporting their community.

How do I become an age-friendly business?

Becoming an age-friendly business is easier than many businesses realise. Some large adjustments to store structure may need to be considered, but smaller changes to layout, structure and staff culture can go a long way to creating an age-friendly business.

The core to age-friendly businesses is to treat all customers with dignity and respect. This naturally leads to better communication with customers and a desire to adapt the business layout and environment to meet their needs.

COTA has produced an 'Age-Friendly Checklist' for businesses to use to assess their 'age-friendliness' and understand ways to adapt their business, and a list of case studies of businesses that are already going the extra mile for their customers (and reaping the social and financial rewards). Using these documents, and COTA's 'Age-friendly Business Resources', Tasmanian businesses can continue to develop and understand their ageing customer base and the best ways to support them.

⁴ *Good Access is Good Business, City of Melbourne*: <https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/good-access-good-business-infograph.pdf>