

MINISTER FOR AGED CARE / MINISTER FOR INDIGENOUS HEALTH

The Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP

My Senior Gap Year book launch 5pm, Tuesday 20 March, 2018 - Mercado Bar, East Kings Square, Perth

Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me to speak at the launch of this wonderful book.

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Wadjuk people of the Noongar nation, and I extend my respects to Elders past and present.

I would like to thank Chris Herrmann, author of My Senior Gap Year, for giving me the privilege of launching his book today. This is a topic near and dear to me.

A hundred plus years ago we talked about ageing being bleak.

These days, Australians are living longer, more active lives. We're living longer because our health is better — we have access to better treatments and medicines. Older Australians are more independent than ever and are loving life.

This essentially means that we are living an extended middle age, not an extended old age. There is no set age when frailty sets in. For most of us, this will not occur until we're 80 years or even later.

As our lives get longer, the financial implications may mean that we need to extend our working lives.

I personally believe that more and more people will want to work in some capacity into their 70s or beyond.

And this is why I find this book so appealing — it's the perfect illustration of what I think many senior Australians should be doing.

Pressing the pause button on our working lives, not the stop button.

I strongly believe we should consider a seniors' gap year, made available for employees in the lead up to the traditional retirement age.

As Chris says in his book, teenagers have done this for decades and why should they have all the fun?

A gap year could allow older people to map out their future while maintaining job security. Right now, people who finish full time work in their 60s can expect to live for at least 20 years post retirement.

The question is: what do we do for those years?

The number of us aged over 65 is projected to more than double during the next 40 years, but we are still failing to prepare well for living to 100 years of age.

A gap year is a fantastic opportunity to take some time away from work — after all, by the time we hit our 60s, surely we've earned it — and know that we have the security to decide what our working future looks like when we are done.

The gap year concept formed as I visited men's sheds and during forums I've held with seniors, where people have told me they regretted retiring. Some say their reasons are financial but many of their concerns are centred on self-worth and boredom. Some have told me they're trying to get back into the workforce, but are being told they're "too experienced" or "overqualified".

This idea is not about forcing businesses to continue employing older workers but about working together on the great opportunities for us to rethink the value of senior Australians, who still have so much to offer.

We already have leave in other forms – long service leave, annual leave, etc - and people take these and they are reinvigorated. Before people retire, it would be good to see the talented individuals we have in every workplace retained so that companies, service sectors and industry can continue to grow - because when we let people out of the workforce, we lose some incredible skills that have been accumulated over 60 years-plus.

As was mentioned, I actually took my "gap year" early. After working as a teacher, then in senior management roles in indigenous health in both the Western Australian and New South Wales governments, I decided to take a year out after I turned 50.

During those 12 months I was able to read a lot, rejuvenate and consider my options, and that's when I decided to take my career in a new direction, in politics.

That said, I think I'll eventually need another gap year because I'm hoping to continue living life to the full, for a long time to come.

Gap years can prove to be life-changing in many ways.

I was particularly struck by the story Chris recounts about travelling through remote Australia.

He saw perfectly good bed linen being discarded from mining camps - and therein, an opportunity to make a difference.

Working with Rotary International, Chris was able to identify a number of charities who could benefit from this.

The end result was that more than 126 pallets of sheets, worth about a quarter of a million dollars, were given to charities so they could help the needy.

So you see, Chris' gap year not only changed his life but the lives of others — for the better.

And senior Australians are making contributions to society like this every day.

The idea of a senior gap year is an important discussion to have and I would like to thank Chris for sharing his experiences through this book. As he says, it's never too late and you never know what the next adventure brings.

I hope this book inspires people to take the plunge and consider their own senior gap year.

Thank you.