



4.0 Introduction

For most of us, paid work plays a big role in our lives. Someone who starts full-time work in their 20s will likely spend at least 70,000 hours at work over the next 40 years.

Work does much more than help to pay our bills; it can be good for our overall health and wellbeing. Unemployment and joblessness increase not only the risk of economic hardship, but also the risk of deprivation and social exclusion.

This chapter examines various aspects of work—from the changing nature of work and the impact this has had on our wellbeing, to the increasing participation of seniors in the workforce. We also consider some recent trends in the labour market and jobless rates. Finally, we discuss the many Australians who work for free—our volunteers.

The Australian labour market has changed considerably over the last half century. The overall employment rate (proportion of the population who are employed) among people aged 15–64 has increased. As well, many more jobs are now held by women. The composition of jobs has also changed: in 1966, manufacturing accounted for about 25% of all jobs, and the services sector for 56%. Today, manufacturing accounts for about 7% of jobs, and service industries for almost 80%. Since 2008, there has been a marked decline in the proportion of lower skilled people who are employed. For instance, the proportion of people whose highest qualification was Year 10 and below who were employed fell by 8.5% between 2008 and 2016.

The notion of a standard-length work week—centred on the 8-hour day, 5-day week—is no longer the norm. As reported in the specially commissioned article in this chapter, the proportion of employed people working part-time has risen substantially; for men, this share has risen more than threefold over the last half century.

Should we be concerned about these changes? The commissioned article presents evidence that it is not the actual number of hours usually worked that matters for worker wellbeing, rather whether the number of hours align with worker preferences.

With increasing life expectancies and improvements in health care, most Australians will grow older and live longer, healthier and more actively engaging lives than any previous generation. For some older Australians, this includes staying longer in the workforce. Over the last 3 decades, the employment rate of Australians aged 65 and over has more than doubled; in fact, it was at an all-time high of 9.1% as at June 2016.

Every day, thousands of Australians work for free, giving their time, services or skills to help others. Volunteers provide a valuable service to the community—the value of their contribution to not-for-profit organisations has been estimated at \$17 billion a year. In 2014, an estimated 5.8 million people aged 15 and over did some voluntary work. Australia's volunteer rate fell to 31% in 2014 after several years on the increase; however, we are still above the OECD average.

