



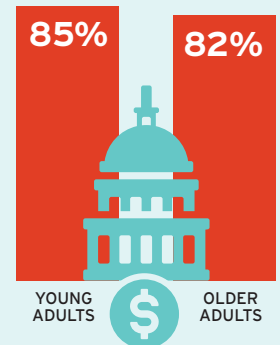
SKILLS ACROSS GENERATIONS: THE REALITIES OF YOUNGER AND OLDER WORKERS

The age composition of the U.S. workforce is shifting dramatically, with 38 million younger workers (ages 16-24) and 118 million older workers (50 and above) driving economic activity. Both age groups face distinct challenges that require tailored policy solutions to unlock their full potential and address critical labor shortages. Younger workers are navigating a period of discovery and growth, but may face barriers to securing quality jobs, career pathways, and training opportunities that allow them to contribute fully to the workforce. Many older workers contend with financial insecurity, age bias in employment, and unsupportive workplaces. Both groups share challenges like age discrimination, limited training access, and workplace inflexibility that require policy action to address workforce shortages and maximize talent.

Recognizing the economic potential of supporting workers, this issue brief presents a statistical overview of younger and older workers, and highlights key employment barriers they encounter as well as the opportunities they present. It also calls on policymakers to support a multigenerational workforce that benefits all of us, ensuring that every person in America has access to skills training, good jobs, and economic prosperity.

DID YOU KNOW?

SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT FUNDING OF SKILLS TRAINING



**85% OF YOUNG ADULTS
AND 82% OF OLDER ADULTS
SUPPORT GOVERNMENT
FUNDING FOR SKILLS TRAINING!**

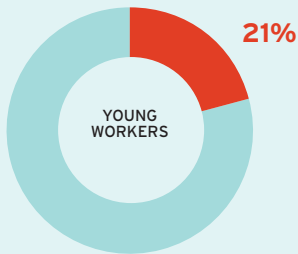
THIS RARE CROSS
GENERATIONAL CONSENSUS
HIGHLIGHTS **BROAD
RECOGNITION** OF HOW
SKILLS TRAINING PREPARES
PEOPLE FOR **ECONOMIC
OPPORTUNITY.**

DID YOU KNOW?



6 IN 10 OF THOSE OVER 50 REPORT THAT THEY ARE WILLING TO LEARN NEW SKILLS IF REQUIRED BY THEIR EMPLOYER.⁷

YOUNG WORKERS ARE OFTEN UNDEREMPLOYED



OVER 21% OF YOUNG WORKERS ARE UNDEREMPLOYED—WORKING PART-TIME OR IN ROLES BELOW THEIR SKILL LEVEL.⁸



ONE IN TEN YOUNG PEOPLE IS NEITHER WORKING NOR IN SCHOOL⁹

THE REALITIES OF YOUNGER AND OLDER WORKERS

Younger and older workers comprise critical segments of the workforce.

In 2024, 38 million Americans were aged 16-24, with very modest growth to 39 million projected by 2040.² Meanwhile, one in ten young people is neither working nor in school and they need opportunities to plug into education and the labor market.³ The population aged 50 and over has surged from 102 million in 2014 to 118 million today, with a projected increase to 132 million by 2040—or more than one in three workers.⁴ This shift is driven by two key factors: the aging of the sizable Baby Boomer generation and increasing life expectancy.

Young workers are in a critical stage of career development, seeking opportunities to gain experience and build long-term careers. Investing in early career pathways can help them plug into the workforce. At the same time, older workers bring decades of experience and leadership to industries that need skilled talent. While many choose to work longer, others remain in the workforce due to systemic factors such as a lifetime

of low wages, limited retirement savings, and age-related barriers in hiring and promotion. Expanding career options and addressing these structural challenges can ensure they have meaningful, financially secure employment.

Black and Latino younger and older workers often face compounded challenges due to systemic discrimination and economic inequities. Black, Indigenous, and Latino young people experience higher rates of disconnection from school and work than white and Asian young people. Meanwhile, young people living in rural areas experience higher rates of disconnection than their counterparts in urban and suburban areas.⁵

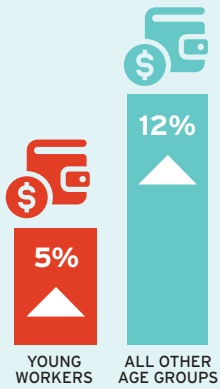
On the other end of the age spectrum, a study investigating how older women and people of color leave the workforce (through retirement, work disability, or death) found that Black and Hispanic women are more likely than white women to experience work disability. This disparity results from lifelong disadvantages in areas such as education, job opportunities, income, wealth, health, and marital status—factors that significantly influence retirement outcomes.⁶



Participating in Jewish Vocational Service's CareerWorks Medical Assistant training program gave me confidence in myself and taught me new skills—from learning how to turn on a computer to standing in front of a group and speaking. The program provided essentials like glasses, interview clothing, and resume help, and it taught me how to believe in myself and not be afraid to ask questions. Because of the program, I've built a career, established relationships with mentors and peers, and strengthened relationships with my family. I've now been on my job for more than nine years, and I'm able to provide for myself and my family.

Denise Thomas, a 50+ professional thriving in the health care field

DID YOU KNOW?

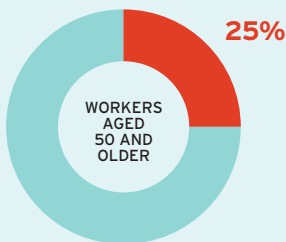


FROM 2000 TO 2023, REAL WAGES FOR WORKERS AGED 16 TO 24 GREW BY ONLY 5%, COMPARED TO 12% FOR ALL OTHER AGE GROUPS.¹³



9 OUT OF 10 OF WORKERS AGED 50 AND OLDER BELIEVE **AGEISM** IS COMMON IN THE WORKPLACE.¹⁴

OLDER WORKERS FACING NEGATIVE COMMENTS



25% OF WORKERS 50 AND OLDER HAVE HEARD **NEGATIVE COMMENTS** ABOUT AN **OLDER** COWORKER'S AGE.¹⁵

WHAT'S HOLDING YOUNGER AND OLDER WORKERS BACK?

Young people are looking to build their careers, yet many face systemic barriers to doing so. Investing in inclusive workforce policies and practices—such as apprenticeship and work-based learning, affordable postsecondary training, and supportive services—ensures they can build strong career pathways.

Older workers bring valuable experience and institutional knowledge, yet outdated workplace policies and hiring practices can limit their opportunities.

Many older workers remain in low-wage jobs with inadequate benefits, while others are financially secure but one health crisis away from poverty.¹⁰ Ensuring workplaces become age-inclusive benefits both workers and employers. A 2024 study revealed that nearly 6 million workers aged 40 and over believe they have experienced age discrimination in the workplace, with half fearing that their age would be a disadvantage when seeking a job today.¹¹ In fact, AARP estimates age discrimination costs the U.S. economy \$850 billion annually, a figure projected to rise to nearly \$4 trillion by 2050.¹²

Expanding flexible work options, lifelong learning opportunities, and supportive services can help older workers continue to contribute their skills while balancing health and caregiving responsibilities.



Attending Georgia Building Trades Academy's YouthBuild program changed my life by helping me develop time management and communication skills while working with others. I met people who were all trying to better themselves, just like me, and we became like family—always having each other's backs. Most importantly, GABTA gave me the support I needed and helped me land a good-paying job that's allowing me to build a better future for myself.

Vondre Westbrook, a young professional thriving in the construction field

By advancing policies that foster a multigenerational workforce, we can build a resilient economy that meets today's demands while ensuring equitable access to skills training, quality jobs, and supportive services—creating opportunities for workers of all ages to thrive.



Investing in our younger and older workers by supporting their unique needs and creating lifelong learning and upskilling opportunities is critical for the success of our company and our industry.

Jason Mann, Business Development, Howard Companies

ENDNOTES

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National Skills Coalition (NSC) is a national coalition that works to meet the ever-changing needs of America's workforce. We organize diverse networks that help to change the conversation about work and advocate for workforce-strengthening policies so that more working people have access to a better life, local businesses around the country see sustained growth, and more communities experience prosperity.

Learn more at nationalskillscoalition.org.

