

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability 2020



MISSION
AUSTRALIA

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability – Employment

Mission Australia is a national, non-denominational Christian charity that has been helping vulnerable Australians move towards independence for more than 160 years. We deliver a range of community, family and specialist employment services across Australia including Disability Employment Services. Mission Australia is one of the largest National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) community partners, working with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to deliver Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) and Local Area Coordination (LAC) services since 2013. Earlier this year, Mission Australia published the *Young willing and able: Youth Survey Disability Report 2019*, which provides important insights into the experiences and views of young people with disability.¹

Mission Australia is also a member of Australian Council of Social Service and Jobs Australia and supports the findings in their *Faces of Unemployment 2020* report, which we commend to the attention of the Royal Commission.²

Recommendations

- Develop a comprehensive national advertising campaign to promote employment of people with disability. This should be designed and developed in consultation with people with disability, employers, the employment services and community sector.
- Ensure the implementation of agile and accessible work environments, inclusive work culture, and recognition of diverse needs and provision of flexible work conditions to meet the needs of people with disability. Employers should be incentivised to be proactive in making these changes and broader monitoring and accountability is required.
- Implement significant improvements to both disability specific and generalist employment services by increasing flexibility to better support people with disability to gain and maintain meaningful employment.
- Completely phase out segregated employment of people with disability such as Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) by supporting them to enter mainstream employment and ensure equitable remuneration for work.
- Increase funding for peer support work options and peer work models that are effective in creating employment opportunities for people with disability.

¹ Mission Australia, *Young willing and able: Youth Survey Disability Report 2019, 2020*, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey>

² Australian Council of Social Service and Jobs Australia, *Faces of Unemployment 2020*, web report, accessible at: <https://www.acoss.org.au/faces-of-unemployment-2020/>

- Develop a National Jobs Plan that will bring together the different levels of government, as well as the private and not-for-profit sectors and employers to create meaningful employment opportunities for people with disability.

Challenges for people with disability in finding and keeping a job

Participation in meaningful employment that is in line with the individual's career aspirations and interests is vital to emotional and financial wellbeing.³ However, there are a range of systemic and structural barriers to people with disability accessing and maintaining employment, including direct and overt discrimination, lack of accessibility and lack of opportunities. It is concerning that people with disability make up 27% of the long-term unemployed in Australia,⁴ which further entrenches their challenges to finding sustainable employment.

While there are supports in place to assist people with disability to overcome these barriers, they have some limitations in achieving positive outcomes. For example, supports are provided for people with disability to access and maintain employment through Disability Employment Services (DES) as well as a more limited range of supports under jobactive. However, there is little or no communication between the two employment support systems, despite jobactive having an active case load of close to 240,000 people with disability as of 31 July 2020.⁵ It is unclear whether the majority of these people with disability are in Stream C of jobactive supports which incorporates additional support for participants. It is important to note that there are limited targeted supports that are appropriately tailored to the needs of people with disability within jobactive.

It is also likely that jobactive and mainstream employment services are working with people who may need additional supports but do not necessarily identify as having a disability or who have not been diagnosed with a disability. This too represents a challenge for people with disability entering the workforce, as it means that they are not receiving appropriate supports from employment services. Mainstream employment services need to ensure that they are providing adequate, appropriate services for people who need additional supports but may not have a formal diagnosis of disability.

Challenges associated with entering the employment market are often outside the control of individuals trying to find employment. While the majority of Australian employers are open to hiring people with

³ See further, Australian Human Rights Commission, *Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability*, 2016, accessible at: <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/publications/willing-work-national-inquiry-employment-discrimination>

⁴ ACOSS and Jobs Australia, *faces of Unemployment*, Web report, 2020, accessible at: <https://www.acoss.org.au/faces-of-unemployment-2020/>

⁵ Department of Jobs and Small Businesses, Labour Market Information Portal, *jobactive and Transition to Work (TtW) Provider Caseload by Selected Cohorts*, accessible at: <http://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/Downloads/EmploymentRegion>

disability (77%), a much lower proportion (35%) demonstrate behavioural commitment to doing so.⁶ Social marketing and advertising campaigns can challenge negative attitudes, with previous campaigns about people with particular disability (psychosocial/intellectual) having been successful in improving community views about people with disability.⁷ A comprehensive national advertising campaign to promote employment of people with disability including young people with disability should be invested in by the government in consultation with people with disability and employers.

Limited availability of accessible and flexible employment opportunities also impact on the individual's ability to enter job markets. There is ample evidence to demonstrate that most people with disability, including those with mental health issues, are placed by employment providers in low paid jobs that do not reflect the individual's qualifications or career aspirations.⁸

Agile and accessible work environments, inclusive work culture, recognition of diverse needs and providing flexible work conditions are needed to address the systemic and structural barriers to employment that are specific to people with disability.⁹ Employers should be incentivised to be proactive in making these changes and broader monitoring and accountability is required.

Considering the importance of economic participation for independence and addressing social isolation, there should be appropriate services to support people to gain meaningful, long-term employment. However, people with mental health issues looking for work should not be placed under pressure with unnecessary and inflexible reporting requirements that can exacerbate their conditions.

Current employment services to assist people with disability

There are both supply-side and demand-side interventions that have the potential to improve employment outcomes for people with disability. On the supply side, employment services can provide more tailored and effective supports to people with disability, and on the demand side, employers can be encouraged and supported to employ more people with disability.

Disability Employment Services (DES)

The DES is a Department of Social Services funded employment program that supports people with disability to find and maintain employment and is better suited to supporting people with disability than jobactive. Nonetheless, there are aspects of DES which limit positive outcomes from the program.

⁶ Jane Prentice, Assistant Minister for Social Services and Disability Services, Media release: Businesses are missing out, 27 July 2018, accessible at: <https://ministers.dss.gov.au/media-releases/3471>

⁷ People with Disability Australia, Federal Pre-Budget Submission, 2020, accessible at: <https://pwd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SB-20200131-PWDA-Treasury-Pre-Budget-Submission-1.pdf>

⁸ See further: National People with Disabilities and Carer Council, Shut out: The Experience of People with Disabilities and Their Families in Australia, 2009 and M. Walsh, P. Stephens and S. Moore, Social Policy and Welfare, 2000.

⁹ Deloitte Access Economics, The Economic Benefits of Increasing Employment for People with Disability, 2011, accessible at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/economics/articles/economic-benefits-increasing-employment-for-people-with-disability.html>

For example, there is limited program flexibility in DES at present. DES currently carries significant administrative burdens for service providers and insufficient flexibility for program participants. Reporting requirements, outcome measures and KPIs for service providers are stringent, and other supports and wage subsidies are often too restrictive. For example, in the event where DES-supported employees need to take leave from work, especially those with episodic mental health issues, there are inadequate supports available. There needs to be more flexibility in the program to allow for longer periods of breaks in employment and additional support for the employers to hold the position open until the employee is ready to return to work.

The application of the Targeted Compliance Framework (TCF) can also cause negative outcomes for program participants. In 2018 the Federal Government introduced the TCF into employment services including DES. These tougher requirements coupled with onerous reporting responsibilities on participants are challenging for some participants. There is also limited discretion for service providers to provide exemptions when DES participants are experiencing challenges such as domestic and family violence and other similar challenges. This can be a significant issue for people as they are trying to grapple with other challenges in life.

During the initial stages of COVID 19, the government suspended the application of the TCF.¹⁰ However, since the beginning of August, services are slowly transitioning to applying TCF.¹¹ There is a clear need to maintain employment services for people with disability similar to DES to ensure that participants are linked with services to access various support needs. As service providers have built ongoing relationships with the participants, they are more likely to become aware of the challenges participants experience, especially in the current context where social and other interactions are limited and unemployment rates are going up. Therefore, these services should be flexible in scope to ensure the service providers are able to provide the necessary exemptions to participants and link them with other community services where appropriate.

Despite these program issues, DES service providers are able to have a significant impact on the lives of some program participants. Given the complex nature of issues that people with disability experience, the DES providers are often required to provide referrals to other community services and in some cases provide supports outside the scope of direct employment support, as illustrated in the case study below.

Case study

Jim* is a 17-year-old young person who was voluntarily referred to Mission Australia's DES program. He was accompanied by his parents for his first appointment. Jim was diagnosed with Autism and had two

¹⁰ Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Explainer: COVID-19 gradual return of mutual obligation requirements, updated on 5 Aug 2020, accessible at: https://www.employment.gov.au/newsroom/explainer-covid-19-gradual-return-mutual-obligation-requirements?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=shareTool

¹¹ Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Explainer: COVID-19 gradual return of mutual obligation requirements, updated on 5 Aug 2020, accessible at: https://www.employment.gov.au/newsroom/explainer-covid-19-gradual-return-mutual-obligation-requirements?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=shareTool

separate youth justice related matters pending at the time. Jim indicated that he was interested in working in the brick laying industry. His DES employment consultant was able to link him with Youth Learning Pathway, an education and training service co-located in the same building as Mission Australia's services in Dandenong.

Youth Learning Pathway supported Jim to access the 5 days' taste trader program, and supported him to obtain his white card and first aid certification. Unfortunately, Jim was unable to participate in the program on the 5th day due to a family relationship breakdown. Mission Australia services immediately informed Youth Learning Pathway of the change in circumstances.

On the following day Jim contacted the employment consultant and informed them that he had a court appearance and that his parents were not supporting him to attend the appointment. The employment consultant accompanied him to the court hearing to provide support. Later, Jim rang the employment consultant again to inform them that he had become homeless as his parents asked him to leave and he was in contact with the police as he was sleeping rough near a train station. The police, together with a case worker from Embedded Youth Outreach Project (EYOP) took Jim back to his parents' place as it was too late in the day to find appropriate accommodation.

When Jim came to meet the employment consultant the next day, it was evident that he had not had a proper meal. He was taken to a restaurant and was also provided with food vouchers. When the employment consultant took him home, Jim was confronted by his father who stated that he was not welcome. With intervention from the employment consultant, EYOP staff and the police, it was agreed Jim would be allowed to spend the night at his family home and leave next morning. When the EYOP Officer checked his bedroom, his bed had already been given away along with all of his belongings.

Jim was linked with a youth housing service, provided with a phone and transport card top-ups and more food vouchers. He was also accompanied to Centrelink to apply for financial support and to the bank to update his information. He was assisted to set up his myGov account. The employment consultant also made arrangements for the Magistrate Court Diversion Officer to meet with Jim at the Mission Australia office along with Youth Learning Pathway staff.

After spending a considerable amount of time reaching out to a range of services, the services were able to support Jim to find accommodation for a week. While he was in temporary accommodation, Jim was successful in securing long-term youth accommodation. In addition to learning brick laying, he is currently participating in the Changing Gear program to obtain his Learner Driver's Permit. He has also updated his resume and received coaching on interview techniques. The employment consultant is currently working with Jim to obtain employment in his chosen field.

*Name has been changed for privacy

There is a clear need to maintain employment services for people with disability similar to DES. However, significant improvements should be made to these services by increasing flexibility in scope, accommodating person-centred delivery and being able to provide services to meet the diverse and

specific needs of people with disability in order to ensure they have choice and control over their career aspirations.

Specific strategies to improve employment outcomes for people accessing DES could include reducing benchmarking hours, increasing targeted strategies and incentives to ensure employers are able to create flexible work places, national strategies promoting employment opportunities to those with mental illnesses and increasing support for them to remain employed.

Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs)

ADEs were designed to provide employment opportunities for people with disability. Approximately 20,000 people with disability are currently engaged in ADEs in areas such as packaging, assembly, production, recycling, screen printing, plant nursery, garden maintenance and landscaping, cleaning services, laundry services and food services.¹² These have been criticised for promoting segregated employment, limited access to skills development, not providing appropriate pathways to open employment and promoting wage disparities.¹³ ADEs can also restrict the ability of people with disability to develop their employability skills so they can find roles that are better aligned with their career aspirations and skills.¹⁴ Mission Australia joins with calls made by others including People with Disability Australia to completely phase out segregated employment of people with disability by supporting them to enter mainstream employment and ensure equitable remuneration for work.

Employment related support under the NDIS

Over the years, the uptake of employment supports in NDIS Plans has been low.¹⁵ Across relevant age groups (15-64) only about 1 in 5 participants were receiving employment supports in their plans, making up a mere 2.5% of annualised committed support.¹⁶

In 2019, the NDIS Participant Employment Strategy 2019 – 2022 was established with the goal to enable 30% of participants of working age to be in paid work by 30 June 2023.¹⁷ This is a welcome development and an important step in making strides towards employment equality. However, activities under the Strategy are likely to have little impact due to the effects of COVID-19 and associated lockdowns, including significant job losses and increasing unemployment rates. Therefore, the NDIA should revisit

¹² Department of Social Services, About Australian Disability Enterprises, accessible at:

<https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers-programmes-services-for-people-with-disability/about-australian-disability-enterprises>

¹³ Australian Human Rights Commission, Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability, 2016, accessible at: <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/age-discrimination/projects/willing-work-national-inquiry-employment-discrimination>

¹⁴ People with Disability Australia, Federal Pre-Budget Submission, 2020, accessible at: <https://pwd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SB-20200131-PWDA-Treasury-Pre-Budget-Submission-1.pdf>

¹⁵ F. Lawrence, Increasing Employment Supports in NDIS Plans – Where to from Here?, 2018, accessible at: <http://www.disabilityservicesconsulting.com.au/resources/increasing-employment-supports-ndis-plans>

¹⁶ F. Lawrence, Increasing Employment Supports in NDIS Plans – Where to from Here?, 2018, accessible at: <http://www.disabilityservicesconsulting.com.au/resources/increasing-employment-supports-ndis-plans>

¹⁷ National Disability Insurance Scheme, NDIS Participant Employment Strategy 2019 – 2022, 2019, accessible at: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/strategies/participant-employment-strategy>

the Strategy to better understand the most appropriate support needs of NDIS participants to gain meaningful long-term employment outcomes in the context of current labour market trends.

Creating peer support workforce frameworks

A peer support approach is able to produce positive outcomes for people experiencing mental illness as people who have similar experiences can better relate to and can consequently offer more authentic empathy and validation.¹⁸ In addition to the benefits for people using services, the mental health and financial benefits of peer support and peer work are also demonstrated for peer workers themselves.¹⁹ Training and work as a peer worker can increase an individual's skill base, which makes them more employable and opens up other employment and educational opportunities.²⁰

In light of the importance of lived experience in delivering services in local communities, Mission Australia has developed and implemented a suite of resources and training modules for Lived Expertise staff, their managers and co-workers. Lived Expertise practitioners bring significant value to the services through their contribution to the development of person led and recovery focused support and care.

Connections Program Broken Hill NSW

Mission Australia and the Far West Local Health District have partnered for the previous three years to deliver a social inclusion program, Connections, to address loneliness, after hours, in the Far West of the state. The program is delivered after hours to support connection in mainstream community activities for those who are lonely or socially isolated.

Connections aimed to reduce social isolation by supporting people to develop a network within their community; provide an informal, non-clinical after-hours support service for socially isolated people when no other services are open, reduce reliance on after hours' crisis support; provide additional employment opportunities in a remote area and develop a peer workforce in a remote area.

Since its inception, over 140 unique individuals have accessed Connections and, while there is some variation from month to month, attendance is trending up. Attendance has increased confidence, hope, connection, friendships and a sense of belonging to their own community for participants.

In the programs first 6 months, Emergency Department presentations, and Inpatient acute days dramatically reduced for 5 most frequent attendees, at a cost saving of over \$710,000.

In 2019, the Connections program was awarded the Outstanding Achievement in Mental Health Promotion Award at The Mental Health Matters Awards which is run by WayAhead – Mental Health Association NSW. The Mental Health Matters Awards recognise the achievements of individuals and

¹⁸ J. Repper and T. Carter, A review of the literature on peer support in mental health services in Journal of Mental Health, August 2011; 20(4): 392–411.

¹⁹ See: Health Workforce Australia, Mental Health Peer Workforce Study, 2014, pp. 11-12.

²⁰ Health Workforce Australia, Mental Health Peer Workforce Literature Scan, 2014, p. 10.

organisations who have worked to improve understanding, awareness, service provision and the general mental health of communities in NSW over the previous year.

Connections is able to continue to provide this vital service with the generous support of Sharon and Peter Ivany AM and the NSW Department of Health.

There are some challenges with engaging Lived Expertise practitioners due to the qualification requirements of contracts in the social services sector.

“We have some amazing people with lived experience who are from the local aboriginal community, extremely dedicated and compassionate. We have tried helping them access scholarships to complete some qualifications but they have had issues completing courses due to various reasons and we can’t employ them because of the contractual requirements. Valuing peer work should also include flexibility in terms of qualifications where people have years of experience.”

Mission Australia Program Manager Community Services, NT

Another significant challenge with peer support worker programs is the lack of funding. There are innovative models that are available to ensure people, particularly those with serious mental health issues, receive services and supports from peer workers who are people with lived experience. However, due to funding constraints, these programs only run for a brief period of time.

However, the Connections program highlighted above demonstrates the positive outcomes that can be achieved in a short span of time to build trust, rapport and community connections. Creating a peer support worker network has created employment opportunities for people in the community who understand the cultural nuances and needs of local communities as well as the existing services and other relevant support networks. Therefore, Mission Australia recommends that programs such as Connections, which employ peer workers with lived experience, should continue to be funded. This is particularly important to address workforce issues in rural and remote areas.

Peer Support Worker program in Orange NSW

In partnership with Western Local Health District, Mission Australia co-designed and implemented an inpatient peer support team in the largest psychiatric hospital – Bloomfield campus. This program was funded from a short term revenue stream, and was designed to provide peer support services to people in inpatient wards.

This project included the recruitment of 7 peer support workers to be based full time with the hospital’s multi-disciplinary team across a range of specialist wards including Forensic Mental Health, Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Adult Acute Unit, State-wide Rehabilitation, Older Persons Mental Health Unit and Involuntary Alcohol and Drug Treatment Unit.

An additional peer worker was based in the Emergency Department, particularly to engage and work with people who are experiencing suicide ideation or have attempted suicide both during and after hours. The peer workers provide emotional support and comfort to the hospital patients, families and carers, particularly being able to draw on their own lived experience of the hospital system. Further, a range of peer workers have been involved in systems-level activities and service development activities on their respective wards.

About 30 – 35% of the patients at the hospital are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and currently the program has recruited three peer workers who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and are therefore able to deliver culturally appropriate and sensitive services, particularly for those that have been required to travel away from country for treatment.

Anecdotal evidence demonstrated that the services these peer workers provide are immensely valued by the hospital staff, the patients and their families.

All peer workers were provided with access to ongoing training including paid access to Certificate IV level education. Therefore, in addition to supporting hospital patients, this service provides an opportunity for people with mental health and other significant issues to engage in paid employment in an area where they are able to use their life experiences and learning to support others, build on their skills and confidence and plan their future career.

This project highlighted innovative solutions to enhance the patient experience of hospital, through the participation of people with a lived experience into mainstream employment. This program has now come to an end as funding was not available to continue the support. However, the peer workers engaged in the project have been absorbed as staff members in other Mission Australia services.

National jobs plan

After conducting substantial research and consultations with a range of stakeholders, the Australian Human Rights Commission released the *Willing to Work* report in 2016 which contained a series of recommendations to support employment opportunities for people with disability.²¹ One of the key recommendations of the Commission was to develop a National Jobs Plan that will bring together the different levels of government, as well as private employers and the not-for-profit sector to create meaningful employment opportunities. This includes strengthening the focus on pathways and outcomes for young people with disability who are transitioning from school to higher education or employment through career planning.

Mission Australia supports this recommendation as a critical step towards improving employment outcomes for people with disability.

²¹ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability*, 2016, accessible at: <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/publications/willing-work-national-inquiry-employment-discrimination>