



**MISSION  
AUSTRALIA**

# **The Next Generation of Employment Services**

- Employment Services Review 2018

Submission

# The Next Generation of Employment Services

## Introduction

Mission Australia is a national non-denominational Christian organisation that delivers evidence-based, consumer-centred community services. In the 2016-17 financial year we supported over 140,000 Australians through 470 programs and services.

Mission Australia currently provides a number of services related to employment including: ParentsNext; Transition to Work (TtW); the Department of Social Services funded Disability Employment Services, Disability Management Services (DES - DMS) and DES Employment Support Services (DES-ESS); the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet funded Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTEC); and a number of State Government funded employment, pre-employment and youth transition programs. During the 2017-18 financial year, we supported nearly 7000 individuals under DES – DMS, over 1,500 young people under TtW and close to 1,800 parents under the ParentsNext pilot programs and we deliver these 3 services in all States and Territories except for WA.

Mission Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the next generation of employment services review. Mission Australia is a member of Australian Council of Community Services (ACOSS) and Jobs Australia and understand that they have provided more detailed submissions to this inquiry. Our submission focusses on people who are unemployed and experiencing disadvantage and/or a range of challenges that impact on their capacity to gain employment. It is based on a combination of research and insights from our long experience in direct service provision across Australia, and includes direct testimony from some of our employment service managers and practitioners, and some of the participants they work with.

## Current employment landscape

Employment is an integral aspect of a person's economic independence as well as health and wellbeing. With access to the appropriate supports at the right time, many people who are currently experiencing unemployment are able to join or re-join the workforce.

There is a significant number of people in Australia experiencing a range of personal and structural barriers to enter the employment market. Finding employment is tougher in the current employment context with fierce competition in the job market with limited number of employment opportunities. For example, as of May 2018, there were 180,700 vacancies across Australia.<sup>1</sup> According to the Australia

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Jobs and Small Businesses, Labour Market Information Portal: Vacancy Report, accessible at: <http://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/VacancyReport>

Bureau of Statistics (ABS), in May 2018 there were 714, 600 unemployed people in Australia.<sup>2</sup> This in effect means that there are approximately 4 unemployed people per job vacancy.<sup>3</sup>

Anglicare Australia's *Jobs Availability Snapshot 2017* also identified that there were 5 participants per 1 Level 5 Job (Level 5 are jobs are those requiring Certificate I, or the completion of compulsory secondary education as defined by ANZSCO classifications).<sup>4</sup> The report also highlights that there are significantly lower numbers of Level 4 (requiring Certificate II or III, or at least one year of relevant experience) and Level 5 vacancies and that the competition for these jobs are made worse by people with higher qualifications and experience competing for the same job opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

Another equally important challenge in the current employment market is the underemployment of skilled and qualified individuals. ABS statistics reveal that since 2003, the rate of underemployment<sup>6</sup> has been increasing, and in February this year the underemployment rate was 8.3%.<sup>7</sup> More women were likely to be underemployed compared to men.<sup>8</sup> People aged 15 - 24 years had the highest underemployment rate and the prevalence of underemployment was more prominent among the lower skilled occupation groups.<sup>9</sup>

Underemployment includes limited working hours as well as people with higher experience, skills or qualifications working in areas that do not reflect these attributes and has costs to the economy and society as well as adverse impacts on the people who are underemployed.<sup>10</sup> Contributing factors include slow jobs growth, changes in industries such as mining, as well as the outcomes and compliance driven framework within the current employment services model that incentivises people to take up a job that does not suit their needs or experience. The future employment services will need to clearly identify these challenges and work across different branches of the government, employment service participants, employers, employment providers and community sector to develop a comprehensive employment framework.

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<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force, 6202.0 - Labour Force, Australia, May 2018, accessible at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6202.0>

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that these statistics do not take into account the level of skills, experience or qualifications of the unemployed people.

<sup>4</sup> Anglicare Australia, *Jobs Availability Snapshot 2017*, p. 11, accessible at:

<http://www.anglicare.asn.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/jobs-availability-snapshot-2017.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Anglicare Australia, *Jobs Availability Snapshot 2017*, p. 11, accessible at:

<http://www.anglicare.asn.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/jobs-availability-snapshot-2017.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> 'Underemployment' refers to people who are working but would like to be working more hours. See further:

Australian Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force, 6202.0 - Labour Force, Australia, February 2018, accessible at:

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/6202.0Media%20Release1Feb%202018>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Australian Bureau of statistics, Labour Force, 6202.0 - Labour Force, Australia, Nov 2016, accessible at:

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6202.0Main%20Features5Nov%202016>

<sup>9</sup> Australian Bureau of statistics, Labour Force, 6202.0 - Labour Force, Australia, Nov 2016, accessible at:

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6202.0Main%20Features5Nov%202016>

<sup>10</sup> See further: D. Bowman, et al, *Understanding financial wellbeing in times of insecurity*, Working paper, Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2016.

The increase in casual and insecure work environments adds further burden on both participants and employment services<sup>11</sup> as the current employment services framework is geared towards encouraging people to obtain and maintain a full-time job.

The rigidity of current employment framework incentivises employment services participants to take up jobs that do not best meet their level of skills, qualifications or experience. The pressure on employment service providers to meet their targets causes some operators to underinvest in the skills and time needed to build relationships with participants and fail to identify their individual needs and characteristics.

“The focus of the current [jobactive] framework is simply ‘work first’ ... Getting people into some job irrespective of their personal circumstances and barriers is what is expected. The employment services are essentially telling participants, ‘don’t talk to me about other problems, just get out there and get a job’. The system needs to understand that there are other priorities for participants before they can even think about getting a job.”

Mission Australia Program Manager, SA

## Helping people experiencing disadvantage into work

Mission Australia is encouraged to see the emphasis in the discussion paper on providing additional supports for people who are experiencing disadvantage when entering and maintaining employment. As an organisation committed to reducing homelessness and strengthening communities, we see supporting people experiencing disadvantage into work as part of our core business. In the right circumstances, employment can provide people with a sense of fulfilment, empowerment and financial independence that in turn can increase their wellbeing and community engagement.

As highlighted in the discussion paper, people with complex needs, particularly those currently in Stream C have often been unemployed for protracted periods of time. These people are likely to be among the most disadvantaged in the community and may be experiencing multiple, complex issues such as domestic and family violence, health and mental health related issues, disabilities, alcohol and drug dependence or other comorbid issues.

The caseloads under jobactive streams are not publicly available, however, as of 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2016, there were over 142, 000 in Stream C including nearly 50,000 participants who were unemployed for 5 years.<sup>12</sup> These people may or may not be accessing other community support programs to address their complex issues.

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<sup>11</sup> Anglicare Australia, Jobs Availability Snapshot 2017, p. 14, accessible at:

<http://www.anglicare.asn.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/jobs-availability-snapshot-2017.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment, Questions on notice, *Supplementary Budget Estimates 2015 – 2016*, accessible at:

[https://www.aph.gov.au/~media/Committees/eet\\_ctte/estimates/add\\_1516/Employment/Answers/SQ16-000150.pdf](https://www.aph.gov.au/~media/Committees/eet_ctte/estimates/add_1516/Employment/Answers/SQ16-000150.pdf)

Targeted supports are needed to ensure that people experiencing disadvantage and who have complex needs are supported to address those needs prior to accessing employment services parallel to employment services (depending on the gravity of the issues). Depending on the circumstances, they would also benefit from being exempt from some of the current stringent obligations until they are able to meaningfully engage with employment service providers.

### **Further expanding participant choice**

Mission Australia supports the notion of adopting measures to tailor the type and mix of services for individual participants to meet their particular needs and local employment opportunities as highlighted in the discussion paper. Focusing on expanding user-choice is essential in ensuring that participants are able to change the provider if they are not meeting the needs of the participant.

However, the discussion paper indicates that the number of times a participant could transfer could be capped with restrictions around the timing of transfers.<sup>13</sup> Imposing a cap on the number of times a participant can change their employment provider is ineffective as a participant may still experience the same challenges if they are unable to change the service providers who do not meet the needs.

### **Eligibility for the enhanced services**

Most participants experiencing disadvantage are likely to need access to enhanced services when searching for employment. The eligibility determination through an assessment could be challenging for participants who are experiencing other disadvantages such as language barriers, physical or psychosocial disabilities, etc. The majority of these participants will benefit from having access to an advocate or a case manager to support them through the assessment process.

It is not clear as to what supports will be provided to those who are eligible for enhanced services under the new employment services as the next iteration of employment services are still being designed. We recommend that enhanced services under a reformed employment services model include coordination between employment services and other community sector supports to ensure people experiencing disadvantage are provided with holistic, wrap-around supports to address their complex needs. Regular follow-ups and ongoing support post job placements will also assist individuals experiencing disadvantage to address employment related issues and maintain long-term employment.

The employment services should acknowledge the diversity of the current participants experiencing barriers to obtaining long-term sustainable employment. The employment services should better cater for their specific needs by employing specialist staff recruited for their understanding of the issues in their local communities, the challenges experienced by different cohorts and the diversity of participants' needs. In addition, participants should be provided with a choice of diverse range of specialist and generalist service providers who are capable of supporting different cohorts (e.g. youth, people with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, etc.) or sectors (e.g. based around local industries such as farming, hospitality, etc.).

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<sup>13</sup> Department of Jobs and Small Businesses, The Next Generation of Employment Services, 2018, p.27.

If the next iteration of employment services incorporates mechanisms for job-ready participants to access enhanced services, it may be prudent to provide opportunities to engage the job ready self-servicing participants at regular intervals rather than waiting for a long period of time to determine whether they would benefit from receiving enhanced services.

### **Young people experiencing disadvantage**

*The New Work Reality* report finds that despite higher levels of education attainment (with nearly 60% of 25 year-olds holding a higher level of education than secondary school), entering fulltime work is proving a significant challenge for many young people.<sup>14</sup>

For young people experiencing disadvantage the challenges to employment are exacerbated. Disengagement from education or employment at early stages of life can have a significant impact on young people in the future that may increase the chances of long-term welfare dependence. Other complex issues can also impact on a young person's ability to engage in the workforce including homelessness, mental illness, substance dependence, contact with the justice system, domestic and family violence and the like.

Mission Australia's *Location Vocation Aspiration* youth report found that young people across Australia were likely to see achieving career success and being financially independent were of major importance.<sup>15</sup> However, young people from low SES areas were more likely to say that getting a job was of major importance to them.<sup>16</sup> This demonstrates that young people experiencing disadvantage are likely to prioritise employment and would focus on achieving their career goals if they are provided with early intervention and other supports to overcome their barriers to employment.

Therefore, it is important to intervene early to provide the necessary supports to ensure the issues young people experience are remedied and that young people have the capacity to engage in employment and education. Complex needs should be addressed through a range of wrap-around supports before they are in a position to access employment services.

### **Barriers to post-school plans**

Mission Australia conducts an annual youth survey targeting young people aged 15-19 years. There were over 24,000 respondents aged 15-19 years in the 2017 *Youth Survey*. Of the participants still at school, 97.0% stated that they intended to complete Year 12.<sup>17</sup> When asked what they were planning to do after school, going to university was the most frequently chosen option (70.0%).<sup>18</sup> A greater proportion

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<sup>14</sup> Foundation for Young Australians, *The New Work Reality*, 2018, p. 8

<sup>15</sup> Mission Australia, *Location, Vocation, Aspiration Findings from Mission Australia's Youth Survey*, 2014, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/young-people/387-youth-survey-2014-ses-report/file>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Mission Australia, *Youth Survey Report 2017*, p.3, accessible at:

<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/young-people/746-youth-survey-2017-report/file>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid p.13

of respondents from major cities than from regional areas indicated that they planned to go to university (75.5% compared with 60.0%).

For the first time in 2017, respondents who were still at school were asked to indicate if there were any barriers which may impact on the achievement of their study/work goals after school. Just over half (51.6%) of respondents indicated that they felt there would be barriers to the achievement of their study/work goals. *Academic ability*, *financial difficulty* and *mental health* were the three most commonly cited barriers (22.0%, 14.2% and 13.2% respectively).

It is also important to note that, for young people from major cities, the top three barriers they felt would impact on their study/work goals were *academic ability* (23.5%), *mental health* (13.8%) and *financial difficulty* (13.6%). For young people from regional areas the top three barriers were *academic ability* (19.3%), *financial difficulties* (15.2%), followed by *mental health* and *where you live* (third equal; both 11.9%). A greater proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people *reported family responsibilities* and *where you live* as barriers to their study work goals.

The survey also reported that around half the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported *going to university* (35.0% compared with 67.8% for non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people) as a post-school plan.

These data demonstrate the challenges young people identify in achieving their goals in life and engaging with future employment. However, with appropriate interventions at the earliest possible point in time, young people are able to overcome the challenges to achieving their goals.

### Case Study

Kelly\* is a 19 year old young person from NSW who lost her father when she was young. The loss of Kelly's father followed by the death of her step father impacted on her mother's mental health. Kelly's mother blamed her for the deaths and asked her to leave home. At 18 years, Kelly was made homeless and was living in an old sub-standard caravan in the front yard of a friend's house. After a few months she was asked to leave the friend's house and she moved the caravan to a nearby street.

Feeling unsafe, she approached Mission Australia services. She was moved into transitional accommodation immediately. She stated that she had been feeling isolated and frightened and that Mission Australia staff were the first people to actually listen to her. During the initial days at Canterbury Bankstown Youth Service (CBYS), Kelly would act out and throw child-like tantrums. However, with the support of the staff, she began to trust the staff members and respect other residents.

She participated in the 'Learn to Earn' program that was provided at CBYS. She was supported by the staff to obtain part-time employment at a supermarket chain. She has now moved to more stable accommodation and has a fulltime job that she enjoys. She has also reached out to her mother and is slowly rebuilding the relationship with her.

\*Name has been changed to protect the individual's identity

### Services targeted to support young people

One of the significant changes from Job Services Australia (JSA) to jobactive was the loss of specialist cohort-specific service delivery including targeted supports for young people. The move away from targeted services for certain cohorts to provision of universal employment services under jobactive has presented challenges. Complementary programs such as TtW and ParentsNext are now providing some specific supports, however, these services are not available across the country and may not be available to the participants who do not meet the strict eligibility criteria.

Early intervention and pre-employment programs are useful in seamlessly transitioning young people from education to employment. Pre-employment support programs such as TtW assist young people to transition into employment or re-engage with education. However, TtW only provides supports to a limited number of young people with less complex challenges.

### Transition to Work (TtW)

The Transition to Work program focuses on young people aged 15-21 who are facing barriers to enter the workforce to pursue employment or further education. Youth Employment Specialists assist young people in the development of practical skills, connection with education or training providers, engagement with work-experience opportunities and local community services, as well as identifying job opportunities to suit their aspirations and skill set and the needs of the local job market. By intervening early to help young people stay in school, engage in training or find work, we can set them up for a better future. The program offers practical interventions to assist them in finding work including Apprenticeships, Traineeships or education.

Mission Australia delivers TtW in VIC: South Eastern Melbourne, and Peninsula, Gippsland. NSW: Sydney South West, Illawarra South Coast (Ulladulla, Nowra, Vincentia, Batemans Bay, Moruya and Bega). SA: Berri, Loxton, Renmark, Waikerie.

### Case Study

Mandy\* is a 21 year old young person from regional NSW. She completed year 12 and started a 4-year degree in Psychology. However, due to growing cost of living she deferred her degree to find employment. Although she was applying for a large number of jobs in a day, she was only able to secure a few interviews. She was unsuccessful in securing a job despite her best efforts.

She was referred to Mission Australia's TtW service. Mandy was provided with a range of supports including interview preparation, clothes for interviews and assisting with budgeting on a lower income. With the support of her case worker, Mandy secured an interview at a well-established real estate agency. Her case worker followed up with the organisation after the interview and she was offered a traineeship which then turned to employment. Mandy stated that "I'm doing quite well there [at the real-estate agency] and have moved up fairly quickly. I'm really happy in this job and could see myself doing this until retirement."

\*Name has been changed to protect the individual's identity

There remains a significant service gap for the majority of young Stream C participants who are ineligible for the Transition to Work program. These are the most disadvantaged young people in our community who have tremendous potential, with the right supports, to succeed to join the workforce and make a productive contribution.

### Case study

Josh\* is an 18 year old young person from NSW who was referred to a youth homelessness service due to family breakdown. Although there was no formal diagnosis, Josh demonstrated signs of anxiety and depression when he presented at the service. He was already attending appointments with a jobactive service. The employment service was not able to accommodate Josh's needs including his requests to schedule appointments in the afternoon. Due to a number of missed appointments, Josh's youth allowance payments were cut off.

His case manager at the youth homelessness service tried to support him to access TtW. Since Josh has completed year 12, he had to wait for 6 months to access the service. All these resulted in Josh needing intensive supported accommodation for a prolonged period of time.

After waiting the required 6-month period, Josh was able to access TtW. With additional support from his TtW case manager, Josh was able to update his resume and prepare for job interviews. He was successful in getting employment at a warehouse.

\*Name has been changed to protect the individual's identity

There are some other complementary programs such as the youth vocational education pilot program under Try, Test and Learn (TTL) funded by Department of Social Services that provide targeted services to young people who are disengaged or likely to disengage from vocational education. Programs such as this will ensure that young people are provided with wrap-around supports so they are supported to continue their vocational education. However, such programs are currently small-scale and time-limited and need to be scaled up widely to have a real impact.

Employment support programs that produced positive outcomes in the past for young people include the Job Placement and Employment Training (JPET) and the Youth Connections program,<sup>19</sup> both of which have positive evaluations and should be used as models to support young people to achieve employment outcomes whilst addressing other complex issues such as housing and homelessness.

One of the main criticisms of the current employment services is their siloed approach to service delivery. As demonstrated in the discussion paper, the current framework has not been effective in supporting people with complex needs. Therefore, the system should be changed from a deficit model to a strength based model.

There are numerous programs funded by Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and private sector that are related to employment. Although this consultation process is limited to the role and programs delivered by the Department of Jobs and Small Businesses, it is imperative that the Department complements and build on the services delivered by other branches of the government to strengthen the supports that are currently being delivered, avoid duplication and gaps and ensure that the suite of programs on offer are effectively targeted.

There is also an overlap with State and Territory programs focussed on education and youth welfare from which lessons can be drawn. For example, recently the NSW and Victorian State Governments announced budget measures to increase access to vocational education. Another example is the Future Directions approach of NSW government which has a heavy focus on employment.<sup>20</sup> The Department of Jobs and Small Businesses should have a process to map these complementary programs when supporting disadvantaged employment service participants.

Flexible Learning Options (FLO) is a successful program in South Australia (SA) that provides casework support and individualised learning programs for high school students who have disengaged from mainstream schooling. The learning that FLO students access can be on-site or external to their schools i.e. in dedicated co-located or off-site flexible learning centres (FLCs), at VET courses or apprenticeships. In addition, their attendance is supported by active case management that helps students to work out personal learning plans, addresses barriers to learning and re-engagement supports them to access the services they need and links them to employment opportunities or social activities. Case managers

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<sup>19</sup> Atelier Learning Solutions, Final Report on the Evaluation of the Youth Connections – Specialised Services Program on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012.

<sup>20</sup> See further: NSW Family and Community Services, Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW, accessible at: <http://www.socialhousing.nsw.gov.au/?a=348442>

advocate on behalf of students and their role is critical to motivating FLO students to achieve attainable learning and employment goals.

Mission Australia has been providing FLO in SA since 2007 and currently supports over 500 students through 32 different schools and locations. University of Adelaide's evaluation of FLO shows the successful outcomes which are achieved for young people who are disengaged from school in South Australia.<sup>21</sup>

### Case Study

Abby\* is a 19 year old young person from South Australia who joined Mission Australia's FLO program when she was 15. Abby disengaged from mainstream education when she was in year 9. She stated that she did not enjoy school, the structure of the education system. She was also couch surfing at the time.

She was supported to find appropriate accommodation and was provided with a range of supports. With the support of FLO team, she was able to complete year 11, Certificate II in hospitality and a few other complementary training courses. She indicated that she enjoyed the pace of learning and the fact that there were less people in the learning space compared to mainstream schools.

Abby was also supported to find work at a local fish and chips shop. The team assisted her with her plan to pursue tertiary education. Currently she is undergoing University of Adelaide's University Preparatory Program (UPP) and will continue her undergraduate study next year in a Science/Arts double degree.

\*Name has been changed to protect the individual's identity

Considering the successful outcomes produced by this program, a similar support model should be replicated across the country to assist young people who have or are likely to disengage from education.

The Youth Foyer model provides an integrated approach to tackling youth homelessness, connecting affordable accommodation to training and employment.<sup>22</sup> Although programs such as these are not under the purview of Department of Jobs and Small Businesses, the Department can work closely with other Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to better integrate supports to address youth unemployment.

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<sup>21</sup> University of Adelaide and Mission Australia, What does Success Look Like? An Evaluation of Mission Australia's Flexible Learning Options (FLO) Program (South Australia), 2018, accessible at:

<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/young-people/765-what-does-success-look-like-an-evaluation-of-mission-australia-s-flexible-learning-options-flo-program-south-australia/file>

<sup>22</sup> Mission Australia was awarded a new contract which will deliver evidence-based early intervention through a Youth Foyer for up to 40 vulnerable young people in Townsville, QLD.

The transition from school to work needs to be further strengthened, including through improved career counselling, skills acquisition and a focus on increased literacy and numeracy. The requirement to generate a coherent and national careers service in Australia remains a key challenge. Against the backdrop of the workforce becoming more atomised, with a continued move away from traditional industries, with the decline of low skill entry level vacancies, this requirement to support young people to grow their understanding of the labour market and developing the right competencies to become work ready has become imperative.<sup>23</sup>

### Social enterprises to support young people

Social Enterprise programs such as Synergy Auto Repairs and Charcoal Lane provide work experience and education to young people who are often excluded from the workforce due to discrimination, long-term unemployment, disengagement from school and intergenerational disadvantage. These programs also result in reducing the risk of engagement with juvenile or criminal justice system.

#### Synergy Auto Repairs

Synergy Auto Repairs is a social enterprise based in North Melbourne that offers customers a full suite of smash repair services, while providing a flexible accredited training program and support for young people aged 16-20 with a history of motor vehicle related offences. The program harnesses participants' interest in cars and aims to help them build a career in a field that matches their interests. The social enterprise equips participants with the skills to commence a smash repairs apprenticeship. The initiative is an Australian-first partnership between Mission Australia, the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council (NMVTRC), Kangan TAFE, and Suncorp Group.

#### Case study

Annie\* is a 21 year old young person from Gippsland who participated in Synergy Auto repairs in 2014. By the time she engaged with the service, she had lost her driving license and had a history of vehicle related offences. She had left school early and was not in employment or pursuing her education. She was initially apprehensive about working in the auto repair industry as she felt that it was out of her comfort zone. She was supported by the staff and other people at Synergy to learn new skills and she was able to obtain work experience and other relevant qualifications.

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<sup>23</sup> See further: Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA), Australia's Future Workforce, 2015, pp 16-31, accessible at: <https://cica.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Australias-future-workforce.pdf> and L. Walsh, To get young people into work, we first need to understand how the workplace is changing, The Conversation, 14 September 2016, accessible at: <https://theconversation.com/to-get-young-people-into-work-we-first-need-to-understand-how-the-workplace-is-changing-65394>

She was nominated for a State Training Award offered by Kangan TAFE. She was supported by Mission Australia staff to obtain a job at a repair shop in Gippsland. She now works 5 or more days a week and is saving to buy her own house.

\*Name has been changed to protect the client's identity.

Models that produce positive outcomes such as these should be replicated across the country in collaboration with employers, community sector organisations as well as the relevant government departments and authorities.

The majority of these programs are not directly funded or supported by Commonwealth or State and Territory governments. Thus, they rely heavily on donations to provide the necessary intensive services to trainees and apprentices. With certainty of funding, these successful models of social enterprises can be replicated and expanded. Where possible, the Department could also explore the possibilities of facilitating investments from the private sector into social enterprises to increase employment opportunities and outcomes of those experiencing disadvantage.

### People with disabilities

Employment can provide people with disabilities an opportunity to increase social and economic participation. However, there are many factors which impact on how a person with disability is able to live, participate in society and realise their potential.<sup>24</sup>

A research report of the Australian Government shows that while the majority of Australian employers are open to hiring people with disabilities (77%), a much lower proportion (35%) demonstrate behavioural commitment to doing so.<sup>25</sup> For people with profound or severe disability aged 15-64, the unemployment rate increased from 10.3% in 2012 to 13.7% in 2015.<sup>26</sup> Over the same period, the total unemployment rate for people with disability rose from 9.4% to 10.0%.<sup>27</sup>

Numerous programs and services are available to ensure people with disabilities receive the requisite supports to access and maintain employment such as Disability Employment Services (DES). However,

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<sup>24</sup> 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/sites/default/files/document/publication/WTW\\_2016\\_Full\\_Report\\_AHRC\\_ac.pdf](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/WTW_2016_Full_Report_AHRC_ac.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> 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>

<sup>26</sup> Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services*, 2017, Chapter 15, Services for People with Disability, accessible at: <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2017/community-services/services-for-people-with-disability/rogs-2017-volume-f-chapter15.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

there is little or no communication between the two employment support systems, despite jobactive having an active case load of over 181,000 people with disabilities by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2018.<sup>28</sup> The majority of these people with disabilities are likely to be in Stream C of jobactive supports. However, there are no targeted supports that are tailored to the needs of people with disabilities within jobactive.

Although DES is outside the scope of this review, it is important to note that there are number of people who are likely to transition between the DES and jobactive, particularly those receiving DES Disability Management Services (DMS). With the changes to DES service provision model, a number of jobactive providers have now become DES providers. This may also cause confusion among service participants as they transition between the same DES and jobactive service provider into a different stream of support. Therefore, there should be better coordination and communication between the general employment services and DES to support people with disabilities.

Unfavourable assumptions and attitudes in relation to people with disabilities and their motivation to work can be a huge barrier to economic participation. With the appropriate supports, people with disabilities who have experienced disadvantage and discrimination over long periods of time will build the confidence and skills required to obtain employment.

### Case Study

Megan\* was a young person who was born with a hereditary condition that impaired her vision, making her legally blind. Her mother had the same condition. Her stepfather verbally abused her and often told her that ‘she couldn’t do anything properly’ and that she was ‘hopeless’. As her living conditions became untenable, she moved away from home and got in touch with Mission Australia.

She was provided with crisis accommodation, counselling to overcome the impact that her step father had on her self-confidence and other supports to navigate the services available to her. Small milestones such as doing her laundry by herself was celebrated to boost her confidence. Megan was supported to move into transitional accommodation. The staff also supported her to get additional help from Vision Australia and other disability support services specifically equipped to help with her disability. She is a talented musician and has won awards during Youth Week. She plans to pursue a career in music. Megan is determined to find work and told her support staff that “I don’t want to be on the disability pension for long”.

\* Name has been changed to protect the individual’s identity

This example demonstrates the need for targeted support for people with disabilities including access to housing first model where people with complex needs are provided with accommodation along with other wrap around supports.

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<sup>28</sup> jobactive, 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>

### **Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs) Employment Services**

PHaMs Employment Services provide support for people with a mental illness receiving the Disability Support Pension or other government income support payments who are engaged, or willing to engage, with employment services and who have economic participation as a primary goal in their Individual Recovery Plan.

Organisations are funded to provide specialist support and work with government employment services, such as Disability Employment Services, jobactive, state-funded services and social enterprises, to assist PHaMs participants to address non-vocational issues that are barriers to finding and maintaining employment, training or education. PHaMS Employment supports people with significant mental illness to minimise non-vocational barriers through outreach case management

### **Case study**

Ann\* was a participant in the Victoria who made a self-referral to PHaMS Employment service. She was 24 years old and was from a culturally and linguistically background. By the time she contacted PHaMs employment she had lived in Australia for 10 years. She has been linked to an employment services provider for 2 years but she was unable to achieve any positive outcomes or build a relationship with the service provider.

Following a meeting with Mission Australia, a case conference was initiated and it was identified that Ann could not work fulltime due to her physical and psychosocial barriers including having Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) high levels of anxiety around participating in the community.

Following the case conferencing process, Ann was supported to secure a volunteer role at a well-known charitable organisation. It later became evident that transport was an issue for Ann. The PHaMs Case Manager worked with her employment provider to find her an alternative work experience closer to home. By supporting Ann with her goal of participating in the workforce, she was able to secure paid employment.

\*Name has been changed to protect the individual's identity

However, with the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), PHaMs is currently being phased out, leaving many people who are ineligible for the NDIS without the necessary community mental health supports. Considering the success of the PHaMs Employment program and the outcomes achieved to support people with mental health issues to obtain employment, we recommend incorporating similar models for targeted groups such as people with disability with collaboration and coordination with other Commonwealth, state and territory departments.

While increasing employment opportunities for people with a disability is a systemic issue, to date the uptake of employment supports in NDIS Plans has been low.<sup>29</sup> Across relevant age groups (15-64) only about 1 in 5 participants are receiving employment supports in their plans, making up a mere 2.5% of annualised committed support.<sup>30</sup> The future employment services should ensure that the employment service providers are able to link with complementary supports that people receive including the NDIS to achieve meaningful long-term employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

### Parents experiencing disadvantage when returning to work

The Australian economy receives a substantial financial benefit from the informal carers who care for children, elderly and others with critical illnesses. As a society we also recognise that at different times in their lives people may need to prioritise caring responsibilities over employment.

The *Supporting Working Parents Report* investigated the experiences of parents returning to work after parental leave and reported that there were a range of different types of discrimination experienced by men and women returning to work.<sup>31</sup> These included negative attitudes, recruitment bias against working parents, changes to salary or working conditions and dismissal or redundancy. Discrimination was particularly prominent for single women, gay or lesbian parents or those from different cultural backgrounds.<sup>32</sup>

There are some promising programs offered by different government departments to support parents to maintain ties to the community and engage in employment, including pre-employment programs such as ParentsNext.

#### ParentsNext

ParentsNext is a pre-employment service that aims to assist parents with young children who are not currently in paid employment and are receiving parenting payments to equip them with the skills and knowledge to re-enter the workforce. The program seeks to address barriers to working that parents may be experiencing by connecting them with services to help them improve their confidence in applying for employment, completing education courses, financial awareness and budgeting, improving quality of life through mental health and counselling services, and strategies to improve work life balance. Mission Australia (MA) delivers the ParentsNext program in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria.

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<sup>29</sup> Faye 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>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *Supporting Working Parents: Pregnancy and Return to Work National Review – Report*, 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

In our experience, ParentsNext increases participant's confidence in their ability to achieve work and study goals.

“ParentsNext works because it has a staged approach to support parents with activities such as participating in playgroups when the children are young to make sure they are engaged in the community. When the children are a little older, parents enrol into courses and start planning for their future employment. There's no requirement for people to start looking for work until they feel that they are ready ... The role of ParentsNext is to get the ball rolling and that's why it works.”

Mission Australia Program Manager, NSW

However, our services have observed that participants still experience barriers to both job seeking and their future work/study goals. These challenges range from children or other family responsibilities, cost of and access to reliable childcare, a lack of family support and financial difficulties. Participants also face financial difficulty, poor access to transport and limited employment opportunities, which are outside the scope of the program. Without addressing these issues, it will be challenging for many parents to find employment or simply commit to search for employment.

Mission Australia delivered the initial ParentsNext trial in a number of sites including Bankstown, NSW. As part of ParentsNext program in Bankstown, Mission Australia collaborated with Audi to encourage women who had experienced long term unemployment to enter a non-traditional field of employment, the automotive industry. The pilot program ran for eight weeks in late 2017, with participants undertaking both TAFE training in automotive administration and a vocational placement within an Audi dealership.

Mission Australia's evaluation of this project demonstrated that the Audi Women in Automotive pilot program was successful in building the confidence, knowledge and workplace skills of participants.<sup>33</sup> This is demonstrated by the fact that 100% of participants indicating that the Audi Women in Automotive project would help them re-enter the workforce, 80% said that they were now interested in working in the automotive industry and 80% also felt that being involved in the program had made them more confident in their ability to manage their time between home and work.<sup>34</sup> The program has helped them to hone their aspirations for future training and employment and even resulted in three of the participants being offered employment within the Audi dealership network, as well as two enrolling in further study. Therefore, it is important for the Department to continue to support these pre-employment programs and ensure that parents are provided with the necessary supports to pursue their employment goals.

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<sup>33</sup> Mission Australia, *Audi Women in Automotive Project: Evaluation Report*, 2018, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/employment-and-training>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

### Case study

Mariam\* is a 42 year old single mother with 9 children between 2 and 21 years from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. She was married at the age of 18. She was enrolled to study law at University of Sydney, however, she learnt that she was pregnant with her first child and was unable to continue her education or employment. She has separated from her husband due to family violence.

Mariam was referred to ParentsNext by Centrelink. She has intermittently worked in a factory, at a nursing home kitchen, a bank, and door to door home services. However, she has been unable to sustain long-term employment since she had her 5<sup>th</sup> child 13 years ago. She started a Certificate of Community Services course but was unable to finish it due to her last pregnancy. With the support of ParentsNext, she plans to finish the course and support other women experiencing domestic and family violence.

Mariam looked forward to ParentsNext activities and is positive about finding employment in the future.

\*name has been changed to protect the individual's identity

A benefit of the ParentsNext program is the ability to access multiple services depending on the person's personal circumstances. For instance, a person in ParentsNext can access additional supports under TtW and *vice versa* if they meet the eligibility criteria. These synergies between two targeted support services are likely to result in more positive employment outcomes. Similar connections can be made between other complementary support programs to support people to prepare for employment.

Under the broader ParentsNext rollout, the Department created 2 streams of services, namely, the intensive stream and the targeted stream.<sup>35</sup> The strict eligibility criteria to qualify for ParentsNext is likely to exclude a number of parents experiencing disadvantage, including those who care for children with disabilities.

“The eligibility criteria for ParentsNext can get in the way of helping people who are keen to participate in the program. We have a client who is currently unable to take part in ParentsNext because she receives carer payment and not the parenting payment.”

Mission Australia Program Manager, NSW

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<sup>35</sup> The intensive stream has a stronger emphasis on getting parents into work, by providing connections to pre-employment training, mentoring, work experience, wage subsidies, and job opportunities whereas parents eligible for the targeted ParentsNext will receive tailored assistance to identify education and employment goals, develop a pathway to reach those goals and connect with local services in their local community, see further: Department of Jobs and Small Businesses, *Factsheet: What's ParentsNext*, accessible at: [https://docs.jobs.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/parentsnext\\_national\\_expansion\\_-\\_factsheet.pdf](https://docs.jobs.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/parentsnext_national_expansion_-_factsheet.pdf)

Transitioning clients out of the program as the youngest child turning 6 years without any follow up or further supports is another concern. This sudden transition can be difficult and disruptive for some parents.

### Case studies

Annie\* is a 34 year old single mother with 3 sons, an eight year old and 6 year old twins. Annie was referred to ParentsNext by Centrelink a couple of months before her twins turned 6. She indicated that she didn't have enough time in the program and needed further supports, stating "I wish there were follow-up programs after ParentsNext to cater for parents with children of different ages. So perhaps a group afterwards for parents of six to eight year olds."

During the period where she participated in ParentsNext, she had the opportunity to plan and prepare for her future, referrals to play groups that increased her social interaction and support with her post-natal depression.

Once Annie left the program, employment services required her to find 30 hours of work. She stated that "I felt like I was thrown in the deep end before learning to swim first. I needed to take baby steps so I could undertake my caring responsibilities as well as juggle responsibilities of pursuing study and work. I felt like they [employment service provider] didn't understand my individual needs."

She plans to continue further her studies and as a stepping stone to employment.

\*Name has been changed to protect the individual's identity

The supports individuals receive under the 2 streams are substantially different. We appreciate the thinking behind delivering intensive supports in areas that are likely to be geographically disadvantaged. However, not all the people participating in the program will need access to the intense supports, whereas there might be a number of parents in areas where targeted stream is being delivered who would immensely benefit from the intensive supports. Therefore, it may be more useful to provide both streams in all ParentsNext locations and stream individuals in local areas based on their level of needs and circumstances.

Concerningly, the recent introduction of compliance framework that applies to ParentsNext based on the demerit system may have a negative impact on parents and young children. Under the current policy, parents in this service will accrue demerit points that may result in financial penalties. This may discourage participation and have a negative impact on engagement.

Another program assisting parents with young children is Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) funded by Department of Social Services. There could be better coordination between social and employment programs targeted at parents experiencing disadvantage to improve the outcomes for both children and their parents over the long-term.

### **Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY).**

Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) is a free two-year, home-based early childhood learning and parenting program that empowers parents and carers as their child's first teacher. Mission Australia operates the HIPPY West Ipswich program supporting a total of 60 families.

HIPPY provides a workforce development platform - with HIPPY tutors recruited from the parents who have been a part of the program. Tutors are supported by the HIPPY coordinator and all HIPPY staff receive regular training and support. HIPPY also provides training and support for parents and runs regular parent group meetings for all HIPPY Families every two weeks.

### **Case Study**

Belinda\* started with Hippy as a parent of a young child. During this period, she was able to spend time with her son and learn to be her son's first teacher. With the help of HIPPY, she was able to see her son become a confident student in Preschool.

HIPPY provided Belinda with the opportunity to re-join the workforce as a home tutor after being a stay at home mother for 8 years. She stated that working for HIPPY with Mission Australia has given her confidence, new skills and created social networks. She states that she has met some truly amazing people within her workplace and community.

Participating in HIPPY has provided her with inspiration and drive to continue her education and she hopes to work with children as a teacher or teacher's aide.

\*Name has been changed to protect the individual's identity

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**

The unemployment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over was 20.6% nationally (27.4% in remote areas compared with 19.3% in non-remote areas).<sup>36</sup> These rates are significantly higher than the average national unemployment rates.

The discussion paper highlights a few specific challenges experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, there is no reference to addressing the underlying causes that result in high rates of unemployment including entrenched poverty and issues in relation to discrimination and racism

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<sup>36</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4714.0 - National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2014-15, released April 2016, accessible at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4714.0>

both among employers as well as employment service providers.<sup>37</sup> The service delivery framework should also focus on ensuring cultural safety of work spaces and meaningful, continuous training on cultural competency to employment service providers.

It is also important to note that social determinants of health have a corresponding impact on wellbeing of people. Improvements to these determinants will in turn increase a person's capacity to find and retain employment or continue education. Thus, measures to enhance employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should focus on overcoming these challenges.

Mission Australia produced the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Report in 2016*.<sup>38</sup> Getting a job was found to be more important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people than non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people, although they were less likely to be in paid employment currently, but were notably more likely to be looking for work compared to their non-indigenous counterparts.

To address the economic disadvantage of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people we have recommended a range of measures including, employment programs be demand driven and flexible in scope, provide intensive person-centred mentoring and employment support services that are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led employment and training programs.

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<sup>37</sup> See further: A. Ferdinand, *et al*, Aboriginal health promotion through addressing employment discrimination in Australian Journal of Primary Health, 2014, 20, 384–388 and A. Ferdinand, Y. Paradies, Y. & M. Kelaher, Mental Health Impacts of Racial Discrimination in Victorian Aboriginal Communities: The Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD) Experiences of Racism Survey, 2012, The Lowitja Institute, accessible at: <http://dro.deakin.edu.au/eserv/DU:30058482/paradies-mentalhealthimpacts-2013.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> Mission Australia, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Report 2016, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/young-people/587-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-youth-report/file>

### **Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTEC) model**

Mission Australia provides comprehensive pre-employment training to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants (including school leavers) through the VTEC model developed by GenerationOne and funded by the Australian Government. The VTEC employment model encompasses five stages: Community Engagement, Work Readiness, Vocational Training, Guaranteed Job/Placement and Post Placement Support.

Through VTEC, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants are empowered to build upon their strengths, address any barriers to employment and undertake employer-directed training leading to a guaranteed job at the end of the training period, with the ultimate goal of ensuring long term employment. Mission Australia addresses our clients' specific interests, strengths and challenges on a case-by-case basis through structured mentoring and links them, where possible, to culturally relevant supports. We provide placement and mentoring support to both the employer and their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employee to enable long term, sustainable career success.

Mission Australia supports the measures in relation to promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement and contracting as an avenue to vest the control of service delivery to the respective communities. The employment services framework should consult with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and community leaders to identify the most appropriate options of service delivery to identify a range of service delivery options.

For example, Mission Australia's current VTEC contract, funded by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, required a partnership plan as part of the government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy procurement policies. Mission Australia, in collaboration and consultation with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations developed a transitional plan (partnership) agreement. The initial stage of the partnership is to collaborate and build capacity to support the partnered community organisations with the ultimate goal to enhance the capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to independently deliver services which we are currently contracted to deliver.

Difficulty recruiting and retaining staff has been identified as an issue for service delivery in remote Indigenous communities, and building a local skills base would enable providers to recruit and retain local staff. This needs to be factored into long-term plans including remote housing construction and health services provision which should be led by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

At an organisational level, Mission Australia has made a commitment under our *Reconciliation Action Plan* to investigate opportunities to improve and increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes within our workplace.<sup>39</sup> Mission Australia endeavours to increase the

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<sup>39</sup> See further: Mission Australia, *Reconciliation Action Plan 2017-2019*, p.13, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/documents/200-reconciliation-action-plan-rap/file>

employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly in areas where there are high number of clients who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

In addition to these, Mission Australia also has a social enterprise to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who are interested in gaining vocational training.

### **Charcoal Lane<sup>40</sup>**

Charcoal Lane is a Mission Australia's social enterprise in Fitzroy, Victoria that combines a restaurant specialising in native flavours with a comprehensive training program for young people who have experienced vocational and non-vocational barriers to employment. Charcoal Lane enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other young people to gain both accredited hospitality qualifications and professional experience within a supportive developmental environment. On completing traineeships at the restaurant, young people are well prepared to move into careers in hospitality, or other related industries.

Due to the current structure of employment services, the employers struggle to find candidates who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to participate in employment services.

“Charcoal Lane has difficulty working with employment providers to find Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to could work and train with us. We have to engage with multiple employment providers to find the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees we need. This added complexity having to connecting with multiple people from different employment organisations adds to the expensive admin burden on the Charcoal lane.”

Mission Australia, Executive

In the next iteration of employment services, procedures must be in place to streamline the process to ensure the employers are able to engage with specific cohorts of people without having to go through multiple stakeholders.

### **People from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds**

People from CALD backgrounds experience barriers when entering the workforce due to a range of factors. The *Multicultural Access and Equity: Building a cohesive society through responsive services* report indicates that CALD community views on the responsiveness and effectiveness of employment services were consistently negative.<sup>41</sup> People were frustrated with the lack of flexibility of employment services, their inability to produce positive outcomes for newly arrived migrant and refugee

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<sup>40</sup> Charcoal lane is a social enterprise managed by Mission Australia, more information available at: <https://www.charcoallane.com.au/>

<sup>41</sup> Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA), *Multicultural Access and Equity: Building a cohesive society through responsive services* 2014 – 2015, accessible at: <http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Multicultural-Access-and-Equity-Report-2014-2015.pdf>

employment service participants and the lack of a tailored and creative approach that would take previous overseas qualifications and experience into consideration and recognise skills.<sup>42</sup>

With the changes to Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) payment, more asylum seekers will be accessing the mainstream employment services. These participants are likely to have limited Australian work experience, qualifications recognised in Australia and will need supports and services to improve their language and employability skills.

“Changes to employment services and reporting requirements are usually quite complex ... These changes can be particularly challenging to people from non-English speaking backgrounds because of language barriers and unfamiliarity with Australian government guidelines and policies.”

Mission Australia Employment Services Manager, QLD

Employment services need to understand the challenges experienced by this cohort and provide requisite supports. These supports may include referring people to appropriate community based services, coordinating and supporting them to access language services and the like.

#### **Multicultural Employment Service ACT<sup>43</sup>**

Multicultural Employment Service (MES) has qualified and experienced Employment Consultants who actively seek out jobs in local businesses, services and agencies for CALD employment service participants. Participants are assessed for their skills, qualifications, experience and suitability for particular jobs by MES support staff. The service also facilitates interactions with jobactive to ensure participants receive the best outcomes to suit their circumstances.

The service also coordinates workplace culture training and on-the-job training to ensure the best outcomes for the employer and the employee. Regular mentoring and follow up are also provided to both the employer and the employee to ensure more successful long-term outcomes.

Models such as these should be replicated across the country to support the employment services participants experiencing additional barriers.

#### **People experiencing extreme disadvantage**

The recently released *Inequality in Australia* report found that most (60%) of the lowest 20% are in households that rely mainly on social security for their income.<sup>44</sup> People who are unemployed constituted the highest proportion (77%) of individuals in the lowest 20% of households.<sup>45</sup> Extreme

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Multicultural Employment Service ACT, accessible at: <http://www.mes.org.au/>

<sup>44</sup> ACOSS and UNSW, *Supplementary report to Inequality in Australia 2018*, August 2018, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

poverty coupled with other challenges may become a barrier for people to meet their mutual obligations.

Mission Australia has opposed recent changes to welfare reform that are to the detriment of disadvantaged and vulnerable participants such as policies in relation to drug testing and the removal of drug and alcohol as a reasonable excuse. These measures are likely to discourage rather than encourage people to engage with government supports and services. Particularly measures in relation to alcohol and drug related issues are obstructive as these are health issues and should be treated as such.<sup>46</sup>

### People experiencing housing stress or homelessness

With only 6% of the rental properties are affordable for people receiving income support payments,<sup>47</sup> the majority of people receiving income support payments are likely to be under housing stress or at risk of homelessness. The discussion paper does not make any references to these complex issues other than the need for employment services to collaborate or build networks with local community services.

“People can’t be expected to look for a job when they don’t know where they will sleep that night.”

Mission Australia Regional Leader, SA

Addressing housing issues can have a significant positive impact on health and wellbeing as well as financial independence of people. The housing first model that provides a stable home with person-centred wrap around supports is strongly supported by the evidence.

For example, Mission Australia’s philanthropically-funded MISHA (Michael’s Intensive Supported Housing Accord) project, provided homeless men with support to enter and sustain permanent housing, ensure access to mental and physical health supports, reduce social isolation and equip the men to live successfully within the community. An evaluation of the program found that after 24 months, more participants were employed and there was also an increase in the number of participants looking for work who initially were not in labour force.<sup>48</sup> This demonstrates that provision of housing with other wrap-around supports can increase the employment outcomes of people experiencing extreme disadvantage and result in saving the government tens of thousands of dollars.

### Inadequacy of income support payments

The purpose of employment services should be to assist people who are struggling to enter or re-enter workforce. However, enforcing the obligations in relation to workforce participation through limiting or

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<sup>46</sup> Mission Australia, *Submission to Social Services Legislation Amendment (Drug Testing Trial) Bill 2018*, April 2018, p.1.

<sup>47</sup> Anglicare Australia, *Rental affordability Snapshot*, 2018, p.5, accessible at:

<http://www.anglicare.asn.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/final---rental-affordability-snapshotb811d9309d6962baacc1ff0000899bca.pdf?sfvrsn=4>

<sup>48</sup> Mission Australia, *From Homelessness to Sustained Housing, 2010 – 2013, MISHA research report*, accessible at:

<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/documents/279-from-homelessness-to-sustained-housing-2010-2013-misha-research-report-2014/file>

reducing social welfare payments can have a substantial negative impact on the wellbeing of individuals, thereby, limiting their capacity to look for work.

The majority of Mission Australia's clients in receipt of income support payments have other complex needs relating to housing and homelessness, domestic and family violence, alcohol and drug issues, mental illness, care responsibilities and a range of other similar issues.

If the welfare system is designed to enable economic and social participation and encourage independence, then support payments like Newstart Allowance, Youth Allowance and Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) need to provide a real subsidy to help cover the costs of housing, meet living expenses including food and transport, allowing people to find employment.

It is widely accepted that the current Newstart Allowance and Youth Allowance payments are far too low and are acting as an impediment to people looking for work.<sup>49</sup> The National Housing Supply Council calculated that 60% of people who are on low incomes in the rental market are in housing stress<sup>50</sup> and therefore at risk of homelessness. Even for those receiving CRA, 41% of people are still living in rental stress after the payment is taken into account.<sup>51</sup> Mission Australia, along with other community sector as well as other stakeholders including local governments, business sector are currently calling the government to increase the lowest income support payments by \$75.00 per week as part of the Raise the Rate campaign.<sup>52</sup>

Obtaining part time employment can reduce income support payments drastically including payments such as CRA even if the part time employment is temporary or short term. Due to the casualised nature of employment, the reduction in income can force people into homelessness as the income from part-time employment is likely to be unpredictable and short-term. Once a person is removed from supports such as CRA, the process of reapplying and obtaining the support payments can be complex and protracted. There should be better processes to ensure that people who are engaged in casual or part-time work are able to access support payments without significant barriers to changing payment rates should that employment reduce or end.

The McClure report stated that housing assistance should be recognised as a critical component of securing social and employment outcomes and that housing is essential to support employment and wellbeing and assist people on their path to self-reliance.<sup>53</sup> Given the importance of housing and the

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<sup>49</sup> See further: Business Council of Australia, Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Adequacy of the Allowance Payment System for Jobseekers and Others, accessible at: <http://www.bca.com.au/publications/submission-to-the-senate-inquiry-into-the-adequacy-of-the-allowance-payment-system-for-jobseekers-and-others>

<sup>50</sup> National Housing Supply Council, *Housing Supply and Affordability Key Indicators*, 2012, NHSC, Canberra.

<sup>51</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Housing Assistance in Australia 2017*, accessible at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia-2017/contents/financial-assistance>

<sup>52</sup> See further: Raise the Rate Campaign, accessible at: <https://www.acoss.org.au/raisetherate/>

<sup>53</sup> Department of Social services, *A New System for Better Employment and Social Outcomes Report of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform to the Minister for Social Services*, 2015, Canberra, accessible at: [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02\\_2015/dss001\\_14\\_final\\_report\\_access\\_2.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02_2015/dss001_14_final_report_access_2.pdf)

links between housing and employment, we support the implementation of the relevant recommendations therein.

Although the adequacy of welfare payments is not within the scope of this review, the intrinsic link between the welfare payments and the ability to spend time looking for work while financially struggling to make ends meet must be considered when designing and developing the next iteration of the employment services. Welfare reform and the review of employment services should be considered in conjunction with each other.

The reductions of income support payments due to inability to meet mutual obligations can result in forcing people into poverty, homelessness or increase the risk of homelessness, deteriorate physical and/or mental health or be a contributor to domestic and family violence. These punitive measures can also be counterproductive as once disengaged from the system, it is likely that it would take a considerable amount of time for people to reengage with Centrelink and employment services and be supported to pursue their employment goals.

### **Changing attitudes and perceptions**

Community misconceptions in relation to people receiving welfare payments can hinder the opportunities of participants from gaining meaningful employment. The false premise that all people on welfare payments are unwilling to engage in the workforce can negatively impact on the ability of a participant to address their barriers to gaining meaningful long-term employment.

“Some employment service providers don’t have the right attitude. They start with the assumption that people on welfare payments don’t want a job ... labels like ‘dole bludgers’ or ‘people playing the system’ can be toxic and extremely unhelpful. The employment services should hire people with the right attitude.”

Mission Australia Area Manager, NSW

These negative attitudes are often reinforced by politicians and the media further stigmatising and marginalising already disadvantaged people. The next iteration of employment services should focus on providing employment services access to training to change these negative perceptions.

### **Empowering participants and employers through improved online services**

Use of online platforms can be both enabling as well as disabling for employment service participants. For those who have access to online services, with the appropriate level of digital literacy and willing to participate, the online service delivery system will be a useful tool. However, for people with limited digital literacy, without the financial means to access online services or experiencing other challenges, the online service delivery system can add another layer of unnecessary pressure.

Increasing options for employment service participants to learn transferable skills via online employment platforms may provide the necessary flexibility for participants who have the capacity to access these services while, excluding a cohort of people who are unlikely to have access to reliable

access to internet or computers as well as those who are not computer literate. Thus, there should be additional support for those who are willing to participate but experience challenges to accessing online services.

Acknowledging the gap between digital inclusion levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-indigenous communities is encouraging. There is lack of reference to evidence in relation to access to these facilities in rural and remote Australia where people are already experiencing significant disadvantage.

There are many risks associated with developing online platforms that store personal information of employment service participants that can be compromised and exposed to exploitation. Considering this, creating an online platform for reporting mutual obligations should take into account the challenges of cyber-security and provide necessary safeguards to prevent exploitation by third parties.

It is imperative to ensure that participants are provided with all relevant information to make an informed decision about the use of online platforms. They should also have the option to change from online services to face to face services or vice versa depending on the person's personal preferences and circumstances without limiting them to one form of service provision.

### **Better meeting the needs of the employers**

Employers are an integral part of the puzzle and should be provided with the necessary supports. However, it is important to ensure that whilst meeting the needs of the employers, the employment services have sufficient safeguards to protect vulnerable participants from exploitation.

Australia's small businesses employ over 40% of the workforce<sup>54</sup> and are the likely beneficiaries of supports such as wage subsidies. Proactive outreach to educate employers about the subsidies and benefits of recruiting people who are disadvantaged could provide participants with workplace experience and exposure to other opportunities in the sector.

“What we do in DES is reverse marketing – we promote the jobseeker and the benefits that follow when we see an employment opportunity ...

Financial incentives are important in the employment sector. From our experience in DES space, large employers don't really rely on the subsidies but the small to medium enterprises do. We see that some employers terminate employment as soon as the wage subsidy runs out. It is disappointing in some ways but it also means that we have a person with 6 months of work experience which might be appealing to another employer.”

Mission Australia Area Manager, NSW

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<sup>54</sup> Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman, *Small Business Counts: Small Business in the Australian Economy*, 2016, p.6.

## **Training and volunteering**

Recent, relevant work experience can be an added advantage for participants when searching for employment. There are numerous programs to facilitate the opportunities. Although these programs have the potential to encourage participation in training, some concerns have also been raised about the risks of exploitation of labour. Therefore, it is vital that there are appropriate protections for people to protect the vulnerable employment service participants who may not be aware of their rights or are able to assert their rights.

When using unpaid or low-paid apprenticeships or volunteering as part of the employment services framework, it is important to ensure that the employment service provider continuously maintain contact with participants and the employer at regular intervals to ensure that the participant's rights are not infringed and that the employers' expectations are met.

## **Assessment of participants to tailor support to their needs**

The current jobseeker assessment and classification framework has been criticised for not accurately identifying the level of disadvantage experienced by some participants, particularly participants experiencing disadvantage. For instance, Employment Services Assessment (ESAt) assessors have been continuously criticised for not having the appropriate expertise or understanding of certain types of disabilities when conducting the assessments. Therefore, it is important to adopt measures to conduct more comprehensive assessments to identify the level of vulnerability of the participant. As discussed above, consideration should be given to having an advocate or a case manager to assist the participant with the assessment process.

Inaccurate assessments resulting in people getting into the wrong employment pathway can stagnate a person's employment prospects. The assessors as well as the employment service participant would benefit from having a third party present such as an advocate or a case manager to support them through the ESAt process that will ensure participants are accessing the appropriate employment support service. Changes to the funding models have also resulted in vulnerable participants not receiving the necessary supports due to the competitiveness in the job market.

“Under the old DES system, we were able to refer DES participants to external providers who would conduct an independent assessment and offer a letter of support to the participant after considering all the circumstances. Then the participant would produce that letter to the ESAt assessor who will make a determination based on all the evidence. Unfortunately, with the new DES model, it's not financially viable for us to support participants to get those assessments and our clients don't have the financial means to pay for those services themselves.”

Mission Australia Area Manager, NSW

## Measuring participant's motivation

Inability to gain employment can be discouraging for many people despite the effort and time they invest in job search. However, if procedures are adopted to measure participant's motivation, it is imperative that this is built on a trauma informed approach that does not exacerbate the frustrations of the participants, particularly, those with mental health issues.

In-depth assessments to gauge motivation and other subjective measures should only be conducted by trained professionals who are experienced or alternatively by the employment services provider after a reasonable period of time is spent on building a relationship with the participant. The employment services providers should be provided with necessary training to gather such information through sensitive approaches.

## Information sharing between government agencies

Information sharing between government agencies to understand participant's circumstances may benefit the participants as well as the employment and other service providers. However, in order to access such information, there should be clear procedures and guidelines to obtain the employment service participant's informed consent.

## Reassessments

Mission Australia supports measures to reassess where the participant's circumstances change or where participant feels that the initial classification is inaccurate. However, these ongoing reassessments at frequent intervals should not become an additional burden for the participant by increasing administrative tasks that do not necessarily address the participant's circumstances.

## Incentives for participants to find work

The mutual obligations placed on people receiving income support payments are intended as an incentive, but are an additional burden that can result in people withdrawing from government services and forced into homelessness. The jobactive framework's focus on quantity over quality in terms of employment outcomes and the punitive compliance regime are also likely disengage people from employment services rather than support them to build skills and find a job.

“People can job search all they want but if you don't have the interview skills, or have the soft skills like have any understanding of workplace relationships, they are not going to get a job. The focus should be on supporting these vulnerable people not punishing them.”

Mission Australia Employment Services Manager, QLD

Due to the incentives in the current system, employers are likely to force people into job opportunities that do not suit the skills, qualifications or career interests. This includes encouraging people to take up courses 'for the sake of doing a course' without regard to the participant needs or goals. Given the power imbalance in the relationship, the participants are likely to follow the instructions of the employment service provider. For better long-term outcomes, the incentives should focus on

empowering the participant to have more control over decisions and incentivise them to follow education pathways that they are interested in.

### **Focus on participant's general wellbeing**

The new employment framework should be shaped towards encouraging participants to find work through building skills and confidence rather than relying on compliance as a flawed motivational tool.

In 2014-15, Mission Australia implemented a Client Wellbeing pilot into two Commonwealth government funded programs, namely, Stream 4 Job Services Australia (JSA) participants and Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs)<sup>55</sup> community mental health program clients.<sup>56</sup> The evaluation saw significant improvements in wellbeing of the PHaMs clients across a range of domains and self-reported measures after eight months in the program. However, significant improvements were not seen in the wellbeing of JSA Stream 4 participants.

The poor results in the JSA stream 4 pilot may be attributed to less flexible contract and funding constraints that limit the capacity of employment advisers to provide holistic and intensive supports for a cohort that faces multiple barriers.<sup>57</sup> Under jobactive, the employment services model still has many of the same issues as the JSA model while the compliance framework has become more stringent over the years, negatively impacting wellbeing.

While there is general consensus that measures should be in place to ensure that participants are continuously engaged and are proactively searching for employment, it is also important not to overburden participants with unrealistic expectations of meeting mutual obligations that do not provide sufficient consideration of personal circumstances. Current cancellation or preclusion periods due to failures to meet mutual obligations are likely to disengage people from employment services and push them towards poverty and homelessness.

We are of the firm view that the participant should have more control over the employment plan that they develop with the support of the employment service provider and that the funding to implement that plan should follow the participant if they choose to change service providers.

### **Well-designed activation policies to help participants find work**

In terms of activation of jobseekers, the two options provided in the discussion paper are unlikely to result in producing the expected outcomes. Both suggested processes are binary and do not provide sufficient consideration to the unique needs of the individuals. The activation process should be carefully designed to understand and better cater for the needs of the individual and the activities stipulated should be meaningful to the expected employment pathways and outcomes of the

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<sup>55</sup> PHaMs program offers an individualised and intensive program for clients and this approach can be seen as responsible for the positive results.

<sup>56</sup> Mission Australia, Impact Measurement and Client Wellbeing, 2015, accessible at:

<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/children-families-research/449-impact-measurement-and-client-wellbeing-report-2015>

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.13

participants. Ideally, the participants should have control and agency over the activation process and the relevant activities to suit their individual circumstances and have a range of options to choose from.

## Targeted regional and local approaches

The participants in rural and remote areas in particular are likely to experience further disadvantage with limited employment, education, training and apprenticeship opportunities in the local communities. This is further aggravated by external circumstances and factors such as closing down of industries, impact of weather in farming communities and other similar factors that are specific to rural, remote and regional areas.

It is encouraging to note the emphasis in the discussion paper to get employment services consultants to engage with local employers and support services in the local community to provide additional supports to employment services participants. This means that people who are experiencing challenging circumstances are provided with opportunities to address those challenges prior to focusing on obtaining employment. However, it is important to note that coordination and collaboration across sectors can be resource intensive, particularly for community organisations that are currently delivering services with limited financial and human resources. Therefore, the Department should ensure that there is clear investment into supporting employment service providers to engage with community organisations without overburdening the community organisations.

Employment services could be incentivised to develop innovative pathways to increase and create employment opportunities for people in the local communities.

“The employment services should take the seasonality factor into consideration when designing employment opportunities. For example, in certain regional areas employment rates sky rocket during harvesting season. The employment services could facilitate a training program where people in the regions receive training for the next phase after harvesting so that there’s a continuous flow of skilled workers. This also means that participants are engaged in work related training prior to harvesting and in employment during the harvesting and processing period.”

Mission Australia Regional Leader, SA

Considering the specific challenges in rural, regional and remote areas, the Department could further explore the options of increasing the level of funding per participant based on remoteness and employment opportunities available in the local communities.

### **Indigenous Rangers - Working on Country**

Funded by Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the program aims to strengthen the compliance capabilities and related technical skills of Indigenous rangers. The Strategy will support rangers to take up surveillance and compliance opportunities with government regulatory agencies and other fee-for-service work.

A Social Return on Investment evaluation conducted by Social Ventures Australia found that the Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) and associated Indigenous ranger programmes have demonstrated success across a broad range of outcome areas, effectively overcoming barriers to addressing Indigenous disadvantage and engaging Indigenous Australians on country in meaningful employment to achieve large scale conservation outcomes, thus aligning the interests of Indigenous Australians and the broader community.

By facilitating reconnection with country, culture and language, the IPA and Working on Country programmes have achieved exceptional levels of engagement amongst Indigenous Australians, driving the achievement of positive social, economic, cultural and environmental outcomes, delivering a mutual benefit for all key stakeholders.

Programs such as these that facilitate and promote the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture whilst providing meaningful employment opportunities should be replicated across the country with the support of Department of Jobs and Small Businesses.

Provision of financial and human resources to relocate participants with their families to increase labour market mobility may be helpful in some circumstances. The wellbeing of the participant and their family members should be a key priority including access to adequate health and education services. Therefore, this decision should be entirely up to the participant and they should be provided with all the necessary supports to make an informed decision before they commit to drastic changes such as moving into or out of regional, rural and remote areas. This should not be an expectation, only an opportunity that comes with requisite support.

### **A service culture built on competition and quality**

Increased competition should only be pursued where it increases choices for participants. Mission Australia believes that the participant should have more control over their employment pathway and be able to exercise choice in identifying the employment service providers that better understand and meet their needs.

Cohort or sector specific service providers, particularly, service providers with demonstrated experience in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, CALD communities, or sectors such as farming or manufacturing may produce positive outcomes as the service providers have a better understanding of the sector or the communities. These employment services could be a consortium or

an individual provider. A majority of the participants will fall into more than one category, therefore, the choice should be made by the participant depending on their needs and circumstances.

Participants choice and agency is almost non-existent in programs where service users are subject to mutual obligation requirements where employment service providers have significant control over the participant's performance.

Further, in certain areas, introducing competition may not produce positive outcomes due to limited number of services available in local communities, increased employment services staff turnover and unhealthy competition that will drive smaller, cohort specific service providers out of the market.

### **Transitioning to a future employment service**

Transitioning to a future model should be a gradual, transparent process where participants are made aware of the changes and how the changes would impact on them. In order to facilitate this a range of communication tools should be used to engage employment services participant at the earliest possible point in time. We also recommend provision of a considerable time period for participants to get accustomed to the new employment framework before any non-compliance penalties or preclusions are applied.

## Recommendations

Mission Australia supports and endorses the recommendations made by Australian Council of Community Services (ACOSS).

### Helping people experiencing disadvantage into work

- People who are unemployed, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, should be at the centre of the policy design and development process for the new employment services model, and there should be meaningful and continuous consultation and engagement of job seekers from diverse backgrounds and lived experiences.
- Employment services for people experiencing disadvantage should be person centred, holistic and focus on long-term sustainable employment outcomes. Increasing job seekers' capacity and wellbeing will be more effective in achieving continuous workforce participation than the current model which incentivises short-term employment. The framework should be flexible to prioritise and balance people's individual needs (such as caring responsibilities and mental health) and promote positive outcomes that are unique to each individual.
- People who are unemployed should be provided with more autonomy to make an *informed choice* when selecting an employment service provider and to change the provider when appropriate. Information necessary to choose or change the provider should be made available to participants in a simple and easy to access and understand format.
- Participants receiving employment services should have more control over the employment plan that is developed to enhance their employment options. The funding to implement that plan should follow the participant if they choose to change service providers.
- The Commonwealth should lead cross-sector collaboration and cross-government efforts through Ministerial Councils and the Council of Australian Governments to achieve a seamless national employment strategy which results in better coordination and cooperation between the multiple employment services provided by various branches of the government, prevents duplication of and gaps in service provision and strengthens existing supports for disadvantaged job seekers.
  - Clear guidelines and policies should be in place to facilitate sector-wide collaboration to ensure participants are able to work with employment service providers to identify their barriers to employment and are provided with the necessary supports to address complex issues.
  - There should be adequate funding and human resources underpinning the collaborative framework to ensure that the community organisations that receive referrals from employment services are able to meet the increasing demand for services.
  - This includes better coordination and collaboration with parallel support programs for people with disabilities including DES, the NDIA partners in the community and NDIS registered service providers.

- The Department of Jobs and Small Business (the Department) should increase access to enhanced supports for participants who are most disadvantaged.
- The Department should increase flexibility and relax the strict eligibility criteria of pre-employment support programs such as TtW and ParentsNext to ensure people experiencing barriers to employment are able to access early intervention services at the earliest possible point in time.
- Pre-employment programs should be exempt from strict mutual obligations as they are only expected to prepare individuals for employment. The imposition of a punitive and stringent compliance framework to these programs (albeit in a modified way) potentially risks the programs' goals of building participants' skills and confidence in overcoming barriers through alienating and demotivating participants.
- Targeted employment services should be made available to different cohorts of participants.
- For young people who are unemployed:
  - Innovative, engaging and youth oriented employment services should be available, including expansion of programs such as TtW to assist young people with the transition from education to work.
  - Youth transitions programs for the most disadvantaged participants should be expanded incorporating a holistic, strengths-based approach and where necessary have the flexibility to work with young people's families. Such programs should include careers advice, mentoring, skills training, assistance to re-engage with education and work experience as well as working on underlying issues that present as barriers to employment.
  - Program design should be sufficiently flexible to allow training and vocational education opportunities to be tailored to the individual capabilities and career pathway aspirations of the young people.
  - Volunteering opportunities should be available to obtain work experience with safeguards and measures to prevent exploitation.
  - Measures should be adopted to scale and replicate models such as social enterprises that provide flexible training and apprenticeship opportunities for young people and respond to local needs. These social enterprises should be provided with necessary financial support to ensure long-term sustainability.
- Parents with young children should continue to receive assistance with childcare and other parenting responsibilities while they engage with pre-employment programs or employment programs.
- The Department should adopt the relevant recommendations made by the Australian Human Rights Commission following the Willing to Work inquiry to support people with disabilities and older people.

- Learnings from programs that produced positive outcomes such as PHaMs Employment should be adopted by the Department when designing, developing and delivering employment services to people with disability or mental health issues.
- Employment services should be culturally appropriate and sensitive to unique needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people from CALD backgrounds and be able to link them to other appropriate community services where necessary.
- For participants who are willing to access employment services online, a priority should be providing continuous supports to increase digital literacy, improving access to internet in areas with limited access, particularly in areas with a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Access to literacy and numeracy courses should be increased with tailored literacy and numeracy supports for people who are aiming to join particular industries or sectors to better understand the technicalities and jargon in those sectors.
- Clear policies should be designed to ensure that holistic, wrap-around supports (such as access to secure and affordable housing, alcohol and drug related or mental health services and the like) are prioritised over mutual obligations to search for employment.
- Funding should be tailored to individual job plans or pre-employment service plans which are portable or reviewed after moving to different areas, so that participants who move to different areas are able to access the necessary supports.
- Income support payments for people who are unemployed must be increased in order to enable people to maintain a decent life while they undertake training, education and/or job search.
  - The policies that de-incentivise employment service participants including reduction or discontinuation of payments when a person secures casual or part-time employment should be amended to ensure that people are supported to find long-term sustainable employment outcomes.

### **Empowering participants and employers through improved online services**

- Using online platforms or face to face services for employment services should be a decision made by the participant and the necessary supports to access and learn how to use those tools should be made available to them prior to the roll-out of the changes.
- The Department should provide guarantees in relation to the safety of participant information on an online platform. There must be clear guidelines and protocols in relation to the use of this data and what happens to the data after an individual is no longer in receipt of income support payments.

### **Better meeting the needs of the employers**

- Adopting measures from wage subsidies to training opportunities should be carefully designed to ensure that the participants are provided with sufficient protections including ensuring that

employers are able to attract people interested in the sector or trade, procedures are in place to prevent exploitation and people are appropriately remunerated.

- Both employers and participants should be made aware of their rights and obligations and these should be clearly communicated to both parties.

### **Assessment of Participants to tailor support to their needs**

- The assessments should be used to better understand the individual's strengths and barriers to employment. The participant, the employment service provider or an advocate acting on behalf of a participant should have the opportunity to request for reassessments in instances where the person is inaccurately streamed or where their circumstances have changed.
- In-depth assessments to gauge motivation and other subjective measures should only be conducted by trained professionals who are experienced or alternatively by the employment services provider after a reasonable period of time is spent on building a relationship with the participant. The employment services providers should be provided with necessary training to gather such information through sensitive approaches.

### **Incentives for participants to find work**

- Transparent and simple activity requirements should be established that are easy to understand and follow. This process must entail a range of choices to meet the activity requirements and the participants should be provided with more autonomy over the type of activities they are able to undertake.
- The Department should further explore the possibility of developing a model that increases the level of funding per participant based on remoteness and employment opportunities available in the local communities.
- A national career guidance or counselling pathway should be created to support participants, particularly young people, early school leavers and those who are returning to work after being disengaged from employment for lengthy periods of time. Career advisors should work with participants to understand the employment setting, career interests and education opportunities. This will ensure that the employment services, planning and access to training programs can be targeted and relevant.

### **Targeted regional and local approaches**

- Where employment services are expected to collaborate with local community organisations, the local community organisations should be provided with or have access to increased financial and human resources to meet the growing demand for supports and services.
- Employment service providers should be encouraged and incentivised for identifying employment opportunities by providing and facilitating access to training opportunities that meet the needs of employment in local communities
- In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the local community leaders and community controlled organisations should be consulted through the design, development and delivery of employment services.