

## **DSS Consultation on National Disability Employment Framework – Round 1 Ostara Australia Response – July 2015**

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### **Introduction**

Ostara Australia is a Disability Employment Service provider, operating across 5 states and territories, delivering services under both DMS and ESS contracts. Formed in 2001 by a group of specialist mental health service providers, Ostara has become the largest DES provider in Australia, specializing in the support of participants experiencing mental illness.

Ostara has participated in general provider consultation sessions in Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra, as well as a private session at Ostara National Office. Our formal response submission focuses on the key issues facing participants experiencing mental illness in their quest for sustainable employment, the employers we work with, and the employment services staff who do a remarkable job in some of the toughest labour market conditions experienced in the last 20 years.

## A. Principles for Change - Feedback

Principles	Benefits
<b>Individual funding based on needs and aspirations</b>	Choice and control to the individual
<p>Response: This principle not only recognises individual aspirations but also needs. With appropriate individualised funding for the person at each stage of their employment journey, services can be better designed and delivered over their life-course, and we support this principle. Success will depend on finely tuned assessment approaches, which truly understand the support needs of the person at each stage.</p>	
<b>Market-based service provision</b>	Flexibility, innovation and responsiveness to individually based consumer choices
<p>Response: Participants experiencing mental illness can have significant issues in receiving quality service support due to contract constraints as to which provider they may use, in which relatively small geographical area. Greater flexibility for person-choice of provider will significantly improve options for participants, and will reward greater innovation. We support this principle.</p>	
<b>Long-term career planning and capacity building</b>	Sustainable employment outcomes that meet current and future labour market needs
<p>Response: While this in many respects in the “holy grail” in any national employment program, a key focus needs to be on how young people with early-onset disabilities develop the “expectation” to be employed and achieve some level of social and economic independence in their life. This “expectation” needs to start at home and school. Once in their first job, the framework must allow for participants to continue receiving supports as their skills and aspirations develop.</p>	
<b>Understanding of employer needs</b>	Better match between job seeker and jobs, leading to better, longer term employment
<p>Response: The framework needs to accommodate better employer planning supports for workplace diversity, as well as a “recruitment” approach for identifying participants who match employer requirements. This approach is particularly critical in supporting larger employers who are motivated to employ people with disabilities, but are uncertain where to start.</p>	
<b>Increased open employment options</b>	Social and economic gains for the individual and broader community
<p>Response: The framework should recognise the pathway to sustainable long-term employment may involve a combination of vocational training, volunteering, work-experience, supported employment, and open employment that coincide with a person’s mental health experience, not just when they are “well”.</p>	
<b>Whole-of-government coordination and use of technology</b>	Improved service pathways and reduced ‘red tape’ for clients and service providers
<p>Response: The key focus for government should be that individual funding packages match the persons support needs and these funds are appropriately acquitted. A service directory should be made available to participants and employers for a range of career planning, pre-employment, vocational and non-vocational supports as well as job placement and workplace supports. Government should also ensure all service providers meet minimum service standards and are National Disability Service Standards- compliant.</p>	
<b>The person is supported through the life-course</b>	An integrated approach that maximises lifetime wellbeing
<p>Response: For people experiencing mental illness, an integrated support approach is critical to long-term success. Ostara’s current programs demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach.</p>	

**B. Further comments:**

1. The framework should take a longer term view in supporting participants into sustainable employment
  - a. PPS for 12 months
  - b. More flexible permissible breaks, particularly for participants experiencing episodic illness.
2. More intensive early intervention for younger job-seekers, linking into school-to-work transition
  - a. Open access to program/funding
  - b. Enable pathways from NDIS to DES – 0-7 benchmark hours
3. Recognise benefits of not only industry specialists, but also jobseeker cohort specialists
  - a. Reinforce Government focus on participants with mental illness requiring specialist support
4. Redefinition of employment
  - a. Recognize casualization and self-employment
  - b. Supported employment as a pathway to open employment
5. Employer fund
  - a. Wage subsidies tiered to complexity of disability
  - b. Employer supports to promote mentally healthy work places
6. Encourage partnerships to cover vocational and non-vocational supports for participants.
  - a. Recognize vocational training and non-vocational education as part of career development while working.
  - b. Encourage integrated recovery and employment support services, eg PHAMS & DES
7. Ensure funding model not only improves choice of service for participants, but also supports existing quality service provider base.
  - a. Best practice does not necessarily lead to financial strength, particularly in community organisations, where surplus funding is reinvested for the benefit of clients, not shareholders.