

**Response to DSS’s National Disability Employment Framework Issues Paper**

Australia has an exciting opportunity to rethink how people with disability are assisted to prepare for, find and maintain employment and to develop careers. To do this well, we need to draw on the experiences of current disability employment programs and arrangements – Disability Employment Services (DES); Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs); social enterprises – and the design and implementation of the fledgling National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Alongside these, an assessment of the merits of existing support for employers and programs such as Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs) needs to be made.

National Disability Services (NDS) is confident that there is a way to design both the new National Disability Employment Framework and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) so that together they provide better employment opportunities for people with disability. Ensuring that the support systems are complementary will drive improved social and economic participation outcomes for Australians with disability.

This paper identifies the strengths and weaknesses of existing employment programs and associated services and then considers what we can learn from the NDIS. Principles for designing a new Framework are proposed and revised employment support arrangements are outlined.

**Lessons from the Disability Employment Services (DES) program**

**Strengths**

The following features of the DES program assist in helping a jobseeker or worker with disability to secure and maintain employment. They perform functions that are vital for the success of the future employment support framework.

* **Expertise of Disability Employment Services providers**

The existing expertise, knowledge and experience of the 140 DES providers operating across Australia is a valuable asset that needs to be retained and further developed. Much of the criticism aimed at DES providers (and the stagnant level of outcomes) lies with the complexity and design of the programme rather than the capability of the providers themselves.

* **Employment Assistance Fund**

Access to workplace modifications, work equipment, Auslan services and workplace assistance and support services – currently available through the Employment Assistance Fund – can boost the likelihood of an employee with disability successfully performing in a job.

However, the provision of these supports is often disconnected from the personal support and equipment that individuals need in other domains of their lives. An integrated approach to their provision would be more efficient and more effective than the current fragmentary approach.

* **Supported Wage System**

The Supported Wage System assists individuals whose disability impacts on their productivity to compete in an open employment setting. It fosters realistic wage expectations for employers and employees as it pays a wage that reflects the impact of an employee’s disability on their output.

* **Wage subsidies**

Wage subsidies can be very important for small to medium size businesses as they can be used to cover initial on-boarding costs when hiring and training staff. Large businesses and corporations are less likely to take advantage of wage subsidies but could benefit from an initiative similar to the CareerTrackers Indigenous Internship Program (but designed for students with disability). This initiative encourages employers to offer internship opportunities for indigenous students. Students transition to full-time employment once they complete their studies.

* **Ongoing support**

Ongoing support is important in helping some people with disability to maintain employment. In particular, it is vital for many people with intellectual disability.

* **Job in Jeopardy**

Access to rapid connection and support when a person’s job is at risk (as provided by Job in Jeopardy) is a positive feature of the current DES program.

**Weaknesses**

Many of the current weaknesses of the DES model lie in the highly-prescriptive design of the programme. These include:

* **Excessive regulatory burden**

The high level of red tape and prescription diverts providers’ focus (and resources) from service provision. This over-regulation prevents innovation and flexibility in service delivery. While in recent measures the Government has removed some red tape, a more fundamental shift in the regulation of employment services is required.

* **Inadequate funding**

DES providers are struggling with a decline in the real value of funding as a result of a prolonged indexation freeze on program fees[[1]](#footnote-1). This real decline in funding has decreased providers’ capacity to innovate and invest in skills development.

* **Performance framework**

The current performance framework (Star Ratings system) encourages providers to work with jobseekers who are relatively job ready and the easiest to place. It discourages investment in jobseekers who require additional time and effort to place in employment but for whom the long-term benefits far outweigh the costs.

* **Assessment problems**

The current assessment procedures can result in people being streamed to the wrong service and funded at the wrong support level. The concept of determining an individual’s future work capacity in the abstract and setting a benchmark of working hours based on that is highly problematic.

Assessors are bound by inflexible guidelines that inadequately recognise the differences in people’s employment support needs. The assessors’ technical knowledge is often insufficient to enable them to predict how an individual’s impairment will impact on their work capacity.

Work capacity is the product not just of an individual’s impairment but the way that impairment affects their motivation and emotional life and interacts with their social and physical environment. A biopsychosocial assessment that recognises these multiple influences on work capacity would be preferable to the current approach. Furthermore, apart from determining eligibility for income support, it makes no sense to retain a bureaucratic process for predicting degrees of work capacity, detached from any particular job.

* **Disincentives to work**

Work disincentives exist for people receiving government benefits, for example, the loss of concession cards and high effective marginal tax rates. If a person loses access to the Health Care Card as a consequence of gaining a job, a large proportion of their wages could be spent on medication.

* **Lack of a career focus**

The current system discourages providers from working with individuals to build their career prospects after they have commenced employment. People with disability should be assisted to build a career rather than to just find and stay in a job.

* **Restricted access**

Although the DES program is uncapped, access is restricted by eligibility rules that are too tight. Access by school students, for example, is restricted to those with a ‘significant disability’ in the final year of secondary school. There is little doubt that expanding the access of students with disability to ‘the world of work’ would result in many more of them engaging successfully with employment during a critical stage of life.

**Lessons from the Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) program**

**Strengths**

* **Commitment to social purpose combined with business know-how**

ADEs are not-for-profit organisations established to provide employment for people who would otherwise be denied work, enabling them to gain the social, financial and personal benefits of work. This combination of skills, purpose and values is unique and needs to be recognised and enhanced in the new Employment Framework.

* **Subsidises government funding through commercial activity**

The commercial activity of ADEs effectively subsidises government funding. Without ADEs, most supported employees would require more expensive support in a community program.

* **Provides social supports and skills**

ADEs often provide supports that mainstream employers do not provide, including training in life skills, household budgeting and social activities. These supports are delivered because of the commitment of staff and management to the well-being of their employees with disability.

* **Assists career development**

ADEs provide job-related training and skills development that can assist supported employees to gain promotion within a disability enterprise (taking on additional responsibilities) or pursue alternative employment options such as open employment.

**Weaknesses**

* **Uncertainty fuelled by ideological opponents**

While recent Australian governments of both persuasions endorse ADEs as a legitimate employment option for people with disability, some advocates in Australia and overseas are strong critics of supported employment per se, arguing that it segregates people with disability and provides poor outcomes. This opposition has helped create a climate of uncertainty for ADEs and their supported employees. In response to the question of what would happen to supported employees if ADEs didn’t exist, some critics argue that all supported employees could work in open employment; others simply avoid the question.

* **Financial viability is precarious**

Established for the purpose of providing employment opportunities for people with disability, ADEs structure their operations in response to a ‘duality of focus’: they are both businesses and service providers; their supported employees are also their clients. This a difficult tension to manage and restricts the capacity of ADEs to be commercially profitable. If their purpose was profit, they would not employ most of the people whom they do employ. NDS has proposed that an industry development plan be implemented to build the financial viability of ADEs.

* **Access is restricted by a capped program**

The number of funded places in ADEs is capped, limiting the capacity of ADEs to expand and restricting the movement of supported employees between ADEs. Given the benefits of work and the higher costs of supporting people with disability who are excluded from work, access to ADEs should depend on the availability of jobs not the availability of support funding.

* **Inflexible guidelines**

Some current program guidelines entrench inflexible employment engagement practices. For example, the employment of contract labour to is not allowed.

The range of employment support options available to people with disability should expand and the barriers to people accessing these options should be minimised. Government’s future approach should involve not seeking to replace one employment model with another but stimulating innovation and allowing an increased diversity of options. Changes such as the 2015 Budget measure to allow supported employees to engage with a DES without having first to resign from their job are a good first step, but more extensive reforms are required.

**Assist people with mental illness to find work**

Mental illness is the fastest growing disability in Australia. Evidence demonstrates that engaging in employment is an important part of the recovery process. These recommendations outline how the framework can better assist people with mental illness to find work.

* **High levels of undiagnosed or untreated mental illness**

Currently, the majority of people with mental illness requiring employment support receive services from jobactive (the replacement for Job Services Australia) and the remainder from DES. The majority of these jobseekers are not receiving treatment for their condition. It is unrealistic to expect that a job seeker with an untreated mental illness will successfully obtain and maintain employment. It is also unrealistic to expect an employer to provide ongoing employment to someone with an untreated mental illness.

More, therefore, needs to be done to ensure such jobseekers receive appropriate mental health care. Effective treatment decreases the likelihood of symptoms manifesting themselves, shortens illness duration and improves workplace productivity. Services and supports need to be available in non-work or community settings.

* **Job matching is vital**

Specific mental health conditions are commonly associated with particular cognitive, psychological, physical and social limitations. Better decisions about employment can be made if these limitations are understood. Employment services should be encouraged to use publically available tools on job matching and mental illness.

* **People with a severe mental illness need a special focus**

The majority of people with severe mental illness are not in the workforce despite employment being one of the top three aspirations for this cohort. They may have been out of work for a significant number of years, or have never worked and have little knowledge of how to secure employment.

Most will experience cognitive, social, psychological and behavioural limitations that will need to be accommodated in the workplace and many will have other physical health problems that also need to be considered. This is not helped by the lack of suitable jobs in supportive workplaces.

Job seekers with severe mental illness require targeted, intense services. Specialist evidence-based employment support services that are familiar with international best practice and who work in partnership with therapeutic services are best able to provide these.

* **Open discussion should be encouraged**

Active encouragement from employment services for jobseekers to disclose their illness is needed. International evidence indicates that without openness around illness, appropriate workplace support and adjustments are often not made and the job fails.

* **Collaboration across service systems is necessary**

Strategies to increase collaboration between therapeutic or health services, rehabilitation and employment support services are needed to give people with the disability the best results in employment. This is particularly important for people with a severe mental illness.

* **Regulations can limit flexibility**

DES currently has the capacity to provide some of the necessary supports for an employee with a mental illness in the workplace, but given the high level of compliance and regulation binding providers, more innovative supports may not be allowed. Given the difficulties of disclosing a mental illness in the workplace, individual employees need to be able to access the service without involving their employer.

* **Broader marketing of employment support is required**

Marketing of employment supports should be broadened to include places such as general practice surgeries and pharmacies as these are the main locations to be accessed by people with common mental illness. Guidelines for accessing employment assistance should be more explicit in specifying the range of supports which can be provided.

* **Employers need advice about mental health issues**

Employers often lack confidence in managing their obligations to support an employee experiencing mental illness. Employer feedback has identified supports they would like to access, including timely, inexpensive advice on their legal rights and obligations. Assistance throughout the process of managing an employee experiencing mental illness is useful, as well as identifying and implementing effective workplace adjustments such as:

* + frequent supervision, with greater emotional content and assistance with defining workplace priorities and problem-solving
  + flexibility in work hours such as start and finish times, frequent breaks, capacity to adapt hours to accommodate fluctuation of their illness, and time off work to attend therapeutic appointments
  + support to form and maintain appropriate social relationships at work
  + strategies to manage common cognitive limitations experienced by people with mental illness such as memory, attention span and problem solving
  + policy, procedure and action plans to manage a decline in mental health, unacceptable work behaviours and critical incidents
  + targeted strategies to eliminate workplace bullying, harassment and social exclusion.

**Meet the needs of employers**

It is crucial that the new National Disability Employment Framework responds to the needs of employers. These recommendations offer practical ways to achieve this.

* **Promote specialist employment supports to employers**

There are a range of different specialist employment supports available to employers, such as JobAccess and DES. A survey conducted in 2011 by DEEWR demonstrated that only two-thirds of employers were aware of government-funded employment service agencies. Of these, only three percent had used a DES in the previous twelve month period. These supports and assistance available for employers need to be more broadly promoted to ensure their greater use, resulting in increased employment opportunities for people with disability.

* **Fund employment supports adequately**

The more jobseekers are prepared for employment, the more likely they are to secure and retain a job. Job preparation requires investment of resources. Similarly, regular access to ongoing support is essential to maintain a job for some employees. This can’t occur without adequate funding, but the pay-off over the long-term will be worthwhile.

* **Use different strategies to engage different types of employers**

Large corporations may be resistant to direct approaches from a service provider, as they prefer to deal with one point of contact, such as the National Disability Recruitment Coordinator (NDRC). But small business is the largest potential source of jobs for people with disability and service providers often foster long-term direct relationships with small and medium employers which produce real benefits. In other cases, service providers can most usefully work with industry bodies whose message to their business members is likely to be heard.

* **Sell the benefits of employing people with disability**

Service providers should help employers to understand the benefits of employing people with disability. These benefits include a more diverse workforce that reflects their customer base as well as securing loyal and committed employees. Some existing initiatives, including ACCI’s ‘Employ Outside the Box’, encourage employers to broaden their pool of potential employees in the context of workforce shortages.

Ultimately, however, an employment service provider needs to be in the position to respond to an employer’s need to fill a particular job vacancy or skill gap, even if that means working with them to redesign a job.

* **Enhance recruitment processes**

Due to the current prescriptive DES procedures, employers are often faced with excessive red tape. Recruitment procedures for employers should be simple, flexible, benefit employers and ensure access to and awareness of assistance such as wage subsidies, workplace modifications, specialist advice and streamlined personal support. All employers should be able to be connected with the right person at the right time with the right skills.

* **Build a disability confident culture**

As many employers as possible should have a disability confident culture. Encouraging this culture could be facilitated with an internal disability employment advocate, who can champion the inclusion of people with disability in the workplace e.g. similar to the Special Employment Placement Officer which used to be funded by DEWR.

**Improve pathways from school to employment**

The current DES Eligible School Leaver Guidelines have a narrow entry point, giving only students with ‘significant’ disability entry to DES in their final year of school.

Exposure to the world of work before leaving the structured school environment helps young people understand the difference between school and the post-school environment. It also allows them to develop a sense of responsibility and independence and is more likely to lead to post-school employment. This is supported by Dr Richard Luecking, who states[[2]](#footnote-2)

Since the mid 1980s research has shown that youth with disabilities who participate in work experience, especially paid work, while in secondary school are significantly more likely to hold job after they exit school than those who do not have these experiences.

All students with disability who elect to participate in employment in their final years of education should be entitled to employment support. Transition-to-employment supports should be available to young people with disability whilst they are still at school.

The Ticket to Work initiative housed by NDS provides part of the solution. Ticket to Work takes a partnership approach to improving the employment and education outcomes of young people with disability. Ticket to Work achieves this by supporting organisations, in local regions across Australia, to build a ‘Local Ticket to Work Network’ so that they can provide students in their community with career development, workplace preparation, work experience and Australian School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships. Ticket to Work has proven to be a successful model that is leading to genuine employment outcomes for young people with disabilities in Australia.

NDS believes Ticket to Work needs to be developed nationally and should be funded as part of the continuum of employment supports going forward.

**Taking direction from the NDIS**

The NDIS is beginning to deliver increased investment in disability services, with the scheme now launched in sites across seven states and territories. The trial sites are providing valuable information about what is working well in the NDIS design and what needs improving. While there are certainly implementation challenges and parts of the NDIS design that are yet to be decided, the NDIS vision and design principles remain very compelling. There is significant scope for these principles to help shape the new Disability Employment Framework.

The following core aspects of the NDIS should influence the design of the new Framework:

* The provision of reasonable and necessary supports is based on an assessment of an individual’s disability-related needs and their aspirations. Attention is given to identifying a person’s strengths, preferences and goals, not just their impairment. The key planning question is: “what support do you need to achieve your goals?” Employment is more likely to succeed if it reflects a person’s ambitions and proclivities.
* holistic planning occurs where appropriate - recognising mainstream services, such as education and recognising that the domains of a person’s life (home, work, transport, relationships, education) are inter-connected and that achieving goals in one domain (eg work) may involve providing support in another domain (eg home or transport)
* supports are reviewed at least annually to ensure that they reflect changes in circumstances, needs and goals.
* intervening early can improve outcomes in the longer-term. The NDIS takes a long-term cost-benefit approach to funding supports. One of its three categories of support is ‘capacity-building’, recognising that extra investment in a person’s supports now can save costs over the person’s lifetime by helping to build their independence. This approach should inform investment in employment support, including early intervention at school, training and career development.
* levels of supports are individualised: tailored to the needs, circumstances and reasonable goals of the person
* funding is attached to the participant and portable: people with disability can choose their provider/s
* people with disability can negotiate on how, when and what supports are provided
* participants have improved access to assistive technology: for example, a non-verbal child denied a communication device under the current system because of its cost has been provided with the device in an NDIS trial site, greatly enhancing his educational experience and his subsequent employment prospects.

Under a new Framework, the employment support available to a person with disability should be based on the reasonable and necessary support they need to find, maintain (including in a crisis) and change employment. It should also be regularly reviewed, consider their individual interests, and during the assessment of capability and capacity, choice of provider should be available. Employment support providers need to work collaboratively and flexibly with individuals so as to maximise the possibility of finding a good job.

Discussions about employment should begin while a young person is still at school and involve the individual, families, teachers and employment support providers. Support focused on preparing a person for future employment should be available to young people during this time and when transitioning from school.

The Framework should facilitate cooperative engagement with the NDIS, where appropriate, in order to ensure the necessary personal supports are available to support a person who is working or seeking work, and that good decisions are made about the provision of assistive technology.

The NDIS is still in its early stages and is not without teething problems, particularly around pricing and information systems. The new Employment Framework will need to incorporate an efficient and streamlined ICT system, along with adequate pricing for supports to sustain a diverse market of employment providers.

There is some tension between the NDIS’s emphasis on participant choice and its object of increasing people’s economic and social participation. Of 13,610 approved plans at the end of March 2015, only 1,546 (11.4%) fund any form of employment support. This is too low. It may reflect low expectations about participants’ capacity to work. It may also reflect the disconnection between the NDIS and large parts of the employment support system. Aligning the design principles which underpin the NDIS with those that inform the new Employment Framework would help fix this disconnection.

**Principles for a new national disability employment framework**

NDS reviewed the principles included in the National Disability Employment Framework: Issues Paper and proposes the following:

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| **Principle** | **Implications** | **Benefits** |
| Employment participation is the expectation for Australians of working age | * building work aspirations needs to begin at school * transition to work support must be widely available | * social and economic gains for people with disability and the broader community |
| All people with disability should be given the opportunity to seek employment | * an assessed capacity to work should not be a pre-requisite to having access to employment support * people with a disability who would like to work have access to reasonable and necessary employment support | * the expectations and capacity of people with disability are enhanced and their opportunities to participate in society are maximised |
| People who have the capacity to work should be required to seek employment or contribute to the economy | * people of working age—whether or not they have a disability—who have the capacity to work are expected to seek employment * work expectations should not exceed a person’s capacity * unreasonable refusal to seek employment may affect social security payments * Volunteering is recognised as a valuable contribution as well as a pathway to paid employment | * people with disability receive the reasonable and necessary supports they need to secure employment. The NDIS encourages and supports people who can work to seek work. |
| Supporting people to find work is a net benefit for the individual and the community | * Adopting an investment approach requires assessing costs and benefits over the long term * providing employment support early makes economic sense * reasonable support should be available for people who need assistance to maintain employment * there is adequate investment in career development. | * sustainable employment outcomes that meet current and future labour market needs, including enhanced career options for people with disability |

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| **Principle** | **Implications** | **Benefits** |
| Support is tailored to individual needs and focused on outcomes | * the allocation of reasonable and necessary employment supports should be based on an assessment of individual needs, aspirations and current barriers to employment * service providers have the ability to respond to individual needs and aspirations * funding should reflect the real cost of supporting a person to gain employment | * the employment participation experience of the individual is maximised |
| Support provided may vary across an individual’s employment life course | * people should have access to additional, different or post employment supports if they require assistance to change jobs, progress their career or exit the workforce * ensure that instances of episodic conditions and/or illness do not lead to loss of employment * people should have access to career counselling | * individuals receive appropriate employment support interventions as needed |
| People with disability can choose the supports they receive | * people should be able to choose the provider of their employment supports and negotiate the types of supports that will lead to employment * people should be assisted to make informed choices through the availability of transparent and uniform data * there should be access to a wide range of employment support providers * a broad range of employment arrangements is available including open employment, supported open employment, supported employment and employment-like activities | * choice and control by individuals is maximised |
| **Principle** | **Implications** | **Benefits** |
| Administration should be simple, transparent and flexible | * employment outcomes should be recognised if achieved within ethical boundaries * IT and payment systems should be simple to use | * taxpayer funds and service provider resources are appropriately utilised and individual outcomes are enhanced |
| Employers are seen as partners | * assistance is available to help employers to adopt a disability confident culture and to understand concepts such as reasonable adjustment * service providers engage constructively with employers to meet their needs and encourage flexibility in employment practices * employment engagement process is simple, flexible and easy to navigate * information on assistance measures—such as wage subsidies, workplace modifications, specialist advice and personal support—is widely available and easily accessible * government should procure more goods and services from employers of people with disability * government agencies should employ more people with disability | * an increased rate of disability employment and more positive engagement by employers |
| There is a diverse and sustainable supply of disability employment support | * prices ensure quality and choice of support for participants as well as capable and effective service delivery * funding and policy settings encourage innovation and research and development * there is adequate investment in skills development | * quality of service provision and quality of employment outcomes are maximised |
| **Principle** | **Implications** | **Benefits** |
| The new Disability Employment Framework builds on strengths in the current system | * Reform does not begin from a blank slate but builds on current expertise, experience and strengths to drive change * The designers of the new system make recommendations based on evidence * The new Framework is formulated through a co-design approach which draws on the insights of all stakeholders | * The new Framework, based on evidence and the practical experience of service providers and people with disability, delivers on its aims |

**How would it work?**

The application of NDIS principles to any future employment framework presents opportunities for enhanced employment participation of people with disability. However, caution needs to be exercised in regard to what ‘reasonable and necessary’ choices mean for those with workforce participation requirements and the extent to which providers can deliver those options.

In order to safeguard public accountability principles, providers would need to be accredited to deliver a range of employment related supports. Providers could choose to deliver specialised supports or offer a more comprehensive suite of services. These specialised supports could be industry or disability specific.

Some form of quality assurance system needs to be retained in order to provide a guaranteed quality of service provision.

**Scenario 1: With assessed work capacity**

* **Gateway via DHS**

DHS assesses an individual’s eligibility for income support. If they are deemed to have work capacity, they are allocated a funding package, taking into account their skills, barriers to employment, disability type, career aspirations and the current labour market (based on reference packages of reasonable and necessary support to find work).

The job seeker selects an employment planner within ten working days in order to meet their employment participation requirements.

A person assessed as not having capacity to work but would like to find employment is referred to the NDIS.

***Issue:*** The tension between choice and participation requirements will need to be addressed. People assessed with a capacity to work should not be able to ignore those requirements but should still be able to choose their provider/s and be able to negotiate with the provider on what interventions are most appropriate and most likely to help them to find work.

***Issue:*** Non-compliance with participation requirements will continue to need to be managed, ideally by DHS.

***Issue:*** NDIS principles allow a person with disability to control the budget for the purchase of supports. If, and how, this would operate under the new disability employment framework needs to be explored.

* **Development of an employment plan**

The individual works with an employment planner to prepare a plan to assist them to find employment. The plan will take into account interests, aspirations and the reasonable and necessary supports (such as career counselling, training, work experience, or pre-employment interventions) that will be required. This process will confirm whether enough funding has been provided. The planner will also determine if a wage subsidy or workplace modifications would improve an individual’s employability.

***Issue:*** The people most skilled to help a person to develop an employment plan are often likely to be employed by employment support providers. If this is the case, the employment support provider will need to demonstrate that it has safeguards in place to manage any conflict of interest.

***Issue:*** Checks will be needed to ensure that requests by employment planners for additional funding are justified (and are consistent with what is reasonable and necessary to assist a particular person with disability to find employment).

* **Selection of provider**

On completion of the plan the individual will choose the appropriate provider/s to implement it.

Once the individual is ready for work, the job search phase commences. This will involve either three or six months of intensive employment assistance (determined by an assessment of the individual’s needs). If the person is unable to obtain employment, their support needs are reviewed.

***Issue:*** Payments need to be carefully structured to ensure that providers are appropriately paid for the work they do to prepare individuals for employment and that appropriate incentives exist to help find people – and keep – a job.

***Issue:*** Giving people choice of provider eliminates the Government’s role of allocating market share. The market will need to be monitored to ensure that providers are available for people to choose from, even in more sparsely populated areas.

* **Support in employment**

Individuals who gain employment (which could be in a broad range of employment settings) receive post-placement support for up to six months. An assessment of whether or not they need ongoing support is then made.

***Issue:*** Independence in secure and satisfying employment should be the goal but not at the expense of maintaining a job. Careful assessment of the need for ongoing support must be made, which needs to include a determination of the level of ongoing support required and the allocation of funding.

* **Alternative employment or career progression**

If a person decides to find alternative employment or wants help to further their career, they can apply to DHS for an additional funding package (and be assisted to develop and implement a new plan).

***Issue:*** Like other Australians, people with disability should be able to change jobs and develop their careers. Many will need assistance to do this. This assistance should be available to people with disability in employment.



**Scenario two: With no assessed work capacity**

* **Gateway via the NDIS**

An individual with no assessed work capacity (0-7hrs) may be eligible for the NDIS. If during planning the person identifies employment as a goal, funding for employment support is included in their package.

* **Development and implementation of an employment plan**

The participant will seek assistance to develop a plan for employment. A plan will be developed, taking into account aspirations and the reasonable and necessary supports required (such as career counselling, training, work experience, or pre-employment interventions).

The NDIS defines employment supports as capacity-building assistance which can be used flexibly to find and secure employment but not for other purposes such as personal support or community participation.

A broad range of employment settings are an option. If the participant is already working in a supported employment setting they may ask their provider to assist them with additional training and skills development. They can also choose to access open employment supports under concurrency arrangements, while keeping their supported employment.

Over time, the participant can decide to change jobs. This may be employment in a social firm, in open employment or to establish a business. Through the NDIS, various forms of ongoing support can be provided for these options.

**Critical elements of a new framework**

* **Access to an Enhanced Employment Assistance Fund**

The range of measures available under the current Employment Assistance Fund should be retained, integrated with other sources of support and enhanced – for example, the cap for Auslan level one should be removed, allowing it to be accessed as required.

* **Early intervention**

Applying early invention principles to employment support would ensure that assistance is available during critical phases of an individual’s life, such as senior school years, returning to employment after a traumatic injury/episode, loss of job or redundancy. There is a need for a range of transition-to-work supports that incorporate all essential elements.

* **Adequate funding for employment support**

The funding model should allow for supports to build individual capacity, rather than simply concentrating on placing a person in a job. There is a need for upfront time to plan with an individual. People with disability should also be able to receive the support required to pursue a career, across a range of employment settings during their life e.g. moving to and from a supported and mainstream employment setting. Additionally, the true cost of individuals not engaging in employment should be examined.

A funding model must be developed for supported employment that recognises not only support costs but the additional overhead costs of running a business which supports a workforce with significant disabilities.

* **Let choice shape the market**

The current artificial barriers imposed by the government do not encourage consumer choice, flexibility or innovation in service delivery. These barriers include restricting choice with arbitrary geographical boundaries, allocating market share and restricted access to specialist employment providers.

* **Market the benefits of employment support and the expertise of providers**

The valuable role of supported employment needs to be effectively marketed to the community, businesses and the bureaucracy. This should be complemented by formal procurement initiatives by government and commercial businesses that include incentives – e.g. tax incentives for businesses. Significant progress in implementing a government procurement model has been achieved through the NSW Disability Enterprise Procurement Program, administered by NDS, which has created hundreds of new jobs for people with disability.

Many mainstream employers are unaware of the expertise and assistance available through DES. As a consequence, too many employers view employing a person with disability as complex and risky. However the new Framework reconfigures employment support, the potential assistance and benefits to employers need to be communicated widely.

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**National Disability Services** is the peak industry body for non-government disability services. Its purpose is to promote and advance services for people with disability. Its Australia-wide membership includes over 1100 non-government organisations, which support people with all forms of disability. Its members collectively provide the full range of disability services—from accommodation support, respite and therapy to community access and employment. NDS provides information and networking opportunities to its members and policy advice to State, Territory and Federal governments.

1. NDS State Of The Disability Sector Report 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Dr Richard Luecking, 2009, ‘The Way to Work, How to Facilitate Work Experiences for Youth in Transition’. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)