



Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC)

Written Submission to Department of Social Services
New Disability Employment Services Discussion paper

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For further information

Professor Sylvia Rodger
Director of Research and Education, Autism CRC
srodger@autismcrc.com.au

Autism CRC welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Department of Social Services on their discussion paper on new disability employment services from 2018. We applaud both The Hon Christian Porter MP, Minister for Social Services and The Hon Jane Prentice MP, Assistant Minister for Social Services and Disability Services for leading this process. The current review is timely and recognises that there is much to do in improving outcomes for people with disabilities in both open and supported employment in Australia.

Autism CRC is pleased to see a focus in the discussion paper on initiatives that increase employment opportunities for people with a disability. Notably, employment participation rates for people on the autism spectrum are dramatically worse than those of people with disabilities generally (52.9%), with estimates of unemployment for adults on the autism spectrum ranging from 50 – 75% [1-3]. In 2012, the ABS put the workforce participation rate for people on the autism spectrum at 42%, compared to 53% for people with disabilities generally and 83% for people without disabilities. The lost productivity resulting from the high unemployment of adults on the autism spectrum has been estimated to cost Australia AUD\$ 939-1,357 million per annum [4].

Autism CRC believes that one of the biggest issues for those on the autism spectrum to find productive employment is to **address the employment barriers** that exist and work with employers to increase their understanding and openness to hire people with a disability.

We applaud the department's ambition to create the circumstances in which more department providers operate at the level of current **5 star performers** to improve employment for people with a disability.

The proposed **participant-centric approach** is commended and consistent with the NDIS and other areas of government service provision.



We are also pleased to see that further measures are being considered to support and encourage employers to hire people with a disability, including more targeted communication, education and awareness activities and trialing employer nominated disability employment initiatives.

We believe Autism CRC has an important role in these activities and programs and we would be very keen to collaborate with the Department of Social Services and other non-government organisations to trial autism specific employment tools such as our IEST and BOOST-A.

Autism CRC has developed tools that will be useful for Department of Social Services providers. These are currently being trialed to develop the evidence base and to refine these tools for provider use. The first is a protocol that will support adolescents with high functioning autism or Asperger's Syndrome to plan their transition from school to employment. It is called the **Better Outcomes and Successful Transitions for Autism** or **BOOST-A** for short. The protocol will help an individual work with those who support them to set goals in their final years of high school that will help them to successfully transition from school. It will also help them to determine what pathway they want to take after school, such as going to university, doing training or going straight into work. We anticipate that this protocol will help adolescents with high functioning autism to be more successful in post-school study or getting a job when they finish school. We hope this will increase the number of adults with autism who are successful in employment.

A second project on which we are keen to also collaborate with the Department of Social Services is our **Integrated Employment Success Tool or IEST**. The IEST is a workplace tool that has been developed specifically for employers of adults with autism. It has been developed as a result of the identified gaps that exist between employers and employees on the autism spectrum in the employment process. The purpose of the IEST to assist with:

- 1) Education and awareness of autism in the workplace,
- 2) Promotion of the strengths of employees on the spectrum
- 3) Recognition of potential workplace difficulties for employees with on the spectrum, and
- 4) Provision of strategies to employers on how to modify and adapt the workplace for employment success.

It is important to note the IEST has been developed from an environmental perspective and not a personal perspective, meaning that it is to be used to adapt and modify the work environment to encourage job retention for employees on the spectrum. The IEST is a series of checklists with multiple strategies to assist employers with these workplace modifications. The overall outcome of the IEST will be to assist in creating a mutually beneficial relationship between employers and employees on the spectrum, in terms of inclusion, job retention, productivity and overall workplace success.

It is often the case that if employment barriers are addressed for those on the autism spectrum that individuals with and without a disability often benefit in the workplace.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Department of Social Services to improve the Disability Employment Services Program so it can make an even bigger difference to people with a disability.

References

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4. Synergies Economic Consulting. 2007 Economic costs of ASD in Australia. <https://aeiou.org.au/files/Cost%20of%20autism%20report_FINAL_120507.pdf>.