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Disability Employment Services Reform 2018  
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## Response to the New Disability Employment Services from 2018 Discussion Paper

Anglicare Australia is writing this letter to support the response of EPIC Assist to the Disability Employment Services Discussion Paper and add some reflections that come from the network more widely.

The Anglicare Australia network consists of 36 members across every Australian state and territory. With a joint budget of over \$1.05 billion, and a strong workforce of 12,600 staff and 7,800 volunteers, catering to the specific or integrated needs of over 931,000 people and supporting them to identify pathways to participate meaningfully in society.

### **To market, to market**

The Disability Employment Services discussion paper strongly echoes discussions being had in other areas of service delivery: the need for more user choice and control, more competition, better outcomes and the right funding models to deliver them. The Productivity Commission's Human Services Inquiry *Issues Paper* identified six areas of human services to prioritise for reform according to principles of user choice, competition and contestability. The NDIS is another example of new service delivery where user choice and a contestable market were central principles of reform.

There are good principles behind these reforms. That of person-centred care and co-production, of improving the quality of services, of outcome oriented services. This approach to reform reflects a need for services that are more responsive to the individual needs of their clients, are of high quality and consistently produce good outcomes.

Anglicare Australia understands the principles that underpin disability employment services to be about working in partnership with people with disabilities, supporting sustainable employment outcomes, and providing high quality supports. It is important to keep these principles at the heart of reform. It is not effective to focus on incentives, compliance and competition as ends in themselves. In our response to the Productivity Commission's *Issues Paper*, we explored how increasing user choice through greater competition and contestability is itself a contestable idea.<sup>1</sup>

We believe that there is a lot to be learned about system design, implementation and resourcing from NDIS and aged care reforms and it would be sensible to evaluate them in terms of equity of access and outcomes before continuing with reforms to Disability Employment Services.

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<sup>1</sup> Anglicare Australia, Response to the Productivity Commission's Issues Paper Identifying Sectors for Reform as part of the Inquiry into the Increased Application of Competition, Contestability and Informed User Choice to Human Services. 2016

### **Person-centred paternalism**

Anglicare Australia believes that the best human services are the result of person-centred care and co-production. While we welcome the recognition of the importance of person-centred care in this Discussion Paper, we question how this principle stands side by side with a continuing commitment to compulsory and narrowly focused mutual obligation requirements.

There is a deep paternalism inherent in the current mutual obligation requirements that contradicts the principles of consumer directed care; the assumption that policy makers are “more rational and moral than income support recipients” who are “too incompetent to act in their best interests”<sup>2</sup>. We support EPIC Assist’s position from their Issues Paper response (09 July, 2015), that the mutual obligations as they currently stand and client choice and control cannot co-exist productively.”<sup>3</sup>

The Job Plan must be fundamentally revised to reflect the holistic needs and choices of the participant. Currently, Job Plans focus on tasks such as applying for jobs and attending interviews yet don’t address many of the factors that lead to sustainable employment, such as illness management or social connectedness. We point you to Anglicare Tasmania’s recent work which shows that job seekers with disabilities are being pulled in different directions by the compulsory job search activities on the one hand, and person-directed employment services on the other.<sup>4</sup> In *‘Disability, employment and mental health: what would a holistic approach look like?’* Anglicare Tasmania present a model for holistic Government outcomes over the short, medium and long terms to achieve sustainable employment for people living with mental health conditions.<sup>5</sup>

### **Cultivating inclusive communities**

Many of the Anglicare Australia network members that provide employment services include specific community-based projects to assist clients in re-engaging with the community. An example of one of these successful projects was a program called Rivers to Recovery. St Luke’s Anglicare, in partnership with the local TAFE, ran a community program where participants with mental health issues who were socially isolated built boats and rowed them 500 km down the River Murray.<sup>6</sup>

In our recent response to the Productivity Commission’s Human Services Inquiry *Preliminary Findings Report* we wrote that “the challenges of life are best met together, by networks of friends and neighbours, of colleagues and communities”<sup>7</sup>. Social inclusion, including inclusion in the workforce, is often built through strengthening family and community networks as well as building individual capability. A market cannot meet all our needs.

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<sup>2</sup> Catholic Social Services Australia. *The Obligation is Mutual*. 2007.

<sup>3</sup> EPIC Assist, *Response to the Australian Government Department of Social Services Re: National Disability Employment Framework Issues Paper*. July 2016

<sup>4</sup> Moffatt, L *Disability, employment and mental health: what would a holistic approach look like?* In Anglicare Australia’s ‘State of the Family Report, 2016, p. 78

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 83

<sup>6</sup> Goodwin, I, Hutchinson, C. *Beyond supply and demand: addressing the complexities of workforce exclusion in Australia*, 2014, p. 15

<sup>7</sup> Anglicare Australia, *Beyond the Individual: Exploring the Context of Improved Outcomes in Human Services* Submission to the Productivity Commission’s Preliminary Findings Report on Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services: Identifying Sectors for Reform, 2016, p.17

There is a strong case for making sure that NFPs are supported to deliver community-based services. Anglicare Australia network members and other NFPs working in the human service sector provide services that have collective social benefits, as well as individual. This whole-of-community work is vital to helping those who have typically been excluded from the workforce and community.

In regards to market arrangements in regional and remote areas, there is a risk that in focusing on competition as a market mechanism to improve service delivery we will lose the quality that comes from local services and the strong relationships they form with the community. This issue is illustrated by Anglicare NT's comments about the roll out of the NDIS in East Arnhem in Anglicare Australia's submission to the Productivity Commission's *Preliminary Findings Report*.<sup>8</sup> While fully supportive of consumer directed reforms, Anglicare NT has many concerns about how these reforms will eventuate in East Arnhem. One of their concerns is whether the market would be able to keep long term service providers in the area. There is a risk that interstate or international providers will fly in and provide services at a cheaper price, only to leave again after a short amount of time. In regional areas, a generic market-driven approach can undermine the value of "place-based" services. In their submission, EPIC Assist has made some specific recommendations about market-share arrangements in regional areas.

Being able to build quality community networks around people with disabilities requires building strong relationships with employers. In this way EPIC Assist provide tailored support not only for the clients but for the employer too. We support EPIC's contention that when employment service providers engage effectively with employers and understand and fulfil business needs then financial incentives are not required. Engaging with employers -be they businesses, public sector or NGOs- to provide secure and sustainable employment opportunities is vital, especially in the context of a tight jobs market. Anglicare Australia believes that there is a leadership role for government here that goes beyond funding public information campaigns and includes leading by example.

### **Ongoing support**

Creating the right supports and relationships around a client to help them sustain their position is another vital part of an employment service. The findings of Anglicare Australia's 2014 research project, *Beyond Supply and Demand*, demonstrated the value of post-placement support.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Case Study: EPIC Assist**

*Maire has been working at Hogs Breath Café in Hobart for the last 18 months.*

*When Maire first commenced employment she worked 3 days a week for 3 hours per day. Maire's core tasks when she started was seating guests, clearing and resetting the tables. Maire loves her job and is the first staff member to greet customers at the entrance with a smile while they wait to be seated.*

*Within the last 6 months her employment consultant Emma Grafton has completed significant work to increase Maire's skills and as more tasks have been identified and training completed to ensure she is independent and meeting the employers standards this has resulted in her hours increasing between 25- 30 hours per week. Maire is now running drink and food dockets, taking drink orders from guests and is starting to learn how to take meal orders from small tables. Maire is also working nights as a food runner and has cemented herself as an integral part of the team.*

<sup>8</sup> Anglicare Australia, *Beyond the Individual*. 2016, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Goodwin, I, Hutchinson, C. *Beyond Supply and Demand*. 2014, p. 17.

Integration of services is also important to providing good ongoing support for clients once they have a work placement. The significant benefits of this approach have been shown through a pilot program run by EPIC Assist in 2013 for people with mental health issues. EPIC Assist embedded a mental health professional into the employment assistance team and developed a referral process which integrated mental health support with a range of employment and community services. The integration of these services allowed participants to address concerns as they arise, and easily access support to overcome a range of barriers to ongoing employment. The trial found that the number of participants who maintained employment doubled.<sup>10</sup> The benefits of this model are clear, but more funding is needed to facilitate its operation.

There also needs to be a recognition paths to employment are not necessarily linear. The provision of ongoing support can help people who need to increase or decrease their employment commitments as their disability allows. In an essay mentioned above... for the State of the Family Report 2016, Anglicare Tasmania discussed how people with episodic mental illnesses, in particular, may need support to dial up or dial back their working hours, or withdraw from employment to focus on managing their illness.<sup>11</sup> Ongoing support is needed to help people with episodic illnesses manage their commitments to employment.

### **Conclusion**

It was remarkable to find that, in the week we are responding to a government paper that lists “perceptions and misconceptions of employers and the public” as one of the main barriers people with disability face to getting work, we had a former Prime Minister on radio saying there are far too many people with a “bit of depression” on the DSP and people need to accept any job they can get. This has served as a stark reminder that ‘people are disabled by society, not just by their bodies’. Our discussion has spoken to this truth. It spoke to how we already know what works in disability employment: person-centred programs, compassionate, holistic and ongoing support, community engagement and inclusion. It also cautioned against pursuing competition as an end of its own, and that we must not only look at the economic value of services, but the social value too.

We thank the Department for considering our response.

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<sup>10</sup> Law, D. *Staying Well at Work* in Anglicare Australia ‘State of the Family Report 2016’. 2016, p. 70

<sup>11</sup> Moffat, 2016, p.75

## References

Anglicare Australia, [\*Response to the Productivity Commission's Issues Paper Identifying Sectors for Reform as part of the Inquiry into the Increased Application of Competition, Contestability and Informed User Choice to Human Services.\*](#) 2016

Anglicare Australia, [\*Beyond the Individual: Exploring the Context of Improved Outcomes in Human Services\*](#) Submission to the Productivity Commission's Preliminary Findings Report on Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services: Identifying Sectors for Reform, 2016.

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