



Ensuring a  
strong future for  
supported  
employment

**DISCUSSION PAPER SUBMISSION RESPONSE**  
to Department of Social Services  
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Minda Commercial Enterprises includes SA Group Enterprises – a disability organisation with 80 supported employees acquired in 2014

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## Introduction

At Minda, we create an environment where people with disability can embrace and enjoy the experiences of life. Minda is at the forefront of the disability sector, offering support and opportunity to approximately 1,700 South Australians in the areas of accommodation, supported employment, lifestyle services and respite. We are committed to creating a dynamic environment where people can live lives of their choosing.

Minda provides a range of employment services and supports from capacity building, supported employment, school leaver supports, Disability Employment services, mentoring, skills development, counselling and more.

Minda Commercial Enterprises provides supported employment to more than 400 people with disability across a diverse range of areas including laundry services, gardening, catering, manufacturing, packaging, electronic waste recycling, and graphic design. This makes Minda Commercial Enterprises one of the largest provider of supported employment across Australia. These employees benefit from being active in the workforce and many have worked for Minda Commercial Enterprises for 10+ years, and enjoy the benefits that we all experience from having a job. Working at Minda's Commercial Enterprises provides people with disability the opportunity to earn a wage, learn new skills, build confidence and self-esteem, make new friends and participate in the community.

Minda has been undertaking significant transformation to transition our support services in readiness for the NDIS, and move Minda Commercial Enterprises from a traditional supported employment model to a dynamic Social Enterprises model as just one part of a range of employment supports that we provide for people with disability. Through the diversity of our businesses we can offer a wide range of employment opportunities for NDIS participants, as well as providing transition pathways towards open employment.

Minda welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission in response to the Department of Social Services, Discussion Paper: Ensuring a strong future for supported employment.



## Guiding principles

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Act 2013<sup>1</sup> through its objects and principles outline the obligations regarding economic participation of people with disability, which are founded in Australian's obligations under the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This includes raising community awareness that affects the economic participation of people with disability, that people with disability should be supported to contribute to economic life to the extent of their ability, and that reasonable and necessary supports should develop and support the capacity of people with disability to undertake activities that enable them to participate in employment. The NDIS Act 2013<sup>1</sup> also articulates the right for people with disability to be able to determine their own best interests, including the right to exercise choice and control, and to engage as equal partners in decisions that will affect their lives, to the full extent of their capacity Part 2 – 4 (8).

Any public policy position that Department of Social Services develops in relation to the future of supported employment needs to reflect these principles.

Leading on from this, the main guiding principle for any policy options should be that the NDIS participant is at the centre of policy development ie: a 'participant first' approach. This needs to be at the core of any further principles and/or policy positions. For customers to have true choice and control they need to have a range of supports and providers to choose from whether that be an employer that provides 'open', 'supported', combinations or other types of employment opportunities such as self-employment. Employment opportunities should be matched to customers strengths, interests and support needs, not program based. Customers should be able to choose and link in to supports that reflects where they are on their employment journey. (Figure 1).

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<sup>1</sup> National Disability Insurance Scheme ACT 2013, Commonwealth of Australia (2013)



Figure 1: The employment pathway

Recent figures published by the NDIA state that employment nationally is only included in 2.5%<sup>2</sup> of plans. This is a significant concern for the Scheme that needs to be addressed given economic participation for people with disability is a key outcome that the NDIS is required to improve. Therefore, Minda strongly supports the ‘employment first’ approach for all NDIS participants of working age principle that is proposed. For the NDIS to deliver on the outcome of increased economic participation for people with disability, this principle needs to be enshrined in participants plans, so that capacity for engagement in employment is assumed, with the ensuing discussion focussing on the supports that are required for the individual to succeed.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ndis.gov.au/medias/documents/dashboard-national-31dec-17/National-Dashboard-31-Dec-2017.pdf>



## Strategies to support employment participation for people with disability

For many years, Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) have provided gainful employment and social engagement opportunities for people with disability who typically would not have been able to gain employment elsewhere as they would be unable to meet the productivity requirements that ensures commercial viability. ADEs have historically designed their business, support and operations within a Not for Profit framework /model. This has been a necessity for remaining in business, and to provide a mix of employment and non-employment supports needed that would not have been available elsewhere. They have persevered in providing these supports, particularly for people with complex needs, underpinned by a strong values base and purpose driven to improve the lives of people with disability.

Existing ADEs who provide supported employment subsidises the tax payer dollar by reducing the amount of government funding that is required. If ADEs ceased to operate more expensive support models/services would be needed by the 20,000 people with disability currently accessing supported employment.

With the increased opportunity for investment in the Disability Sector through the implementation of the NDIS, it provides opportunities for additional supports directed towards capacity building, skill development, training and mentoring to improve employment outcomes for people with disability. Outcomes need to be measured against participants goals, which are participant rather than program focussed eg: I want a job that interests me as opposed to 'I want to work in open or supported employment'.

To support employment participation opportunities there needs to be a range of training, transition and employment opportunities, with the ability to move between different employment programs and supports without restrictions. Options need to be available that can be tailored to a range of support needs, and individual preferences, as opposed to a 'one size fits all' approach.

Investment into research into the benefits to employers both economic and otherwise to employing people with disability would assist in providing evidence for businesses to invest in employing people with disability, seeing the benefits as opposed to only the costs.



## Strategies to support employer/providers to offer effective employment opportunities

There are a range of strategies that can be put in place to support ADEs transition to new ways of providing employment and/or employment supports. Firstly, ascertaining whether the offer really is employment – is an employment contract for the life of the plan ie: 12 months, for longer term contracts, or for the employability life span of the employee.

Clear funding pricing for supports needs to be published and available so providers can complete financial modelling and revenue projections. This funding needs to reflect individual support needs in the workplace as opposed to being attached to the ADEs. Unless funding is included in participants plans, there will be no availability of funding for any providers to offer employment solutions for participants.

As outlined in the National Disability Consultation Framework Report 2015<sup>3</sup>, decreasing bureaucracy, and red tape for providers in the DES space, which is also an experience for NDIS providers would support employers to remain or enter the market, increasing choice for participants.

Supported wages determination needs to be finalised to inform future strategic and business planning for ADEs.

Creating environments, that remove restrictions on employers regarding the mix of employers eg: open vs supported vs social enterprise. This will enable employers to provide employment to people with and without disability, creating a diverse workforce that promotes social inclusion and conditions to maintain profitability. Creating environments, that encourage partnerships between DES providers, business and specialist disability providers will improve choice and opportunities for participants and innovation.

Employers and providers of employment opportunities need further support through funding of pilots and research to reimagine and reinvent what supported employment can be, so that the benefits of supported employment in ADEs are not lost, but improved upon and continues to provide a true choice for improved economic participation for people with disability, as part of a continuum of employment opportunities.

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Social Services. National Disability Employment Framework – Consultation Report Sept. 2015. Page | 6



## Strategies to facilitate greater choice and control for NDIS participants

Employment as a mandatory inclusion in plans for anybody of working age with an opt out approach would increase the focus of planners towards improving economic participation for NDIS participants.

As employment is a specialised and (currently) complex landscape – the NDIA needs to consider the training and support that planners and/or LACs both in-house and contracted need to be able to work successfully with participants to support them to pursue employment opportunities.

As mentioned previously, providing a continuum of employment supports, reducing barriers between the range of employment supports available, and focussing on a ‘participant first’ approach will all help to improve choice and control in the employment space.

NDIA investing in research on effective models of support that improve economic participation, particularly at the key workforce transition points will provide information to providers and the Scheme of strategies going forward that will improve economic participation, which is a large part of what the NDIS is about. This is essential, as what investment has been made so far by Government, has not produced the desired outcomes.

It must not be forgotten, but often is..... that for all involved, the NDIA, DSS, DES, employers and providers need to listen to participants/customers/people with disability who will tell us what choice and control looks like for them, and what they want and need to achieve full citizenship.