The Employment Strategy will focus on four priority areas:

1. **Lifting employer engagement, capability and demand:** providing employers with the tools and abilities to confidently hire, support and develop more people with disability.

I am a person with disability and I have been seeking employment, working as an employee, self-employed as a contractor and training alongside studying for more than 30 years. Mainstream employment services initially through the CES, and later through Centrelink and subsequently through DES providers have largely been apathetic in design and application. Undoubtedly, these labour schemes provided some supports to employers and resourcing to me often to meet physical access demands or financial subsidies time-limited to employers.

Employers seek the right employee with the right skills at the right time to complete a role. As an employee I want the right pay for the right job at the right time. My disability should be a secondary consideration as long as I satisfy the employers initial expectations. There is definitely a complimentary education and support function that is required for employers to shift their attitude towards employing people who identify as having a disability. As an employee should I have to identify as having a disability or is my expectation identified above sufficient for me to be considered as an applicant for a role?

One in five Australians identify as having a disability there is plenty of empirical evidence that demonstrates both in the public and private employment arena there is massive unemployment of people with disability of working age.

I have completed several tertiary qualifications and have two decades of open employment experience. I have more than three decades of voluntary contribution in community typically in disability advocacy space providing leadership in community and governments. I have always wanted employment and am financially independent after 25 years of being co-dependent on Centrelink disability support pension and other supplementary payments. As a result, I am a homeowner with my spouse I now have a young family with teenage daughters and I can design my career options for the next two decades and progressively work towards retirement and ongoing financial autonomy. I want people with disability to be able to realise this for themselves much faster than my pre-existing 30 years everyone has the right to a decent education, capacity to work and to achieve their life goals acknowledging that disability can occur to anyone at any life stage employers need to be aware of their obligation to be less discriminatory and to work with an employee’s strengths before dismissing their limitations by perception.

1. **Building employment skills, experience and confidence of young people with disability:** ensuring young people with disability are supported to obtain meaningful work and careers of their choice.

I would always support any young people transition into the workforce and the sooner successful transition outcomes occur for students with disabilities the better for their longer-term employment outcomes.

Many of my peers in my age group were lucky to receive a special education let alone a standardised secondary education and even fewer were given transition support through to a tertiary education so many still only have entry-level literacy and numeracy and education skills to demonstrate to employers and unfortunately the tertiary sector seems to favour very basic ongoing learning opportunities for this generation

I have fought tooth and nail with the tertiary system to gain access to diploma level learning opportunities and skill development yet in my early 20s I was invited to teach case management to 300 students who were studying social science at university level and did so very successfully using many of my peers with disabilities to share their life experience alongside the course curriculum of the day.

Confidence and opportunity is the key to employment success particularly for people with disability. Learning some resilience skills to cope with the everyday discrimination experience of people from an often-ignorant public can be of great assistance. If you deny the existence of discrimination or ignorance than you are not living in the real world. Understanding when to exercise available rights is critical in any workplace.

Reporting against the National Disability Employment Strategy could be a joint responsibility between the Commonwealth Employment Minister and the Minister for Social Services based on a typical employment metrics like how the unemployment rate is calculated. People with disability have never been included in this statistic. For example, the number of people with disability of working age who are full-time employed, the number of people with disability who are part-time employed and the number of people with disability who are casually employed. It would be useful to identify the types of support provided to sustain these outcomes and the total cost versus the effectiveness of the outcome sustained as a percentage would be a good benchmark year on year. I would think the Australian Institute of health and welfare could provide some useful measuring tools.

1. **Improving systems and services for jobseekers and employers:** making it simpler for job seekers with disability and employers to navigate and utilise government services and driving better performance from service providers.

As a general statement, there is always room to improve systems for jobseekers, employees and employers when dealing with governments and their funded service providers. I have seen several success stories come through DES providers however, as a consumer technical expert in the disability employment services space I have seen many more clients failed along with employers failed by the system over the past three decades. The model of delivery that acknowledges and subsidises throughput of individuals rather than outcome and results focused funding has consistently devalued the employment of people with disability and exposed a real lack of opportunity and contributed to substantial life and resource wasting.

I have been an NDIS participant since October and 2018, even in this relatively new scheme I have continued to struggle with employment support there is a simple acknowledgement that I have some ongoing employment support via a DES provider. No mention of any resource support provided by the NDIS that would be complimentary to me being self-employed and earning 75% of my current income by being an independent contractor. In 2020 my taxable income is just under hundred thousand dollars per annum. I acknowledge this is not the single responsibility of the NDIS however, mainstream employment support will not support or understand well, my disability needs nor either scheme have a willingness to acknowledge my well-developed career aspiration and goal.

It simple, I will work because I want to support my family along with my partner, I want to own our own home and I want to remain healthy and I look forward to retirement and being financially independent is important to me. I will achieve this result despite the system I would rather that it facilitates my reasonable expectation. To be a good economic and social contributor is mutually beneficial for the community and people with a disability.

Employers could be offered a range of incentives financial, attitudinal and social when employing people with disability. Priority access to government funds, programs and tenders when employing ex-numbers of employees with disability. Perhaps, a variety of tax incentives could also create stimulus in the longer term. Training rebates may offer ongoing attitudinal change within the workplace. In the workplace I prefer to be a colleague not treated as the guy in the wheelchair I expect equal treatment.

1. **Changing community attitudes:** changing people’s perception and expectation about the capability of people with disability in the workplace.

Changing expectation is essential for people with disability, employers and the community generally. When I was a six-year-old boy my parents were told that I would be lucky to sit up and be in control of my bodily functions. I entered the education system in a special education environment with my peers with disability and each with different functional capacity. By 1981 I was granted the opportunity to enter mainstream primary school and later in 1985 I entered mainstream high school with special education support as an adjunct mainly for physical access requirements support. Many students were cruel and non-inclusive of students with any difference unsurprisingly a microcosm of community anyhow.

Throughout the 90s and 2000’s I participated with reasonable adjustment in the TAFE system interweaving with labour market support programs and employers willing to develop my customer service and engagement skills working with both large and small organisations. In 2005 gaining in confidence experience and skills I registered with an ABN and slowly over the next decade developed my skills as a contractor and consultant. I am fortunate enough to have diversity in experience that individuals, organisations and governments seek me out for opportunities to provide advice, engagement or policy production such that I can choose my involvement typically, based on outcome and reputation I am very conscious of delivering results for those who become clients.

I like to lead by example among my peers, but we must demonstrate positive example to industry, the political establishment and the wider community. Regrettably, people with a disability are seen as a problem or a program that requires a solution.

People with disability are never problems requiring a solution we are potential contributors when the right resources and opportunities are made available. I am a major employer of support workers, bureaucrats allied health workers et cetera. Interestingly, I self-direct many of these workers every day of my life and I along with many Australians pay tax every year because I work and those who employ me support me together, we deliver mutual outcomes whereby everyone benefits. Attitude change relies on what people experience and what they are exposed to in their daily lives. Employers need to learn how to work supporting people with disability in workplaces and replicate it for 4 million Australians this will circulate tens of billions of dollars into the economy that was an otherwise unexpected income. I ask what is the cost of not doing something?

The Australian government could seek to mandate and/or develop disability employment hubs in conjunction with each state and territory and employment providers. The hubs could either be a physical space and place or a virtual online place where potential employees and employers can be matched, train and resourced to meet a client need or industry demand.

I would like to see the employment program adopt a codesign practice and implementation most people in my experience learn best from their peers and by example. Commonwealth, state and local governments are a substantial employer and can do much better regarding the recruitment, retention and advancement of employees with disability. There should be proactive employment targets provided by every department established in each level of government and budget incentives provided for attracting suitable personnel.