



Inclusion Australia

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Response to National Disability Employment Strategy consultation paper

June 2021



Inclusion Australia: Response to the National Employment Strategy consultation paper April 2021

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Acknowledgments

Inclusion Australia acknowledges the traditional owners of the land on which this publication was produced. We acknowledge the deep spiritual connection to this land of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We extend our respects to community members and Elders past and present.

Inclusion Australia has a long history of expertise in the employment space, advocating to improve employment opportunities for people with intellectual disability. This submission is based on our experience and is informed by people with intellectual disability and their supporters.

Inclusion Australia receives funding from the Australian Government, Department of Social Services to undertake systemic advocacy activities related to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. This submission forms part of this work.

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Executive Summary

Statement by Our Voice; advisory group to the IA Board with 100% membership of people with intellectual disability

“People with disabilities have the right to work in the open job market like anyone else and get the training and support they need; this means no more sheltered employment.”

Inclusion Australia, as the national peak body for people with intellectual disability, has a long and deep understanding of the employment challenges experienced when seeking real jobs and earning real wages. We welcome the release of the National Disability Employment Strategy Consultation Paper (the Employment Strategy).

Inclusion Australia also welcomes the Easy Read version of the Employment Strategy. Unfortunately, accessibility issues in this version combined with the short time period for consultation meant people with intellectual disability were not able to engage directly with the paper.

The Government’s commitment through the Employment Strategy to simplify government disability and employment related systems to reduce barriers for people with intellectual disability and their families and to be more person-centred is encouraging.

Inclusion Australia believes the vision of the Employment Strategy is too broad, open to unhelpful interpretation and needs to be reviewed to better focus on people with disability. The use of plain language throughout would be well-received.

Inclusion Australia agrees work is required in all the priority areas. Further, to effect real and significant change, the systems that surround people with disability and employment must be considered as a whole.

A person with intellectual disability seeking employment needs to navigate multiple related, complex, and largely inaccessible, systems: the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the Disability Support Pension (DSP) and Centrelink – as well as the education system for young people looking to transition from school to employment. These systems need to be simplified and aligned to encourage and support people with intellectual disability to find meaningful employment.

Real jobs for real wages provide people with intellectual disability the financial independence and choices available to other Australians. They also contribute to the sustainability of the NDIS.

Disability employment services need to work for people with intellectual disability. Disability Employment Services (DES), the NDIS funded School Leavers Employment Support (SLES) and Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) are not delivering good results for people with intellectual disability. Thresholds to access necessary supports in some services are too high and there seems to be an inherent assumption that people with intellectual disability start with no skills. This is simply not the case. More time needs to be spent with individuals to understand their skills, interests and how they can contribute to commercial enterprises and other workplaces.

Inclusion Australia believes a first step in this process is making mainstream education more accessible to people with intellectual disability. Most current approaches to education create separation and segregation. This entrenches perceptions and beliefs in children and young people about the capability and skills of people with intellectual disability that no government strategy will be able to overcome.

Terms within the paper such as 'meaningful work' are vague. They have been used historically to mask a lack of real employment outcomes, by focusing on referrals to sheltered employment or unpaid work experience. Too often, these are for groups of people with intellectual disability, and rarely associated with an opportunity for gainful employment. It is deeply concerning that despite 16 references to 'jobseekers' within the Employment Strategy, there are only 3 references to 'jobs' with none actually referencing jobs for people with disability.

Transparency and accountability are critically important. It is not clear how the Employment Strategy will be implemented. Realising the changes outlined in the Employment Strategy requires an implementation plan. It also requires a performance framework that captures the expectations of quality, time, and cost. Only then will there be sufficient data and evidence of input, outputs, outcomes, and the benefits associated with the various strategies and activities in each priority area to determine effectiveness.

It is also important to identify who the Employment Strategy will benefit. It is for people with disability to gain employment. This should be a key measure of success, and at the forefront of any changes made through the Employment Strategy. Any implementation plan, changes to service design and performance frameworks developed under the Employment Strategy should be co-designed by people with intellectual (and other) disabilities, their families, and supporters.

It is critically important changes occur without compromising the safety net supporting people with intellectual disability – people should be confident to engage in the employment process without fearing for their financial security.

Table of Contents

Inclusion Australia.....	1
Acknowledgments.....	2
Contact.....	2
Executive Summary.....	3
Statement by Our Voice; advisory group to the IA Board with 100% membership of people with intellectual disability.....	3
Introduction.....	6
Background.....	6
Current situation.....	6
A note on accessibility.....	7
Engagement with people with intellectual disability.....	7
Questions for consideration – Inclusion Australia response.....	8
Are there barriers or concerns for jobseekers with disability (jobseekers) not covered in this consultation paper?.....	8
Do you have any feedback on the proposed vision or priority areas?.....	9
Which actions or initiatives would best create positive change for people with disability and employers?.....	10
How should we report against the Employment Strategy?.....	12
How do we measure success of the Employment Strategy?.....	13
Priority areas identified in the Consultation Paper.....	15
1. Lifting employer engagement, capability and demand: providing employers with the tools and abilities to confidently hire, support and develop more people with disability.....	15
2. 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.....	16
3. 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.....	17
4. Changing community attitudes: changing people’s perception and expectation about the capability of people with disability in the workplace.....	20
Conclusion.....	21

Introduction

Background

The Australian Government, through the Department of Social Services (DSS), has been working with states and territories to develop a new National Disability Strategy (NDS) for 2021-2031. A National Disability Employment Strategy will sit under the NDS and outline a pathway for increasing the number of people with disability in 'meaningful work'.

In part, it will supplant the Australian Government paper *Inclusive Employment 2012-2022 A vision for supported employment*, which optimistically stated:

"In 2022, Australian Disability Enterprises will look different to what they do today. Organisations will have adapted to a new environment, where people with disability choose where they work, who provides their employment support, and how. Australian Disability Enterprises will have changed the way they operate, and the supports they offer, to attract people with disability as purchasers of employment support from their organisation."

In 2018, the unemployment rate for people with disability was 10.3 per cent, more than double the unemployment rate of people without disability (4.6 per cent) – and only around half of people with disability were in the labour force (53.4 per cent) compared to 84.1 per cent of people without disability¹. The 2018 data unfortunately does not distinguish between intellectual and other disabilities.

Looking specifically at the limited data on people with intellectual disability, only 39% were in the labour force (including a mix of seeking employment, being employed in ADEs and open employment). Additionally, only 12% of people with an intellectual disability were employed full-time compared to 32% of people with other disabilities.²

Current situation

Inclusion Australia (IA) is the national peak body for intellectual disability. Previously known as the National Council on Intellectual Disability (NCID), Inclusion Australia was founded in 1954. Inclusion Australia's mission is to work to ensure people with intellectual disability have the same opportunities as people without disability.

Inclusion Australia is a federated body with state agencies. Those agencies are: Council for Intellectual Disability (NSW), Parent 2 Parent (Qld), the South Australian Council on Intellectual Disability (SA), the Speak Out Association of Tasmania (Tas), the Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability (Vic), and Developmental Disability Western Australia (WA).

In April 2021, the Australian Government, through the Department of Social Services, released its National Disability Employment Strategy Consultation Paper.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2018, 24 October 2019 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-andcarers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release> [accessed 6 January 2021].

² Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2012). *Intellectual disability, Australia, 2012* (Cat. no. 4433.0.55.003), 30 June 2014 <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4433.0.55.003main+features452012> [accessed 31 May 2021].

A note on accessibility

Engagement with people with intellectual disability

An Easy Read version of the Employment Strategy was released but was regrettably not accessible enough. Combined with a short time period for consultation, Inclusion Australia was unable to adequately and meaningfully engage directly with people with intellectual disability.

While Inclusion Australia understands some information described in the Employment Strategy is unavoidably complicated, the Easy Read version contained difficult words and concepts which made it difficult for people with intellectual disability to engage. For example, complex terms like “gender identity” and “negative attitudes” were used and not well explained (pp. 20-21). The Easy Read version was also missing important detail, like around systems and services, which would have allowed people with intellectual disability to better reflect on their own experiences and respond. For example, the document refers to both DES and ADE but does not differentiate between them or explain that DES is for open employment (p. 18). The Easy Read version also refers to the full paper as “the other documents” (p. 2) and suggests you will need a copy but does not provide a name or direct link for it. The questions were often too broad or abstract to garner much response. For example, the question “What ideas do you like best?” (p. 24) was not clear about which ideas it was referring and raised more questions than answers: the DSS ideas? Your own ideas? Both?

Inclusion Australia strongly advises that it is best practice to test Easy Read materials with people with intellectual disability prior to publication.

Questions for consideration – Inclusion Australia response

Are there barriers or concerns for jobseekers with disability (jobseekers) not covered in this consultation paper?

A focus on evidence

The consultation paper could be strengthened with better evidence. The paper subtly supports the pervasive view that some people with intellectual disability can work in open employment, some only in ADEs and some are unable to work at all. Inclusion Australia questions the assumptions that underpin this view and looks forward to reviewing the evidence that supports this premise, to better understand how it was derived.

In particular, the consultation paper states, “The ADE model, generally referred to as supported employment, provides **economic** (our emphasis) and social benefits to approximately 20,000 people with moderate to severe disability who face significant barriers to obtaining mainstream open employment”. Given the volume of reports IA receives from people with intellectual disability about the cost of getting to and from work exceeding their earnings, it is important to review the evidence of the economic benefit of ADEs to people with intellectual disability.

Further, many people with intellectual disability need support to understand the amounts on their pay slips, superannuation and leave entitlements so this evidence needs to be mindful of self-reports of economic benefit.

Increasing transparency and accountability

An improvement in the transparency and accountability of all aspects of the current employment programs is essential. For example, increasing transparency about the way Disability Employment Services (DES) operate would assist people with intellectual disability select a service with specific expertise to support their employment search. Currently, there is no mechanism to determine whether a DES has experience with finding work for people with intellectual disability, or how much success the DES has had in securing long-term, open employment at award wages. Transparency in this process would include reporting on outcomes individual DES providers have achieved, such as, the number of jobs at award wages for people, the length of time people kept their jobs, the type of disability and the industries the DES specialises in and how they go about or manage the matching process.

Strategy monitoring and performance

Inclusion Australia believes monitoring progress and performance of the Employment Strategy is critically important. Monitoring should be evidence-based, visible and transparent. Most importantly, performance should focus on outcomes, as well as activity and processes, and particularly on jobs in mainstream environments earning award wages. For example, training delivered under the Employment Strategy should be monitored for real job skills and employment outcomes, rather than the usual number of attendees and duration of training. And in all cases job creation and training should focus on supporting people with disability as individuals.

All activities and strategies supported under this Employment Strategy should be evidence-based. Where strategies have been successful in other countries, there should be evidence including

analysis to suggest implementation in the Australian environment would be successful. An evidence-based approach supports transparency and promotes accountability.

An evidence-based approach does not mean there should be no innovation. It means that innovative ideas must have well-designed plans, be well-supported by the data and show real opportunity to deliver clear and measurable employment, social and economic benefits to people with disability. It is not enough that an idea worked elsewhere. It requires consideration of the elements that made it work originally, and how they would translate to the Australian context.

Previous success

Many of the ideas in the Consultation Paper touch on activities that have been tried before. There are examples of Australia at various times investing in custom and open employment programs, including in the 1980s. It may be worthwhile exploring the effectiveness of previous programs, the policies that underpinned them, and changes in funding and focus that have resulted in the current situation. Understanding what has previously worked, and why, would certainly contribute to the success of The Employment Strategy.

Inclusion Australia advocates strongly for evidence-based practice and transparency in all areas of activity within the Employment Strategy.

Do you have any feedback on the proposed vision or priority areas?

Strategy vision

The vision of the Employment Strategy – *An inclusive Australian society where all people have access to meaningful work opportunities* is very broad, reaching far beyond a focus on people with disability. While Inclusion Australia recognises the importance of *all people* having work opportunities, this Strategy needs to focus on people with disability, and designing a system so people with disability are better able to access and thrive in the labour market.

Inclusion Australia encourages the Department of Social Services (DSS) to revise the vision of the Employment Strategy, so it identifies the people it aims to benefit.

Some of the terms and language used in the Employment Strategy will be a barrier for many people with intellectual disability. This will limit their ability to engage with and contribute to the Employment Strategy and its refinement and implementation. Using plain language would support people with intellectual disability to engage with this Strategy and self-advocate for changes they have identified through personal experience. Systemic reform will require input from people with experience in using the system, to identify and understand the barriers and challenges they have experienced, and how these can be overcome.

Inclusion Australia encourages the Department of Social Services (DSS) to re-write the vision of the Employment Strategy in plain language.

The term *access to meaningful work opportunities* is not plain language. Further, it can be interpreted to mean the process of identifying work opportunities rather than identifying or creating real jobs. Inclusion Australia supports meaningful work in real jobs – jobs that pay award wages, offer employee entitlements, provide the necessary support to individuals to develop skills and

succeed, and contribute to employers' business objectives. In this way, jobs are meaningful because they represent a necessary function of the business or organisation. They are meaningful because the person with disability works alongside other staff members as colleagues. They are meaningful because the person with disability is valued in their role beyond the end date of the government wage subsidy. And they are meaningful because the person with disability gains the same financial benefit from working as other staff members in similar roles.

Too often the standard examples of *access to meaningful work opportunities* translate into groups of people being given work experience at a supermarket, major hardware store or with a multi-national fast-food restaurant. The work experience does not and cannot lead to ongoing work for all those participating – there are simply insufficient employment opportunities for this to happen. In some cases, there are no ongoing positions at all, so while it can be argued each individual has been given access to a meaningful work opportunity, they have not been given a genuine employment opportunity. The focus has been on *referring* people with intellectual disability to work, rather than engaging in a process that will lead to a real job.

The approach described above does not engage with people with intellectual disability as individuals, but as part of a group of people. Further it perpetuates a belief that people with intellectual disability are only able to work in specific industries.

Governments have frequently attached grants to these 'meaningful work opportunities' so employers are encouraged to employ people with intellectual disability. The unintended consequence is that this can undermine the value and skill of people with intellectual disability and can limit the employment of people within the 'funded' cohort to the funding period. It provides a windfall for employers but does not increase the long-term employment of people with disability. Again, it reinforces the notion people with intellectual disability do not contribute to the workplace.

Priority areas

The priority areas are all important, and Inclusion Australia has provided comment against each of these individually. However, without also considering the system that surrounds people with disability and employment as a whole, there is a risk this Strategy will deliver slight incremental change at best, and worse, result in unintended consequences such as additional or new barriers to jobs for people with disability.

Inclusion Australia encourages DSS to consider the system as a whole, as well as the component parts when developing the plan to operationalise this Strategy, and the associated performance framework to monitor change and benefit realisation.

Which actions or initiatives would best create positive change for people with disability and employers?

The Employment Strategy provides an opportunity to reflect on the effectiveness of current practices, and critically assess whether these, and the investment they attract, are delivering expected results for people with intellectual disability, and value for money. Despite the investment in Disability Employment Services (DES), Australian Disability Enterprises (ADE) and School Leavers Employment Services (SLES), open employment rates for people with an intellectual disability remain low, while segregated employment settings grow. The current system is not delivering positive attitude changes or real jobs for people with intellectual disability.

In addition to the stakeholders listed³, the Employment Strategy should include a focus on micro-enterprises and self-employment. These have always been essential to providing meaningful and ongoing jobs for people with disability and are likely to become increasingly important in the post-COVID environment and the gig economy.

Impact of COVID-19

Employment opportunities have changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are considerably more people working from home or working from home a couple of days a week. This changes the availability of work opportunities for people with intellectual disability.

For example, some people with intellectual disability have been employed in large organisations assisting with administrative tasks for larger teams. With more people working from home and conducting a greater proportion of their meetings using technology as a consequence of COVID-19, very few of these jobs are currently available.

It is likely that flexible work arrangements (employees working a combination of at home and in the office) will remain in place for years to come, if not permanently. This will mean that even if people with intellectual disability are able to return to these admin support roles, it will only be once the larger teams are back in the office, which may take years. Either way, flexible work arrangements will mean a return to work for people with intellectual disability is unlikely to occur in the near future, and more realistically, it will mean many of these jobs will not exist going forward.

Gig economy

Employment opportunities for people with intellectual disability are increasingly becoming part of Australia's gig economy. A gig economy is based on temporary, flexible and task by task jobs such as those on rideshare and delivery apps like Uber or Deliveroo. For people with intellectual disability, this gig economy is reflected in short-term funded project work and irregular consultation jobs with government and other services seeking their lived experience expertise. This one-off or time-limited work presents the same risks for people with intellectual disability as other types of gig work including lack of basic worker entitlements, little worker understanding of entitlements, and weak or non-existent income security.

Individualised approaches

For any employment opportunity to be considered successful it must be a real job with real wages. This involves having a detailed understanding of the business requirements and the gap the organisation or business needs to fill.

Focusing potential employers on the business needs and the tasks involved would provide an opportunity to consider the tasks and activities in detail. The initial focus on these rather than an ideal candidate would then allow a conversation to begin on how the tasks could be 'packaged', including into more than one role. This could facilitate carving out tasks genuinely required by the business, that could be done by people with intellectual disability with the necessary skills.

Equally, it is important to engage with people with intellectual disability individually to understand their skills, the industries and tasks they are interested in, and why. Equally important is understanding what people are not interested in.

³ Page 2, The Employment Strategy "take a holistic approach to disability employment and consider the roles of all stakeholders, including..."

This approach of working with businesses and people individually enables matching of individuals with skills and interest to businesses and available roles. Where there is common ground, the risks associated with any recruitment process are reduced, and the job match is more likely to succeed.

While Disability Employment Services (DES) have the role of identifying work opportunities and matching people with intellectual disability to these, it is not evident an individualised approach is taken. There are however many examples of this approach occurring overseas, and particularly in the USA, where job coaches work with individuals with intellectual disability and potential employers.

Job coaches build relationships to understand how industries and businesses work. They also work to understand the skills and interests of individuals with intellectual disability. With this information, job coaches are able to identify where there may be opportunities to match the needs of businesses, with the needs of individuals. Similarly, customised employment is a targeted and pro-active approach where a provider works with both the job seeker and the employer to shape a job opportunity and create a specific job description to match the requirements of both.

The models outlined above are predicated on the expectation people with intellectual disability are able to work and contribute to the productivity and success of a work environment. The employment of people with intellectual disability is a commercial decision based on business need, not a charitable act. It focuses on the individual needs of people with intellectual disability, and the individual needs of businesses, and tailors job opportunities to meet these needs.

Inclusion Australia encourages the Government to carefully consider how to support more people with disability to access these kinds of evidence-based supports, including individualised ongoing support as needed.

How should we report against the Employment Strategy?

Reporting against any strategy should be transparent. There should be clarity around the goals and objectives, and data to accurately show its effectiveness in meeting these. The goals and objectives should be co-designed by people with disability and other key stakeholders. Reporting should be evidence-based, making reference to cumulative and point in time changes, and aggregated so stakeholders can understand what has changed, when the change happened, why the change occurred and who has benefited.

It is also important to collect qualitative data. Case studies would provide knowledge and understanding from the perspective of people with disability on their experiences, including whether and how the Employment Strategy has helped them. This should not just include success stories. Reporting of any nature is about transparency and accountability – we want to know what aspects of the Employment Strategy have worked well (and why), as well as those that have not, and why - including what will be done or needs to be done differently to improve performance.

As previously mentioned, reporting should be on the Employment Strategy as a whole, and the priority areas. The performance framework should include both and distinguish between them. The success of the Employment Strategy is more than the sum of its parts (the priority areas). The performance framework should enable the reader to understand what is being done (inputs), along with the outputs, outcomes and benefits associated with the Employment Strategy. The performance framework should inform stakeholders as to whether the Employment Strategy is meeting expectations in terms of time, quality, and cost.

It is critical the performance framework identifies the beneficiaries of the Employment Strategy and its associated activities. Reporting can often be around the promotion of activity – a focus on the efforts of organisations – rather than a focus on what these efforts have achieved, and whether the intended beneficiaries, in this case people with disability, were the beneficiaries.

Reporting against the Employment Strategy raises the question of implementation. The 2012 Employment Strategy – *Inclusive Employment 2012-2022: a vision for supported employment* articulated a significant change in the way the Australian Government was going to support people with disability in employment. It was meant to ensure people with disability could control the assistance they get to support them in employment and have real options and choices about their future working lives.

However, it was not accompanied by an implementation plan, and much of the content remains rhetoric. Will such a plan be developed for this Strategy? If so, how will the development process be managed? Who will be involved and who will lead the process?

Inclusion Australia strongly recommends DSS develop the implementation plan for the Employment Strategy in co-design with people with a range of disability types and other key stakeholders.

A final comment is about accountability. As mentioned earlier, earlier, Inclusion Australia believes the systems supporting people with intellectual disability – including education, DES, DSP and the NDIS needs to better align to improve employment (jobs) and financial outcomes. How will the Department of Social Services, as part of this Strategy, ensure the system is working to achieve these outcomes for people with intellectual disability. And what action will be taken if parts of the system under-perform or fail to align with this outcome?

How do we measure success of the Employment Strategy?

Ultimately, the success of the Employment Strategy should be the increased number of people with disability who have gained jobs, with ongoing employment at award wages as a consequence of this Strategy.

People have jobs to earn money. Working provides with financial benefits to employees, and we agree it also provides social participation opportunities. While the importance of social engagement and acceptance as part of the workplace should not be under-estimated, for most people the primary reason they work is financial. This must also be considered the primary goal for people with disability.

Not only should the Employment Strategy measure meaningful employment (real jobs), but it should also measure and monitor wages and wage levels. This will ensure the Employment Strategy is providing the necessary support and incentives for people with intellectual disability to earn a living (award) wage and be financially independent.

An important focus for this Strategy, should be to facilitate and measure changes to the various government systems people with disability need to navigate when seeking employment. These include Disability Support Pension, National Disability Insurance Scheme, Disability Employment Services, and the education system. Individually, these systems and their interfaces need to be simplified. Importantly, they need to be aligned to establish the expectation of, and support employment as an outcome, for people with disability. Information in and about these systems needs to be more readily available and in accessible, easy-to-understand formats.

Developing a performance framework that is co-designed by people with intellectual disability and disability peak bodies would go a long way to ensuring the focus of the Employment Strategy benefits the people it is endeavouring to assist.

The development of a co-designed performance framework should also involve employer groups (small and large business owners, government and the NFP sectors), to assist with understanding the changes this Strategy should deliver from their perspectives. Working with these stakeholders would ensure thinking and practices are contemporary, and performance is focused on the activities that will make the most difference.

Priority areas identified in the Consultation Paper.

Inclusion Australia has provided comments for each of the 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.

Inclusion Australia agrees it is important to lift employer engagement, capability, and demand. Evidence shows that when employers have the right information and confidence in the internal processes to hire and support people with intellectual disability, they are more inclined to actively recruit, and the employment process is more likely to be successful.

There are toolkits and information available to support employers, including examples on Inclusion Australia's [Everyone Can Work](#) website. Accessing information this way relies on employers seeking it out, which is unlikely to be the best way to provide it. Creating more resources (although some may be required) will not address the issues of how and if information and resources are accessed or identify the best mechanisms for this.

As with every part of the Employment Strategy, any information and support provided to employers should reinforce a commitment to evidence-based practice and genuine job opportunities for people with intellectual disability.

Where lack of information is the barrier, then information that is readily locatable and accessible may assist. Inclusion Australia agrees employers would want a single and simple point of access. While this type of service does not seem to be operating currently, it does seem to form part of the function of DES. The question, therefore, is whether this is a marketing issue and more needs to be done to promote the range of programs and services available to employers⁴, or whether this is a function not currently being done, or done sufficiently well, by DES. If it is the latter, then greater accountability and transparency of DES would certainly be beneficial.

Inclusion Australia is also of the view that high levels of underemployment and unemployment for people with intellectual disability is not primarily due to potential employers lacking information.

The Employment Strategy states, 'the main reason small to medium business owners gave for not employing a person with disability was a lack of applications, with most recruitment activity occurring through word of mouth, social media or traditional recruitment channels.'⁵

People with intellectual disability have low take up and access to technology. This is not a medium that will lead to a high number of job outcomes for people with intellectual disability. Recruitment that relies on technology will therefore exclude many people with intellectual disability.

Traditional recruitment is also challenging. Job descriptions are often long and complex documents that describe the ideal candidate. They often contain acronyms, and the use of technical language and industry jargon is common. Without job descriptions being developed using plain or Easy English they will be largely inaccessible for people with intellectual disability, and effectively serve as a

⁴ Page 9, The Employment Strategy

⁵ Page 11, The Employment Strategy

barrier to people with intellectual disability accessing work. Adding to this issue is that the jobs advertised this way are usually broad roles, not those that have been carved out or designed specifically for people with intellectual disability.

Inclusion Australia agrees that employment for people with intellectual disability often comes from word of mouth, through the relationships of their families and supporters. It is often also family members and supporters, who identify and manage the recruitment of people with intellectual disability into jobs. Evidence based models such as job coaches and customised employment have been designed to overcome these communication limitations.

Inclusion Australia agrees that improving outcomes for people with intellectual disability requires leadership. To improve employment outcomes for Indigenous people, most governments around Australia have set quotas and have established identified positions.

There is an opportunity for governments to adopt a similar approach for people with intellectual disability. Governments should be leading the way in employment for people with intellectual disability, as some of the largest employers in the country. Establishing real jobs through job design or job carving would not only demonstrate commitment to employment outcomes for people with intellectual disability, but it would also contribute to a better evidence-base of actions and approaches that work.

2. 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.

Inclusion Australia agrees that this is a priority area, and greater effort is needed to build the skills, experience, and confidence of young people with intellectual disability. However, it is also about creating expectations and changing community opinion.

Schools are critically important to this priority area. Childhood experiences are very influential in the forming of beliefs, which are then held throughout people's lives. Our treatment of people with intellectual disability and expectations about their future employability are, if not set, then certainly strongly influenced during school years. Currently most children with intellectual disability attend separate schools. Even when children with intellectual disability attend mainstream schools, their education support classrooms are usually separate from the rest of campus. They are isolated from their peers from an early age.

Meaningful access to mainstream schools would foster engagement and relationships between students (with and without disability) and teachers. This is typical school engagement. Not only would it improve understanding of disability and inclusion overall, but it also reinforces the message that people with intellectual disability are entitled to an education, and the opportunity to work.

While at school, students with intellectual disability should be able to access flexible and sufficient work experience, as part of the school curriculum. Work experience with the right support is an excellent way for a person with intellectual disability to develop job readiness and the skills necessary to succeed. Early work experience opportunities would enable them to try a variety of work sites, industries, and roles to see what they like and don't like and build necessary skills and confidence along the way. This approach also educates employers about the types of support a person with intellectual disability might need, and how the workplace could be adapted to support future employment.

Skills are developed in the context of a workplace. While many skills are transferable, they are learnt or enhanced within the context of an organisation's specific way of doing business – their processes and policies. People with intellectual disability often find it difficult to demonstrate the transferability of skills. This does not mean they have none. It does mean that on-the-job training is particularly important. This training needs to be provided in a manner suited to the individual. It also needs to be of sufficient duration for the skill to be learnt and may require revision over time. Most people need time to develop new skills, often through repetition. Exposure to learning a few hours a week will not ensure that most people with intellectual disability learn new skills.

3. 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.

Inclusion Australia agrees there needs to be significant reform and improvement to existing systems to improve employment outcomes for people with intellectual disability.

The four key government systems that require attention are the education system (see above) the NDIS, the Disability Support Pension (DSP) and DES. These currently work independently, are bound by complex rules and are very difficult to navigate.

It is not enough to simplify these systems – although that is required. They need to be aligned to encourage and support employment outcomes. For example, the DSP is challenging for people with intellectual disability to access due to both the complexity of the process and because it is online. People with intellectual disability have less access to IT and devices and are frequently less able and confident to navigate complex IT-based systems. System design should adequately consider the lower literacy and digital literacy levels experienced by people with intellectual disability. People with intellectual disability currently rely heavily on carers and supporters to assist with or manage their Centrelink and NDIS engagement. Not only are these repetitive and time-consuming activities, this reliance on carers and supporters erodes people's confidence and independence.

Another system issue is that people with intellectual disability often do not get access to DES because their manifest eligibility for the DSP means the only employment support offered is ADE. They are also disadvantaged because:

- the Ongoing Support through DES is inadequate and does not meet their support needs, and
- the access thresholds for DES itself, as well as the Moderate Intellectual Disability Payment, do not sufficiently allow for the rate of learning, or incremental improvement in ability to work, for people with intellectual disability.

Inclusion Australia strongly believes the threshold for access to DES should be lowered. The current minimum of 8 hours work per week required for support from DES is problematic. It does not recognise that some people with intellectual disability can only work a few hours per week initially while capacity is built. Organisations that carve out jobs specifically for people with intellectual disability may also have fluctuating needs for that service (for example, 3 hours one week and 11 hours the next) and the system needs to be flexible enough to accommodate. While Inclusion Australia would not support a position that people with intellectual disability be employed for fewer

hours, DES needs to be responsive to both employees who can only work less than 8 hours and to employers that are supporting the employment of people with intellectual disability.

More needs to be done to the DES system to make it useful and appropriate for people with intellectual disability. This should start with the assumption that many people with intellectual disability would be able to be gainfully employed with the right support, rather than the current approach, underpinned by outdated assumptions, which focuses on functional ability and extent of disability.

According to *Inclusion Employment: A vision for Supported Employment*, there are 194 not for profit organisations operating Australian Disability Enterprises, which employ about 20,000 people — most of whom have an intellectual disability⁶. It goes on to mention the Federal Court decision that found one of the tools used in determining wages in supported employment — the Business Services Wages Assessment Tool (BSWAT) — was discriminatory under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* in relation to the circumstances of two workers. This case was cited as the reason the (then) Government wanted to make sure future wage setting mechanisms respect the decision of the court and improve employment outcomes for people with disability, while ensuring the supported employment sector is viable into the future.

Despite settlement of the BSWAT class action and subsequent BSWAT Payment Scheme, it is still legal for ADEs to pay as little as \$2.36 per hour for work under the Supported Wage System and \$3.50 per hour per the Fair Work Commission findings. So, while the ADE model may provide social benefits, it is rarely evident they provide people with intellectual disability economic benefits. There is also not sufficient evidence to suggest the beneficiaries are the people with intellectual disability who work there. This needs to be rectified in the Employment Strategy.

Inclusion Australia agrees, to be successful, all disability employment supports, and services will need to:

- become more centred around the person with intellectual disability as an individual.
- recognise the multiple challenges faced by people with intellectual disability but focus on the skills and capability of individuals.
- build meaningful relationships with employers over the long-term. This involves working with employers to identify functions and tasks people with intellectual disability are able to do and contribute to the success of the business. Real employment outcomes are the result of matching people with skills to employers needing staff, not on financial incentives.
- proactively focus on emerging industries and employment trends.

Inclusion Australia agrees with and encourages improved linkages between key government systems and agencies and streamlining processes to reduce the burden on people with intellectual disability and their supporters.

It also believes the reform of the ADE model should be about more than providing work experiences and training. While these are important and necessary, the ADE model should lead to and reference skills development, and increase job outcomes (real jobs, award wages and entitlements) for people with intellectual disability.

⁶ Inclusion Employment: A vision for Supported Employment 2012-2022, page 3.

Inclusion Australia also advocates for greater transparency and accountability around the activities and performance of ADEs and DES providers. This would support people with intellectual disability to exercise their right to choose the most appropriate provider for their needs. This is inherently challenging without knowing what, how and who providers have supported in the past.

Evidence of performance, the outcomes ADEs and DES have achieved, is also critical. It needs to differentiate between disabilities, identify areas of expertise (industries and disability types), and report in sufficient detail for users to determine whether a provider is best placed to meet their needs, or the needs of a family member. Reporting needs to include numbers of people assisted, disability type, industries they are familiar with, time taken to affect an employment outcome, duration of job beyond the subsidy period and so on.

System reform needs to recognise the economic benefits of employment and how it contributes to individuals' choices and promotes independence. While many people with intellectual disability find social connection within ADEs, others do not; the role of ADEs is not primarily providing social connections. The NDIS provides other supports for this purpose, which we acknowledge and welcome. ADEs must encourage and support employment outcomes. While social benefits – health and wellbeing – are derived through being employed, employment is primarily associated with economic benefits. Most people work to earn money. Social engagement is an added benefit of any employment, but it is not the goal of employment.

However, people with intellectual disability often only experience one or the other – social and community engagement or equitable employment conditions. This Strategy should be striving to ensure they are able to have both, and this should be reflected in the Employment Strategy's vision.

Inclusion Australia agrees reform is required. ADEs are not fit for purpose. Disability employment programs need to be better designed to improve employment outcomes for people with intellectual disability.

Disability Equality Index

Reforms to the system should consider establishing a Disability Equality Index, requiring businesses to report on employment of people with disability, and the actions they are taking to make workplaces more culturally and otherwise inclusive.

A Disability Equality Index could be similar in design to the OECD Development Centre's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI). This measures discrimination against women in social institutions across 180 countries, including Australia, by taking into account laws, social norms, and practices, the SIGI captures the underlying drivers of gender inequality with the aim to provide the data necessary for transformative policy-change. Establishing a similar index for people with disability would assist with developing an evidence-base to develop transformative policy and drive the changes necessary to gain equality for people with disability.

And, as previously mentioned, governments should establish employment targets for people with intellectual disability, within the public service and funded agencies.

The Australian Government, along with state and territory governments, should also consider creating or strengthening its portfolio focus on outcomes for people with disability. This role would be not about the actual provision of government services – there are government agencies providing these services, and Ministers responsible for overseeing these agencies. There are bureaucrats working to improve Centrelink, improve the function of the NDIS and improve the Disability Support

Pension. The Minister for Government Services has an important role and is responsible for a number of welfare agencies. Likewise, the Minister for Families and Social Services has an important role in the provision of mental health, families and children's policy, and support for carers and people with disabilities, and seniors.

It is envisaged this role would provide strategic policy advice and support to the Prime Minister and the Minister for Disability in much the same way the Office for Women currently operates. This would provide a level of oversight and strategic intent, beyond the administration of programs and support (although these remain important), to deliver policies and programs to advance disability equality.

4. Changing community attitudes: changing people's perception and expectation about the capability of people with disability in the workplace.

Changing community attitudes is critically important. As previously mentioned, Inclusion Australia believes access to mainstream education is a key priority, and that this would go a long way to removing a barrier created by the current education system.

Government has an opportunity to lead the way in being inclusive. Initially it could be as simple as including people with intellectual disability as a requirement of any government or government funded advertising campaign. This would assist with changing people's perceptions and should include employment opportunities for people with intellectual disability.

Reform of DES, SLES and ADEs to better support people with intellectual disability and create successful employment outcomes would also benefit changes in perceptions and expectations. People with intellectual disability demonstrating their ability to contribute by doing real work, essential to the success of a business, is very powerful. It challenges the myths and low expectations head on, and the more people in these jobs, the stronger the message.

Creating an Office for Disability sends the message within government and to Australians that people with disability are important and a focus of the government. The focus of this Office should be on strategic policy and programs that promote and support engagement and opportunity for people with intellectual (and other) disability. It would address the 'whole of strategy' questions raised in this paper. There are already bureaucracies and ministers with portfolios that focus on streamlining programs, reforming systems, and improving efficiency. We welcome that. However, there needs to be accountability for ensuring these actions deliver the outcomes and benefits people with intellectual disability need.

As a central repository of data and information, the Office for Disability would create the opportunity to showcase how employment in real jobs helps individuals with disability, businesses, and the community more broadly. These should be real examples that focus on what people with intellectual disability can do. They would become part of the evidence base. This would go some way to addressing perceptions that people with intellectual disability cannot work and lack skills.

Conclusion

The Employment Strategy has the potential to create a system that assists people with intellectual disability to exercise choice in employment options and gain financial independence. It is critical to the sustainability of the NDIS, and the NDIS is a critical part of the system to achieve this. However, for this to occur it will need to be supported by an implementation plan that establishes clear timeframes and deliverables, and a performance framework that describes the inputs, outputs, outcomes and benefits of this Strategy, and metrics to monitor progress and achievement. This will support transparency in effectiveness and also how the Employment Strategy is being delivered.

All the priority areas are important for the success of the Employment Strategy. Along with the principles of evidence-based decision making, transparency and accountability, and people with disability being the primary beneficiaries of changes driven by this Strategy.

Systemic reform is required for people with intellectual disability to gain real jobs, and the economic independence and choices this enables. Part of this systemic reform needs to result in the system treating people with intellectual disability as individuals. It will require recognition that they have skills, and to work with these skills to identify jobs and employment opportunities that match their interests.

The system also needs to be simplified. There are many government departments and agencies involved, all operating largely independently of each other. While a 'polished pathway' exists between segregated education and segregated employment settings, navigation to open employment creates a significant burden on people with intellectual disability and their families and supporters.

Streamlining the system, while a desirable outcome, is not enough. People with intellectual disability need the opportunity to participate in the labour force.

Planning for real participation in the labour force needs to start within the education system and not once the person has left school.

Real work that contributes to the success of businesses will assist with changing the perceptions and expectations of people with intellectual disability. Government could and should provide greater leadership in this space. It could create more jobs for people with intellectual disability within its work force, provide leadership by including people with intellectual disability in its advertising campaigns, and require others to do the same when relying on government grants.