

# **Submission to the consultation of the New Disability Employment Support Model**

**Children and Young People with Disability Australia  
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## Recommendations

### **Recommendation 1:**

#### **Address complex barriers to employment, compounded by a fragmented service system**

The Australian Government should invest in:

- Research to reduce fragmentation in employment services and develop clear pathways to avoid duplication and service gaps
- Time to consult with young people about the design of a new employment services system

### **Recommendation 2:**

#### **Invest in the enablers of successful employment service outcomes.**

Listen to what young people from the CYDA community recommends:

- Person-centred practice and holistic approaches to service delivery prioritising the employment aspirations of service users.
- Increase disability awareness among service providers and employers
- Focus on transition from school and provide earlier employment support to young people
- Develop clear mechanisms for feedback and continuous improvement, ensuring that the experiences of people with disability remain at the heart of Employment Service practice and;
- Place-based and Community Focused service delivery

### **Recommendation 3:**

#### **Design service models where young people can be supported to thrive**

Reduce psychological stress experienced by young people with disability as they engage with the disability employment service system by;

- Removing unhelpful and harmful compliance requirements by uncoupling mutual obligation requirements and sanctions from income support.
- Providing a clear evidence base that mutual obligation activities such as compulsory employment service provider appointments lead to meaningful employment outcomes for young people
- Prioritising individualised and holistic service delivery- rather than focusing on compliance requirements - to better address complex structural vocational and non-vocational barriers to employment

#### **Recommendation 4:**

#### **Service contracts, funding models, and Key Performance Indicators of employment programs should address systemic barriers to employment and incentivise supporting the needs of individual jobseekers**

This includes:

- Providing sufficient and up-front funding to support young jobseekers to overcome systemic barriers in the labour market
- Ensuring caseloads allow service providers to deliver personalised supports and demand-based activities, such as building employer networks
- Incorporating participant experiences and feedback as a measure of success
- Formally measuring and recognising human capital development as a service offering
- Recognising and building on the diverse strengths and employment barriers of different community settings

## Introduction

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) is the national representative organisation for children and young people with disability aged 0 to 25 years. CYDA has an extensive national membership of more than 5,000 young people with disability, families and caregivers of children with disability, and advocacy and community organisations.

Our vision is that children and young people with disability are valued and living empowered lives with equality of opportunity; and our purpose is to ensure governments, communities, and families, are empowering children and young people with disability to fully exercise their rights and aspirations. We do this by:

- Driving inclusion
- Creating equitable life pathways and opportunities
- Leading change in community attitudes and aspirations
- Supporting young people to take control
- Calling out discrimination, abuse, and neglect.

CYDA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the New Disability Employment Support Model consultation. Young people in our community routinely tell us how they want, and are excited, to work. Rightfully, they want a fair opportunity to earn money, meet new people, develop new skills and contribute to their community.

*“[Having a job] gives me the independence to start my life. That’s huge! That’s freedom.”*

— Young participant at CYDA’s 2020 National Youth Disability Summit

Despite their eagerness, young people with disability remain one of the most disadvantaged cohorts in the labour market because of the systemic barriers they experience as both a young person and a person with disability. The high and persistent unemployment and underemployment rates of young people with disability demonstrates why major reform of our entire employment service system is needed. CYDA’s view is that the reform will have limited effect in improving rates of economic participation of people with disability if viewed in isolation, separate from the rest of the employment service eco-system.

CYDA also believes that the reform is being rolled out without substantive research behind it. As outlined in this submission, the existing evidence-base on how to best support young people with disability in employment is limited and many programs are being delivered across Australia without rigorous monitoring or evaluation. As such, CYDA recommends that the Australian Government invests in producing a comprehensive evidence-base of what best supports young people (in gaining and maintaining meaningful employment) to inform the overhaul of Australia’s employment service system.

Young people have expressed to CYDA what elements they wish to see in programs and what would make them feel supported in finding employment. This feedback has been outlined in the ‘What works for young people’ section of this submission.

In the final 'Service Model Design' section of this submission we outline some of the fundamental elements in service design that alleviates power imbalances and enables providers to deliver the supports young people want in employment programs.

This submission draws on the insights and lived expertise of young people in our community; specifically, quotes are from young participants who attended our 2021 LivedX Consultations Series, a component of CYDA's Our Voices Our Visions: Youth Advocacy project. The LivedX Consultations were conducted to hear from young people with disability about what an ideal future looks like for them. This included collecting their ideas and solutions on topics and issues they deem important. The project is funded by a Youth Advocacy Support Grant from the Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment.

More specifically, this submission draws largely on the insights and direct quotes from young participants who attended our September, 2021 LivedX consultation on employment. This session was designed, facilitated, and analysed by CYDA's inaugural Youth Council.

Lastly, this submission was also shaped and reviewed by two Youth Advisors who hold lived experience of engaging with Disability Employment Services (DES).

## Section 1: The bigger picture

### Complex barriers to employment, compounded by a fragmented service system

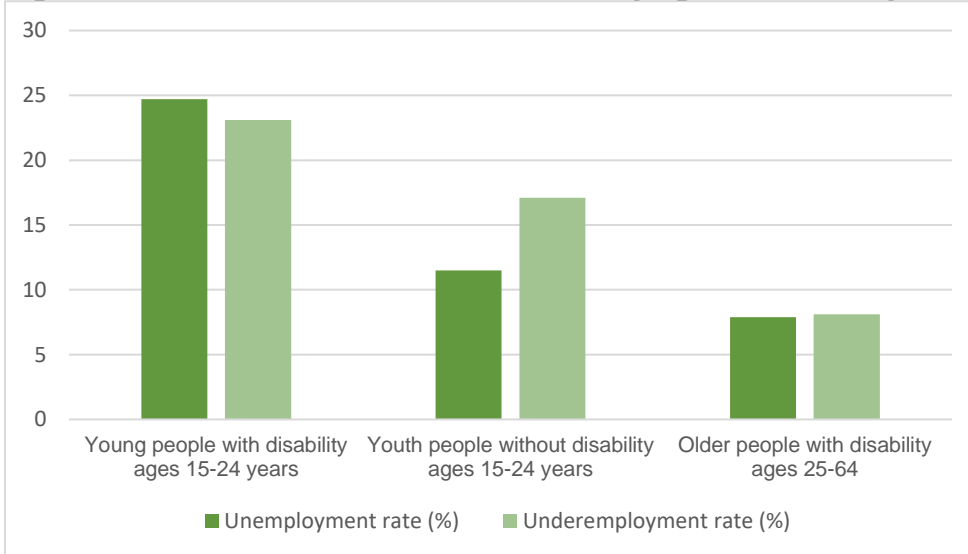
#### Recommendation 1

Before introducing a new disability employment services model, we recommend that the Australian Government should invest in:

- Research to reduce fragmentation in employment services and develop clear pathways to avoid duplication and service gaps
- Time to consult with young people about the design of a new employment services system

Young people with disability are one of the most disadvantaged cohorts in the labour market and the barriers they experience in finding quality and stable work are complex and multi-faceted. The group are more than twice as likely to be unemployed than older adults<sup>1</sup> with disability (24.7 per cent compared to 7.9 per cent).<sup>2</sup> Young people with disability are also more than twice as likely to be underemployed<sup>3</sup> — meaning they have the capacity and desire to work more hours, beyond the level to which they are currently employed.

**Figure 1: Underutilisation rates in Australia by age and disability status, 2018**



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2020)

As a young person entering the labour force, their ability to participate is impacted by a range of external factors. These include the decrease in entry-level, 'blue-collar' type roles, increase in professional occupations, a larger share of older workers remaining in the workforce, and the

<sup>1</sup> Aged 26-64 years old

<sup>2</sup> AIHW. (2020). *People with disability*. Available at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/employment/unemployment>

<sup>3</sup> 23.1% per cent rate of underemployment compared to 8.3 per cent of older adults with disability; AIHW (2020).



increased demand from employers for prospective employees to hold employability skills and work experience.<sup>4</sup>

Young people are more likely to bear the brunt of economic downturn, with employers more reluctant to hire or retain younger workers due to their limited experience and lower skills during periods of cyclical weakness.<sup>5</sup> This is evident in the ongoing COVID-19 economic crisis, with young workers being disproportionately impacted.<sup>6</sup> According to the Productivity Commission<sup>7</sup>, people who experience negative shocks in the labour market go on to experience ‘scarring’ effects on their longer-term employment and earnings prospects.

As a person with disability, young people are also more disadvantaged in the labour market because of the systemic discrimination they experience from employers and the employment environment, and the lack of reasonable adjustments that enable the cohort to participate on an equal basis to their non-disabled peers.

Throughout their life stages and pivotal transitions, children and young people with disability are denied equal opportunities to build personal resources which would support them to secure employment in an increasingly competitive labour market. This includes, but isn’t limited to:

- Being denied a quality inclusive education from an early age, or segregated from their non-disabled peers
- Seeing opportunities withheld to gain work experiences and build networks during school years and;
- Not equally supported or encouraged to undertake post school education.

To add to the complexity and multi-layered barriers young people with disability experience to gain employment, before and as they transition into the workforce, they are also subjected to a fragmented national employment service system. Young people can find themselves in a range of employment programs coordinated by Department of Social Services, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment or under the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Further, young people are also participating in a myriad of state and territory-based programs. The monitoring of young people with disability’s experiences and outcomes across these programs is inconsistent and public reporting is inadequate.

The myriad of national programs largely differ in how they understand the ‘problem’ of unemployment, and as such, provide different problem solutions. This means that some young people with disability are exposed to programs that incorporate punitive measures to ‘push’ young people into employment, irrespective of suitability or fit. Alternatively, others are included in programs that recognises the increased structural barriers young people with disability face in the labour market and are designed to ‘pull’ them into employment opportunities.

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<sup>4</sup> CYDA. (2020). *Response to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability: Employment of young people with disability*. Available at [Resources \(cyda.org.au\)](https://www.cyda.org.au/resources)

<sup>5</sup> Dhillon, Z., & Cassidy, N. (2018). *Labour market outcomes for younger people*. Available at [Labour Market Outcomes for Younger People | Bulletin – June Quarter 2018 | RBA](https://www.rba.gov.au/bulletin/2018/june/younger-people)

<sup>6</sup> Youth Affairs Council Victoria. (2020). *A COVID-19 recovery plan for young people*. Available at <https://www.yacvic.org.au/advocacy/covid-19-recovery/#TOC-1>

<sup>7</sup> de Fontenay, C., Lampe, B., Nugent, J. and Jomini, P. (2020). *Climbing the jobs ladder slower: Young people in a weak labour market*. Available at <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/supporting/jobs-ladder/jobs-ladder.pdf>

This lack of coordinated approach also means that programs are operating in silo and good pockets of practice are being lost or underutilised. Fundamentally, each year – across departments and portfolios – the Australian Government spends billions of dollars, yet the underemployment and unemployment rates of young people with disability in the labour force remains stubbornly and disproportionality high.

While the Department’s transparency about the ineffectiveness of the current DES model and openness to change throughout the consultation process has been encouraging, CYDA is concerned that the current reform process will not be able to produce sustainable outcomes, because:

- DES is only one aspect of a very fragmented system
- Not enough is known about how to effectively, or if to, roll out a national employment program for young people with disability.

As aforementioned, young people disability are engaged with several programs and services delivered by federal government departments. As at 31 December 2021, 12.6 per cent (39,523) of DES caseload participants are 24 years or younger.<sup>8</sup> In the greater scheme of how many young people with disability are experiencing unemployment (or pushed out of the labour market entirely), DES currently only services a fraction of young people with disability. For example as at 30 June 2021, there are 55,648 young people aged 25 years and under on the Disability Support Pension, 14,456 young people on Youth Allowance with partial capacity to work in the same age group, and 23,153 on Jobseeker with partial capacity to work (total 93,257).<sup>9</sup>

CYDA is concerned that with the current reforms, the new disability employment service model will offer a more targeted solution for only some jobseekers with disability, whereas others will be left behind or pushed into mainstream employment programs, such as Jobactive, which a Senate inquiry has established does not address the barriers to employment for jobseekers with disability or young people.<sup>10</sup>

Conversely, if the new disability employment model opens its access criterion to include more young people who once were only eligible for mainstream programs, then it could create new barriers for young people who have undiagnosed disability, or do not identify as having disability, but would benefit from targeted supports. Further, young people have expressed to CYDA that while they want a service which has the capacity and expertise to work with **young people** with disability, they ultimately do not want to be separated from their peers in what they see as a segregated option.

Fundamentally, there is still much to explore and understand in terms of the risks and benefits of rolling out a new disability employment services model that may on the one hand, only cater for a proportion of young people, or on the other, see more young people in mainstream and youth-specific services alongside their peers, but potentially without the capabilities to appropriately support disability-specific needs and strengths. These questions, alongside others, remain untested.

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<sup>8</sup> Labour Market Information Portal. (2022). *DES Monthly Report – December 2021*. Available at <https://lmip.gov.au/PortalFile.axd?FieldID=3195611&.xlsx>

<sup>9</sup> Department of Social Services. (2021). *ADH19-0472: JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance (other) Recipients by Partial Capacity to Work Status and Disability Support Pension Recipients, by Age Group*. Data provided to CYDA upon request.

<sup>10</sup> Senate Education and Employment References Committee. (2019). *Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve*. Available at [Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve – Parliament of Australia \(aph.gov.au\)](http://Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve – Parliament of Australia (aph.gov.au))

It is CYDA's position that more time is needed to consult with young people with disability to determine whether they require a specific employment service, either embedded in a mainstream youth employment service or a youth disability specific employment service. Further, in 2021, the Brotherhood of St Laurence conducted an environmental scan which mapped out the current landscape of research and interventions aimed at promoting economic participation of people with disability, with a specific focus on autism, psychosocial disability, intellectual disability.<sup>11</sup> Despite the scan finding 129 current interventions being delivered in Australia, the researchers concluded that the evidence-base for what supports the three target cohorts, and the disability-cohort more broadly, as "patchy".<sup>12</sup> The researchers continued that this patchy evidence-based is likely to be reflective of the "fragmented and complex nature of the disability employment interventions landscape".<sup>13</sup>

CYDA is concerned that at the conclusion of the contracting period for the new employment model questions will remain unanswered about how a national program can fully and sustainably support people with disability into secure employment. We are further concerned, that the introduction of an unproven model may not result in increased employment outcomes and that young people with disability will continue to experience vulnerability in the labour market.

CYDA recommends, therefore, the building of an evidence base through;

- Further consultation and co-design with young people themselves and;
- Investing in research to determine what service model best supports young people with disability to secure and maintain meaningful employment.

It is from this evidence-base that new employment programs should be established, rather than the current approach which may diminish rather than expand opportunities for young people and entrench further disadvantage.

While CYDA is firm that investment in research is needed to see long-term change, CYDA also acknowledges that there are elements of practice that has been well established to impact young people's engagement with employment services and providers ability to deliver quality support. Further, young people have expressed to CYDA what the elements they wish to see in programs and what would make them feel supported in finding employment. These points are covered in the following sections of this submission.

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<sup>11</sup> Brown, D., & Mallett, S. (2021). *Environmental Scan Part 1: Current research and evaluation to promote economic participation of people with disability*. Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 47

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 47

## Section 2: What works for young people

### The enablers of successful employment service outcomes

#### Recommendation 2

Invest in the enablers of successful employment service outcomes.

Listen to what young people from the CYDA community recommends:

- Person-centred practice and holistic approaches to service delivery prioritising the employment aspirations of service users.
- Increase disability awareness among service providers and employers
- Focus on transition from school and provide earlier employment support to young people
- Develop clear mechanisms for feedback and continuous improvement, ensuring that the experiences of people with disability remain at the heart of Employment Service practice and;
- Place-based and Community Focused service delivery

CYDA holds consultation with young people at the heart of our work. In the case of the disability employment services reform, we have facilitated a number of discussions in order to identify elements and approaches that will serve to empower and enable young people.

Included below are brief descriptions of the key findings as well as quotes taken directly from young people who participated in the consultations.

#### The employment service system should be person-centred

Young people with disability want employment services to be informed about their experiences and for them to be offered solutions that are flexible and tailored to them as individuals. Young people have indicated that a successful employment service needs to provide supports that align with a young person's identity and values. This may include their experiences of disability but crucially incorporates intersectionality; ensuring services can remain culturally safe, LGBTIQ+ friendly and accessible to young people with a broad range of life experiences.

Value- and identity-aligned supports and services that understand the experiences of young people are important and helpful. This includes services that are queer-friendly, 'ethical', rights-focussed, and created with user-friendly design interfaces.

*"The lack of an intersectional lens: so often you're viewed as just a disabled person, which I am a disabled person and happy to be seen that way. But when I'm also like, well I'm also trans, and I'm also gay, and like I need a workplace that's affirming of those parts of my identities. It is too complex, too overwhelming for other people to handle and then support"*

— LivedX consultation participant

The goal should also be to find meaningful and fulfilling employment. However, young people from our community find that often DES providers choose the **path of least resistance** instead of working with them to explore opportunities that suit them personally. For some young people this reflects the low expectations that society places on young people with disability and the lack of understanding of disability from DES providers who assume that young people with disability are unable to make effective choices for themselves.

*“In my experience the [employment service] operators acquired a list, and are just trying to fill a box **without seeing me as a person with interests, needs, and passions.**”*

– LivedX consultation participant

*“One [service] recommended that I work in a call centre, despite me being situationally mute in social settings. **I don’t feel like they listen to me.**”*

– LivedX consultation participant

The funding and service model should be reviewed so individualised and person-centred support can be provided (see Service Model Design section of this submission). Such a model should be flexible, adaptive when needed and with no limits on duration of support. DES does not currently have youth specific interventions with ‘intensive pre-employment support’ built in to help them achieve their employment and education goals.

### **The employment service system should take a holistic approach to supports**

Young people reported that the most successful DES experiences were when services providers looked to support the ‘whole person’, providing support holistically. For many young people this means being supported to engage in all domains of life; understanding that engagement in social and recreational activities (for example) may lead to employment opportunities (networking, skill building, etc.) as well improved quality of life.

Holistic support recognises there are more contributing factors to a young person’s successful transition to work including mental health, physical health, and community/social engagement. Employment services should be aware that young people with disability, like all young people, are going through other life transitions and development phases, as well as an employment phase:

*“Just because we’re young and we might have fewer years on the clock in various industries, **it doesn’t mean that we have any less to give**”*

– LivedX consultation participant

### **The employment service system should have a strong understanding of disability**

Young people shared that the employment service system should have capabilities and awareness of working with people with disability. Specifically, young people want employers, DES providers and alike to build their understanding and awareness of disability by:

- Acknowledging the barriers that young people with disability face when trying to access employment
- Establishing and maintaining a high level of disability specific knowledge; ensuring that the young people do not need to educate the service provider

- Establishing a culture of proactive accessibility and universal design. Removing friction (whether bureaucratic, procedural or social) that would prevent young people from seeing their needs met
- Establishing Centres of Excellence (including for intellectual disability) to build the capacity of services and train them in best practice approaches for working with young people
- Establish a practice that meets the young person where they are at, allowing goals and expectations to evolve and ensuring that service providers leave ableist assumptions behind in favour of allowing the service user to direct the conversation
- Facilitate mentoring from other people with lived experience of disability. This is seen as being helpful in providing support and advice that is targeted to young people with disability. This can be accomplished through inclusive employment practices and building strong relationships with previous service users.

*“For me personally, my university counsellor has insisted on me taking part in a scientific research expedition off the coast of Queensland despite me repeatedly telling her that my dyspraxia means that would be really dangerous for me as I cannot swim. The insistence that ‘you can do anything if you put my mind to it’ places the ‘blame’ of inaccessibility on disabled bodies, not disabling barriers.”*

— CYDA Youth Advisor

### **Employment services should act in conjunction with effective post-school transition activities to support access to open, mainstream employment pathways**

Young people feel strongly that supports to explore career goals, build skills, and engagement in employment should begin early, prior to turning 18. Consultations also highlighted a distinct lack of support for those individuals who are under the age of 18 or not eligible for other service systems, such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Whilst recognising individualised approaches work best, the pathway from school to mainstream employment and employment service supports should be streamlined to overcome systemic barriers. More effective career planning in high school is needed for students with disability that acknowledges the reality of finding a meaningful career whilst they confront ableist hurdles.

For students without disability, elementary career planning commences in the early years of secondary school where students find their passions and explore possibilities. Waiting to start disability employment support in late secondary school means that fostering that same sense of possibility is denied for young people with disability. Commencing career planning and employment support for students with disability earlier would allow them to expand the horizons of the options available to them.

### **Employment services should have clear mechanisms for feedback and continuous improvement**

Young people want to see clear mechanisms for feedback and continuous improvement in employment services.



*But I think something that could be really valuable is like regular kind of assessments of Disability Employment Services... not just being like, oh, 'how many disabled people have you found jobs', 'how many have entered your services', etc., but actually having like, you know, the government paying a disabled person to enter a disability employment service and try to use the service and then like provide feedback on how it was... **I think disability mystery shoppers are the next big thing.**"*

– LivedX consultation participant

### **The employment service system should be place-based and community focused**

Young people from the CYDA community assert that a successful disability employment service should have a strong understanding of its local community and be holders of local knowledge.

This would allow the service to provide young people with disability with realistic and accurate assessments of the job market, inclusive of barriers beyond the disability specific.

An effective understanding of their communities would also enable disability employment service providers to assist young people seeking work, enabling them to:

- Recognise young people's capacity and independence whilst at the same time, capitalise on the DES providers knowledge to connect young people to employment network and support:
- Connect young people with a broad range of local opportunities (inclusive of training, skill building, employment, networking and social or recreation activities).
- Build visibility of disability and inclusivity throughout surrounding communities.
- Maintain a strong awareness of employment opportunities and gaps in the local workforce.
- Inform young people about their employment rights

*"99% of the time I'm told to go 'do my research' by the people [DES providers] I thought were supposed to be [the] experts"*

– LivedX consultation participant

*"Give disabled young people specifically access to information about our rights, so that we, know that was a bit discriminatory that sucks", it's like they [employer] breached a Disability Act or what have you, so they [employer] can be held accountable".*

– LivedX consultation participant

## Section 3: Service Model Design

### Designing service models where young people can be supported to thrive

#### Recommendation 3

Reduce psychological stress experienced by young people with disability as they engage with the disability employment service system by;

- Removing unhelpful and harmful compliance requirements by uncoupling mutual obligation requirements and sanctions from income support.
- Providing a clear evidence base that mutual obligation activities such as compulsory employment service provider appointments lead to meaningful employment outcomes for young people
- Prioritising individualised and holistic service delivery- rather than focusing on compliance requirements - to better address complex structural vocational and non-vocational barriers to employment

#### Recommendation 4

Service contracts, funding models, and Key Performance Indicators of employment programs should address systemic barriers to employment and incentivise supporting the needs of individual jobseekers. This includes:

- Providing sufficient and up-front funding to support young jobseekers to overcome systemic barriers in the labour market
- Ensuring caseloads allow service providers to deliver personalised supports and deliver demand-based activities, such as building employer networks
- Incorporating participant experiences and feedback as a measure of success
- Formally measure and recognises human capital development as a service offering
- Recognising and building on the diverse strengths and employment barriers of different community settings

In the previous section we outlined the elements and approaches young people want to see in employment services. Ultimately, these service offerings will only ever be feasible if employment models are designed in a way that alleviates power imbalances and enables providers to deliver support in harmony with young people.

As such, this section details what are the fundamental elements in service design so that young people can experience a service that supports them to thrive.

#### **Mutual obligation is not a driver of successful employment outcomes for young people**

The inefficiency of the existing DES model to provide jobseekers with person-centred and appropriate supports is overlaid by the presence of the Targeted Compliance Framework, a



measure that punishes jobseekers on income support who do not meet set mutual obligations by suspending or penalising their payments.

In 2018, a Senate Inquiry<sup>14</sup> received overwhelming evidence that mutual obligations are ineffective in facilitating paid work and that the Targeted Compliance Framework is a barrier to employment and is keeping people in poverty. Subsequently, the Inquiry's final report made the recommendation "that the Government immediately abandon the Targeted Compliance Framework".<sup>15</sup> Despite this, in 2021 the Government increased mutual obligations and compliance arrangements for DES participants.<sup>16</sup>

The Targeted Compliance Framework also impacts the ability of employment consultants to effectively build rapport with program participants – the heart of human services and fundamental practice in working with young people. Under the current model, the person who is tasked with supporting jobseekers to meet their employment needs and goals also acts as their punisher.

Further demonstrating the policy practice tensions between provider and service user, a study<sup>17</sup> examining employment service users' (including young people with disability) experience of employment services revealed that mutual obligation activities such as compulsory appointments with providers have limited usefulness in advancing employment outcomes and are in fact, **psychologically harmful**. Such power imbalances between employment consultant and the young person with disability exacerbate psychological stress and limit employment opportunities as demonstrated in the following quote:

*"They [disability employment service providers] say that I'm lazy. Yeah, they do they say, 'Oh, you just don't want to find work, you're just lying. You're just making things up', and I'm there proving that I do want to find work I'm actually really motivated to find work. And then, I feel that they're actually not helping me find the work and I feel they're the ones who are getting the benefits financially and they're getting all of this money from the government to do their job, and I don't feel they're doing it well and it puts the burden and the pressure on me and other people around me and yeah, that's very difficult."*

— LivedX consultation participant

CYDA asserts therefore, that a punitive compliance framework should not be applied, as it adds to distress and is not proven to be linked with positive employment outcomes.

### **Mutual obligation fundamentally changes the service system**

It is the position of CYDA and our community that a disability employment service that relies upon mutual obligation ignores many of the challenges and complexities associated with both living with disability as well as entering the job market for the first time; standing in stark opposition to approaching employment support holistically.

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<sup>14</sup> Education and Employment References Committee. (2018). *Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve*. Available at [Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve \(aph.gov.au\)](https://aph.gov.au/Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve)

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 198

<sup>16</sup> ACOSS. (2021). *JobSeeker Payments: Access and Requirements*. Available at [JobSeeker Payments: Access and Requirements – ACOSS](#)

<sup>17</sup> O'Halloran, D., Farnworth, L., & Thomacos, N. (2020). *Australian employment services: Help or hindrance in the achievement of mutual obligation?*. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 55(4), 492-508.

CYDA affirms through listening to our community members that the current transactional model has significant negative impacts on the health and wellbeing of young people with disability and is likely to put young people with disability at odds with service providers.

**When asked about mutual obligations young people provided the following feedback:**

A disability employment framework that supports mutual obligations:

- Ignores the challenging reality of job hunting and;
- Prioritises box-ticking over the career priorities of young people with disability.

*“In my experience the [employment service] operators acquired a list and are just trying to fill a box without seeing me as a person with interests, needs, and passions.”*

— LivedX consultation participant

Further, power dynamics exercised by employment consultant puts a strain on the crucial working relationship between young people living with disability and their chosen service provider:

*“They [disability employment service providers] are not lenient at all. They force you to apply for so many jobs and if you have severe depression and really bad executive functioning and you have no energy to do anything at all because you just can’t, they don’t care. They are like, “No, you have to otherwise we’ll cut your payments” and that obviously means you can’t eat, you’ll get kicked out of your house. And they don’t care. ... I’ve actively had employment providers and their managers say to me that if I was really trying I’d be applying for more than my threshold. And it felt so horrible and I ended up crying.”*

— LivedX consultation participant

**Structuring the employment service models to support jobseeker needs first**

In the current DES model, external providers are performance monitored on their ability to minimise the average time taken for program participants to achieve employment outcomes. Achievement of participant employment outcome milestones (13-, 26- and 52-week outcomes) are also Key Performance Indicators.

In their submission<sup>18</sup> to the Disability Royal Commission, Dr Lisa Stafford et al. explained that marketised, outcomes-based employment models, such as DES, lead to ‘creaming’ and ‘parking’ practices. Creaming involves prioritising and supporting young jobseekers who are more likely to be job ready. In contrast, parking involves deprioritising young jobseekers who are less job ready and may have more severe impairments. So ultimately, service providers are disincentivised to help arguably those who are most likely to benefit from external employment assistance and support because they will less readily achieve paid outcomes for the provider.

The marketisation of DES also leads to providers pushing jobseekers into jobs that do not meet their interests or skillsets. CYDA has heard firsthand from young people in our community of this

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<sup>18</sup> Stafford, L., Marston, G., Mitchell, S., Beatson, A., & Chamorro-Koc, B. (2020). *Insights into young people with disabilities' education to work journeys. Submission to Employment Issues paper: Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.*

occurring and the issue was also highlighted in the Disability Royal Commission's Overview of responses to the Employment Issues paper<sup>19</sup>.

The existing model does not permit service providers to build rapport with jobseekers, support their individual needs and goals, or work innovatively in the community to create new opportunities and networks for young people. Learning from these shortcomings, the next iteration of DES' model and contracting must create an environment where service providers are encouraged and supported to assist jobseekers overcome the systemic challenges, they are experiencing in the labour market and more broadly.

A positive example of how contracting models can foster engagement and improve service offerings is Department of Education, Skills and Employment national Transition to Work (TtW) program. TtW provides up to 12 months intensive pre-employment support for young people<sup>20</sup> at risk of long-term unemployment. The caseload for TtW is much more targeted and smaller than other national employment services. As at 31 December 2021, TtW has a national caseload of 32,994 young people (of which 13 per cent have formally been recognised as having disability) across 51 employment regions.<sup>21</sup>

The funding model of TtW also differs from other employment services whose funding arrangements is heavily weighted on achieving employment outcomes. By contrast, TtW providers receive an up-front payment based on the funded places, in addition to employment outcome payments.<sup>22</sup> These payments then fund services or activities that will help a young person gain employment, participate in education and increase their work readiness.<sup>23</sup> Another noteworthy difference is that participants in the TtW program do not incur financial penalties for not meeting mutual obligation requirements, (noting, however, they may be asked to return to Jobactive).

A recent evaluation of TtW<sup>24</sup> revealed many positive findings of the TtW program settings and the impacts on their ability to fully engage with participants. Specifically, providers reported that:

- Smaller caseloads allow caseworkers to provide more participant-focused service delivery;
- The up-front payments allowed service providers to support young people overcome barriers to employment in a variety of way, including, but not limited to, purchasing uniforms and interview clothing, access courses, supplement travel costs, etc;
- The inherent flexible service delivery design permitted innovative solutions to both supporting and engaging young people;
- The model removed competition and encouraged collaboration between providers.

TtW participants also acknowledged the positive impact of the program, with nearly three-quarters of young people (73%) thinking their work readiness improved, as evidenced in the 2017–2018 Post Program Monitoring through participation. Additionally, 90 per cent of TtW participants in the 2017

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<sup>19</sup> Royal Commission into the Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with Disability. (2021). *Overview of responses to the Employment Issues paper*. Available at [Overview of responses to the Employment Issues paper \(royalcommission.gov.au\)](https://royalcommission.gov.au/Overview-of-responses-to-the-Employment-Issues-paper)

<sup>20</sup> Ages 15-24 years old

<sup>21</sup> Labour Market Information Portal. (2022). *jobactive and Transition to Work (TtW) Data - December 2021*. Available at <https://lmip.gov.au/PortalFile.axd?FieldID=3195445&.xlsx>

<sup>22</sup> Henderson, R., Reinhard, A., Porter, M., Jankovic, C., Elliott, W., Barber, P., Pham, M., Gonzales S., & Wu, Y. (2021). *Transition to Work Final Evaluation Report*. Department of Education, Skills and Employment.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

Job Seeker Experiences of Employment Services Survey were satisfied or very satisfied with the service their TtW provider gave them.

Although the evaluation broadly concluded that ‘the tailored and intensive support provided through TtW increased the target groups’ work readiness and contributed to their achievement of study and employment outcomes’, the researchers also acknowledged the ‘trade-offs’ of the model and areas for continuous improvement, including the potential ‘lock-in’ effect of the program.<sup>25</sup> CYDA does not endorse this program to be the ‘gold star’ solution to youth underutilisation rates, but instead encourages the Australian Government to adopt some of its (and other programs, such as the Individual Placement and Support Program<sup>26</sup>) design elements that are showing early, encouraging outcomes in supporting jobseekers in the other employment models.

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, p. 18

<sup>26</sup> The Individual Placement and Support Program is a program that aims to improve the educational and employment outcomes of young people aged up to 25 with mental illness. The program is funded by the Australian Department of Social Services. Read more about the program here: [Individual Placement and Support Program \(IPS\) Program | Department of Social Services, Australian Government \(dss.gov.au\)](https://www.dss.gov.au/individual-placement-and-support-program)

## Appendix – Summary of Lived X consultation on Employment

### Background

In September 2021, CYDA engaged with a group of young people with disability to unpack the challenges and opportunities relating to employment for young, disabled people. A focus group on this topic was facilitated by CYDA's Youth Council, which is comprised of a group of young people with disability. The consultation took place over Zoom for a duration of two hours with short breaks, and participants were split into two separate breakout rooms to discuss a series of questions.

The questions which shaped the discussion were:

1. What supports, services and tools have you used to explore your career options and pathways?
2. What did you find helpful and what didn't you find helpful?
3. Thinking about [those supports and services], what would you like done differently?
4. What are some of the other barriers and challenges young people with disability face to finding meaningful employment?
5. What do you think needs to be done to improve employment opportunities for young people with disability?

### Employment themes and quotes

Across the discussion in this group, some key themes were evident and were raised consistently throughout the discussion.

*[Additions in square brackets provide context, and were not directly spoken by the participant.]*

**1) Value- and identity-aligned supports and services that understand the experiences of young, disabled people are important and helpful: this includes services that are queer-friendly, 'ethical', rights-focussed, and created with user-friendly design interfaces. Young people also find the support of family and friends helpful.**

"My favourite website is Ethical Jobs ... just like, browsing the jobs on there is really cool because they're like, I guess, **aligned with my values** and often more likely to be, like, queer friendly and disability friendly, and that kind of thing."

"Yeah, I've used LinkedIn ... I don't think it's the best website to be using for careers ... There's so much non-disability stuff that is focussed on, but yeah, although it is okay [for networking], maybe like a five out of ten."

"Definitely looking at government jobs, because they do they do advertise [for people with] disability, like, just **roles only for disabled people.**"

“The best support, you know, my parents, I knew I was lucky enough to know somebody who worked at Sydney University in the geography sector, and during my degree I didn't really know what I wanted to do ... So yeah, **I'd definitely say family, friends.**”

“I also use LinkedIn as well... it was a bit full on because there was like quite a lot on there but that's also cool to see what other jobs were available, and because you, you find jobs that you didn't think, were actually there in the first place.”

“The [Australian Government] **RecruitAbility scheme is really fantastic.** I've used that one myself in my own contracting jobs, it's been really fantastic.”

“Another one that I can recommend is the Disability Clearinghouse on Tertiary Education, I work in the tertiary sector and I find that it's just like an excellent resource that **they've recently rebranded so it doesn't look like it's stuck in the 1990s anymore.** So that's kind of exciting.”

“Also like giving disabled young people specifically **access to information about our rights**, so that we, you know, we're not just like ‘oh I guess that was a bit discriminatory that sucks’, it's like well actually they like breached a Disability Act or what have you, so they can be held accountable. Giving communications about different kind of like, ombudsmans and bodies that you can report to, if your rights have been denied in a workplace setting. So that, you know, when we, when we do want to like seek better jobs, **we're not just expected to kind of settle** we're allowed to ask for better, and that kind of thing.”

**2) Young people have often not had a great experience with some Disability Employment Services (DES providers) and career counsellors. Young disabled people want these employment services to be informed about their experiences as disabled people and for them to be offered solutions that are flexible and tailored to them as individuals.**

“I tried to access [an employment service] and then the **lifts in the building just didn't work.** And like, the person I engaged with kept tapping her fingernails on the table and it gave me a tic-attack, and I was like ‘can you stop doing that’ and she was like ‘yeah sure’ and then **she didn't stop doing that.**”

“One [service] recommended that I work in a call centre, despite me being situationally mute in social settings. **I don't feel like they listen to me.**”

“The employment service **wasn't tailored to me.** And then when they say that they've placed you with a tailored [disability] service and then it's really not that tailored and you feel... yeah.”

“I think for me, I had a really bad experience with the disability employment service, which I know they do a lot of good for a lot of people, [but] I personally had a really negative experience where **they were incredibly ableist.**”

“Another one that didn't necessarily work for me was like school- and like education-associated employment, like career counsellors or whatever, because they're very much, not only **not** disability informed but **actively ableist** a lot of the time, and very much follow traditional pathways, which is not something a lot of disabled people can access.”

“I kind of found the same experience during high school, there **wasn't really much out there for me in terms of work experience** ... as a kid in a wheelchair, you don't really know what's out there that much and especially when, especially when ... it's something that that that's physically demanding it can be quite difficult.”

“I think with all of them they didn't allow if you're a full time [university] student, they wouldn't allow you to go through the employment service... which was a pretty annoying because you know, **I had never had [work] experience prior to that** to be actually good before I go out, finished uni, go into the workforce. **Not necessarily being so flexible I suppose to lots of different people's situations.**”

“But I think something that could be really valuable is like **regular kind of assessments of Disability Employment Services**... not just being like, oh, ‘how many disabled people have you found jobs’, ‘how many have entered your services’, etc., but actually having like, you know, **the government paying a disabled person to enter a disability employment service and try to use the service and then like provide feedback on how it was**... I think disability mystery shoppers are the next big thing.”

“The **lack of an intersectional lens**: so often you're viewed as just a disabled person, which I am a disabled person and happy to be seen that way. But when I'm also like, well I'm also trans, and I'm also gay, and like I need a workplace that's affirming of those parts of my identities. It is too complex too overwhelming for other people to handle and then support. So, and especially when like, you know, for example like 70% of autistic people are queer, 40% of autistic people are trans... but there's a lack of willingness to learn more about people who have multiple intersecting identities.”

**3) Young people want more transparency on jobs, and to know what an employer's culture is around disability before they apply for a job with them, and where to report them when there is a problem. They want flexibility around application and interview processes, and removal of seemingly irrelevant requirements like to be able to drive.**

“And also what's not been helpful is when there's been like a lack of research or limited ... information available about a company, and **what their stance is on disability employment.**”

“... **want a clear commitment to diversity and inclusion** on workplace websites, and a sections on websites that covers leave policy and work flexibility, and an accessibility map for the office and interview space, multiple ways to submit your CV or interview, receiving the interview questions before the interview...”

“Sometimes I feel like **I'm asking too much to ask for my access needs**. But if I see the other employees have been able to get certain things, that would be great.”

“... if possible mandating it so that people are allowed to **submit job applications in whatever format works for them**. So not just a written CV, like selection criteria response and cover letter, but [also] video, or, you know, visuals and that kind of thing, or like a phone call.”



“Unless I'm applying to be a forklift driver, **I don't understand why I need to be able to drive.**”

“I was complaining to a colleague about this in a slightly different context, but when we do identify these issues in the workplace, **it's really unclear where we report them to.** And it's really unclear whose responsibility it is to fix them. It's like, is this a work health and safety issue, is this an HR issue, like is this a 'my supervisor' issue, and if so like where are they going to put all this information?”

#### **4) Whilst disability-specific jobs are awesome, young people don't want to be pigeon-holed or stereotyped based on their disability. There is also a negative sentiment towards Disability Enterprises.**

“In my experience the [employment service] operators acquired a list, and are just trying to fill a box **without seeing me as a person with interests, needs, and passions.**”

“Just because we're young and we might have fewer years on the clock in various industries, like, **it doesn't mean that we have any less to give.**”

“Mainstream jobs are extremely difficult to get into... hence why [participant] feels that he goes for disability-centred jobs, because he feels more confident of landing a job.”

“I found that they pigeon holed my disability as an autistic person. Some autistic people are great at handling large chunks of data and sorting through data sheets, which is awesome, the [service] only offered these kinds of jobs for autistic people **ignoring that it isn't something I'm interested in. So it doesn't fit into my career aspirations.**”

“Just because we declare one set of needs at the beginning, it doesn't mean that's always going to be the same, and it also means, when we don't engage with some of our access needs, it doesn't mean that we're never going to need them again.”

“So I am also doing biology and environmental science and finding it really hard to find any internships or literally anything for people with disability, especially as environmental science I guess is a very physical and I think that sometimes they're like, 'oh a disabled person couldn't do it', rather than like 'I could do it with a couple of adjustments', that **they don't even like really try with that.**”

“A lot of [internships for people with disabilities] are business, or like banking, and there's not a lot of flexibility with anything else and it really sucks because like, there's lots of really passionate disabled people about the environment and looking after it, but there's nothing, **there's no opportunity and then there's no way to go in.**”

“And then just immediately destroy **Disability Enterprises** as a concept, which that sounds like an ambiguous term, for people who don't know it means like some organizations and companies are legally allowed to pay disabled people less than minimum wage and treat us terribly, because 'this so nice!' and offering us jobs. So I'd like them to be removed.”



"I think, in my experience, when the workplaces are aware of disability, it's very like surface level. And for me as an autistic person I think sometimes I struggle in workplaces when they look at my resume and then look at all of my work samples **they have a particular idea of how I function, and that that can change daily or even throughout the day**. So I'm able to do things to a high standard some of the time, but not all of the time, so it's hard."

**5) Young people don't want to feel pressured to have to educate their employer on disability, and more education is needed about disability in a lot of workplaces. Young people see right through employers who say they are committed to diversity on paper, but not in practise.**

"I guess, sort of, from my experience working in sort of a placement disability organization that was working within the sports sector, they didn't have anyone who has lived experience [of disability] ... **if you say that you are disability friendly or enjoy diversity, you should at least have people who are like, quite diverse**, because I think one of my biggest things was that I really enjoyed my placement but I didn't really enjoy constantly educating the office about disability because I'm like, **I wasn't getting paid** for that placement and it was just, it was kind of mentally taxing ... I just think **more education** and more training, generally around disability would be a really good thing."

"Those of us who are disabled and similarly for people who are Indigenous in workplaces, **we kind of get this extra like 20% workload tacked on to whatever job it is that we do**. And that is just to like, explain ourselves every time and answer questions and though sometimes you don't mind, sometimes kind of just want to do the job that you were employed to do."

"But I think if there was just more education, even if they had like a standard training module, I think that would just do a world of wonder because I just think there's just **not enough education within the whole of disability employment services**."

## **6) Low expectations as a barrier to disabled people finding meaningful work**

Quotes:

"I've got a friend in my degree as well that's also in a [wheel]chair and one of our head of courses said to us like 'isn't it amazing you guys have got through, like you're going into employment next year.' We're both topping the cohort, but we still get the 'It's so good that you've done it' so those expectations are set low every step of the way, a lot of the time especially when compared to our able-bodied peers."

"And often when I talk about the fact that I want to go into OT, which is an allied health field, people are like 'oh that's a good dream but let's be realistic', they don't allow you to reach your goals like your non-disabled kids, and then a lot of [disabled kids] internalise that and then don't bother actually trying to look for meaningful work and just accept whatever they get. We should be really starting early and making sure [that] the passions of disabled young people with what they want to do with the rest of life are heard and also supported."

## **7) Workplace accessibility:**

### Quotes:

“I have a wheelchair adapted vehicle that needs a metre and a half to the side and a meter and a half to the rear, and most staff carparks don’t have accessible parking spaces and you’re not allowed to use the accessible parking spaces because they’re for the clients, they’re for the patients and those sorts of things. So even when you do have the privilege of being able to drive and have that independence, there’s still that additional barrier of being able to get out of your car at the other end too, which I know when [my university] were looking at placements and things they would be like ‘yep, we have a disabled parking spot’ and they’d have one disabled parking spot for the whole building, and if that spot’s taken than too bad so sad.”

“I’m seeing a general theme of people feeling like even if they get the job it’s just a matter of time before they face some sort of discrimination.”