

We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed DES Reforms, specifically highlighting the significance of the Self-Employment Assistance program in supporting individuals with disabilities. As a peak body representing providers of this program, our aim is to offer additional perspectives to enhance flexibility and opportunities within the Disability Services sector. In Australia 16% of all people employed are self-employed so this must be taken into consideration when creating a robust employment support framework.

Overview of our Self-Employment Assistance Program:

Our organisation, as a peak body, supports individuals who aspire to work for themselves, facilitating activities that make self-employment feasible. Across the nation, our 22 providers have the potential to assist up to 10,000 individuals in making informed choices to start micro or small businesses. The scope of support ranges from workshopping business ideas to providing coaching for up to 12 months, all funded by the Australian Government (Department of Employment & Workplace Relations).

Benefits to Individuals:

We have observed that individuals registered with a Disability Services provider often require flexibility in managing life skills. This flexibility extends to their work location, required resources, working hours, and the ability to work when conditions are optimal. Enabling them to work in an industry of personal interest fosters both professional and personal success. With this in mind, Self-Employment can be a welcome alternative for many people living with a disability.

Unintended Consequences:

Historically, Disability Services providers have faced barriers in supporting individuals pursuing self-employment. These include challenges related to meeting minimum wage requirements during the early stages of business, ongoing job search demands despite active engagement in their own business, and the lack of government recognition for self-employment outcomes.

Recommendations for Consideration:

1. **Flexible Support Criteria:** Adjust criteria to allow for the unique circumstances of individuals pursuing self-employment, acknowledging the need for flexible work arrangements and tailored support.
2. **Recognition of Self-Employment Outcomes:** Establish mechanisms to recognise and celebrate outcomes achieved through self-employment, providing a more comprehensive assessment beyond traditional employment metrics.
3. **Minimising Ongoing Job Search Pressure:** Consider revising requirements to accommodate the entrepreneurial journey, recognising that early-stage businesses may not initially meet minimum wage standards.
4. **Self-Employment referral pathway:** Ensure a smooth referral pathway is available for DES participants to complimentary programs such as Self-Employment Assistance

We believe that by addressing these points, the DES Reforms can better accommodate the needs of individuals with disabilities engaged in the Self-Employment Assistance program. We are committed to further collaboration and discussion to ensure the success of these reforms in promoting inclusivity and empowerment within the Disability Services sector.

Thank you for considering our feedback.

Regards

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