



# Disability Employment Reforms

23 July 2024

## **National Disability Services (NDS) Disability at Work Conference – 23 July 2024**

Minister for Social Services, the Hon Amanada Rishworth MP,

### Introduction

Good afternoon,

Thank you to National Disability Services for the introduction and opportunity to speak today.

I'm sorry I am not able to join you in person on Gadigal land, but I pay my respects to all elders past and present.

I'd also like to acknowledge the local member for Sydney who is with you today – Alex Greenwich.

In keeping with your theme - *Navigating the future of disability employment*, I'd like to talk about the Government's vision.

And what we are doing to steer towards it.

### Disability Employment and Progress

Our vision is for everyone to have the opportunity and dignity of work.

But not just any job, opportunities for careers.

That's why at our Jobs and Skills Summit I made sure breaking down the barriers to employment was high on the agenda. I've been absolutely committed to this and we are hearing some positive success stories.

Whether it's employers using JobAccess, Disability Employment Services helping people to find work or new programs that are directly building employer confidence.

And all of you here today play an important role in contributing to this progress. But of course there is a lot more to do.

There are still people with disability being discriminated against in the workplace and facing barriers.

## Progress

We continue to make progress by working with businesses and by listening to people with disability – and by having the best disability employment programs available.

We know that an overwhelming 92 per cent of employers want to recruit more people with disability to their workforce.

But many employers believe they don't have the skills or resources.

Or they think it will be too expensive to make the adjustments needed for people with disability to succeed.

Because of this, businesses are missing out on the many skills and talents people with disability bring.

And importantly, the competitive advantage of an inclusive workforce.

Hiring people with disabilities means businesses can improve customer experience and increase innovation through diversity.

If that wasn't convincing enough, research shows that profits for inclusive businesses are also higher.

As well as bringing talent, people with disability generally take less sick leave, and stay in jobs for longer.

I'm encouraged to see that employers are gaining confidence in employing people with disabilities.

And they are experiencing first hand the statistic that 88 per cent of people with disability do not need modifications in the workplace.

Often it just requires a change in attitudes or adjusting the way they engage with employees and train them in their role.

We've been working with the big names and asking them to show leadership.

Groups like the Business Council of Australia, Australian Disability Network, Coles, Woolworths, Compass group and Kmart and Target Group.

And we started running innovative pilot programs in key industries like tourism and hospitality.

The very industries that are experiencing the biggest skills shortages.

### Disability Employment Services reform

But, of course, the biggest piece in the puzzle is the piece that Government funds.

We know we need a strong Disability Employment Services (DES) sector.

As I said earlier, we know there are some excellent providers and some less inspiring ones.

We need you all to be raising the standard, because accessing employment services should not be a lottery.

Together you have a national footprint and are uniquely positioned to support employers to hire more people with disability and place people with disability into the right roles – which is why under the new program we are incentivising this.

We have listened to ongoing feedback from people with disability, peak organisations, disability representative organisations and disability service providers.

We have heard from participants and providers that the current system is fragmented, complex and does not fully meet the needs of those it serves.

Most of all, we heard about the lack of quality.

When I started out I couldn't believe that quality was not measured as part of the ratings process for DES providers.

And I haven't waited until DES reform to put of a focus on delivering a quality service.

Under the DES Quality Framework released last year, providers delivering high-quality, innovative services that participants value, will be recognised.

And participants will benefit from increased transparency to inform choice.

Earlier this month I announced a new Scorecard system that will rate quality, efficiency and effectiveness.

It will give us a clear picture of performance and provide more choice and control to participants.

This is a model which strives for continuous improvement, because performance will be reviewed every three months.

And what is important about the new performance framework is that providers won't be competing against each other to receive a high rating – performance will be measured against individualised benchmarks.

I believe this will encourage greater collaboration across providers, which will achieve the best possible quality for participants and employers.

For all those in the room today who have lent your voice and experiences to those discussions, thank you for your contributions. Of course, this includes contributions to the Disability Royal Commission.

And our new specialist disability employment program that comes into effect from 1 July next year is the next step in responding to the feedback we have heard.

It will put people – and quality - at the heart of the DES sector.

One of the ways we are putting people back at the centre of the program is by offering two different levels of service intensity to recognise more diverse pathways into employment.

And allow the program to meet the needs of a broader range of participants.

This means the program will support participants who are ready to seek employment.

As well as those who may not yet be ready to work but would still benefit from supports available under the program.

I have also clearly heard that is important not to exclude people with disability from accessing support to find employment.

Which is why we have also expanded eligibility to include those with a work capacity under eight hours per week and those who do not receive an income support payment.

This change alone will mean around an additional 15,000 people each year will be able to access support to find employment.

That's in direct response to listening to people with disability.

There will also be work preparation and pre-employment resources to ensure participants are able to meet their employment goals.

As with the current DES program, ongoing support will continue to be available.

And for those requiring additional support, we have removed the two-year service cap.

That means participants are able to access the program for as long as they need it.

The new model has simplified and streamlined processes to allow providers to spend their time doing what matters most - making a positive impact on the lives of everyday Australians with disability.

This will help to strengthen the relationship between participants, providers and employers.

And should result in a more collaborative approach towards meeting people's goals and career aspirations.

However, as I spoke about earlier, we know that we cannot increase the outcomes for disability employment without a focus on employers.

Under the new specialist disability employment program, employers will be able to access expertise to support them to create and tailor job opportunities.

And as an extra incentive, employers may also be eligible for up to \$10,000 per job seeker who is supported to achieve sustainable employment.

### Supported employment

In addition to reforming DES, the Government is committed to creating more opportunities for people with disability with high support needs.

Opportunities that include pathways not just to employment but career progression.

Of course it is important that people with disability continue to have choice around their employment options.

We know that this is complex – but the sector needs to be evolving to create more pathways to employment so there is real choice.

This is why we have developed the guiding principles for supported employment.

We are investing in organisations to support them to transform their business models – to break down segregation and develop more diverse pathways to open employment.

In last year's Budget we invested \$35 million to support this evolution.

And to help supported employees and their families understand employment options and uphold their rights we have funded a new disability employment advocacy and information program.

Alongside eight job expos so that people with disability understand their options and can exercise choice and control over their employment journey.

As always, our priority within the supported employment space is strengthening choice and control – to give participants and those that support them the information, supports and opportunities they need to thrive at work.

But essentially it all comes back to putting the individual at the centre and building relationships – so that people are genuinely engaging with their service providers to achieve their goals.

### Centre for Excellence

I have acknowledged that there are pockets of excellence everywhere.

And we need to make sure that this best practice is championed and shared.

To make sure that quality is at the heart of our work and to further innovation.

We'll do that through our new Disability Employment Centre of Excellence.

It was an election commitment that we have promised and are now delivering with funding in the Budget of \$23.3 million.

The Centre of Excellence will support inclusive employment through the creation – and sharing - of evidence-based, best-practice resources.

It will bring together and use existing resources that are available both nationally and internationally.

The benefit will span beyond disability employment services providers.

It will also assist employment services delivered by Workforce Australia, the Community Development Program and NDIS providers including the supported employment sector.

We expect the Centre of Excellence to be in place by March next year with an online hub available from September next year.

### Vision of disability employment

All these changes add up to a big reform agenda.

And together they will help us achieve our vision for an inclusive Australia where all people with disability can thrive.

An Australia where everyone gets the opportunity to achieve their dream job.  
A secure job, but not just any job.

A job that matches skills, circumstances and interests.

Because having a job is about more than finding work.

It brings dignity and opportunities to meet and connect with people.



Having a job you enjoy can improve health and wellbeing.

And for employers, having people that are happy in their work, of course means they are more motivated and productive.

That's why it is vital that we have a strong and high-quality disability employment sector.

Where people are supported to find and keep a job – and importantly, build a career.

And employers are supported to create more inclusive recruitment practices and workplaces.

Because we know that everyone's employment needs are unique – and people with disability deserve more than a one-size-fits-all approach.

And it's not just my vision it is the vision of Australia's Disability Strategy.

Which sets out how we all need to pull together to create an inclusive society.

## Conclusion

A big reform agenda can only work with the cooperation of everyone involved.

It is not set and forget.

We will continue to work closely with people with disability and you - the broader disability employment sector.

It is only through genuine collaboration between all parties that we can begin to break down the barriers to employment for people with disability.

And navigate to a better future.

As you would all be aware, the Government's formal response to the Disability Royal Commission is imminent.

But I hope I have shown today that we haven't been waiting to make change.

Our employment reforms have already taken into consideration the recommendations related to disability employment.

I know this system has been overhauled before and not succeeded.

This time, with your support, I'm determined it will.

Thank you for having me here today.

That was a lot of information. I'm happy to take a few questions.