

A new specialist disability employment program

Information Paper – Ongoing Support

The Department of Social Services is seeking feedback from interested parties on program settings as part of the implementation and transition process.

This paper outlines the proposed policies for In-employment Support in the new specialist disability employment program, focusing on Ongoing Support.

About the new program

From 1 July 2025, the Australian Government will introduce a new specialist disability employment program. Under the new program, providers will deliver high-quality, effective employment services to improve employment outcomes for people with disability, injury or health condition. Providers will place participants and employers at the centre of their service design and build meaningful relationships with both participants and employers.

Participants will continue to receive support once they find a job, to ensure they settle into employment. Some participants may require this support for a short time, whereas others may require longer-term or ongoing support to help them keep their job – all of these options will be available.

Employees who are not participants in the program and who are having difficulty fulfilling the essential requirements of their job may, if eligible, join the program to access Ongoing Support (Work Assist) through a provider.

Key features of In-employment support

Post Placement Support

As in the current program, once a participant starts working, they will be able to access Post Placement Support for up to 52-weeks. Providers will keep in contact with participants over this period and offer a range of personalised supports that are designed to help them settle into their new roles.

Providers will also offer specialised assistance for workplace adjustments, additional training and other supports to help employers provide safe and productive workplaces for employees with disability.

Ongoing Support

Ongoing Support will continue to be available under the new program to help people with disability, injury and/or health condition who require additional support to keep their job. This service will be available from a 26-week employment outcome onwards for participants in Post Placement Support who need it.

The new program will continue to have 3 levels of Ongoing Support (Flexible, Moderate and High) to allow support to be tailored to the needs of each participant. If a participant's circumstances change over time, they will be able to move between support streams.

The National Panel of Assessors (NPA) will conduct an initial Ongoing Support Assessment (OSA) for each participant to recommend the level of support that they need. The NPA assessor will also set the timing of future reviews based on the participant's individual circumstances (at 1, 2 or 5-years), including the stability and permanency of their disability, injury and/or health condition, the requirements of their employment and their support needs. Flexibility in the timing of reviews will help to avoid unnecessary reviews, particularly for participants with more stable support needs.

Ongoing Support (Work Assist)

Work Assist currently provides support to eligible employees who have difficulty fulfilling the essential requirements of their existing employment due to their injury, disability or health condition. Eligible employees currently directly register with a Provider to access support through Work Assist.

Under the new program, eligible employees will still be able to directly register for support. Services will be simplified by making Work Assist a part of Ongoing Support. Eligible employees who need support to maintain their job can receive Ongoing Support (Work Assist) from the time they enter the program.

Details on the new Ongoing Support policy

Eligibility for Ongoing Support

Ongoing Support Eligibility for Participants with an Assessed Work Capacity of Less than 8 Hours

The new program will target those who will benefit most from a specialist disability employment program. Eligibility will be expanded, until June 2028, to support new volunteer cohorts. This will include those with a work capacity of less than 8 hours per week, and those not receiving an income support payment.

For participants that are currently employed with an assessed work capacity of 8 hours or more a week, the new program will retain the existing requirement that they must work on average at least 8 hours a week to maintain their eligibility for Ongoing Support.

Participants with an assessed work capacity of less than 8 hours a week, will be able to access Ongoing Support without needing to work an average of at least 8 hours a week.

Ongoing Support (Work Assist) Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for Ongoing Support (Work Assist) in the new program, an employee must meet the following requirements:

- Have disability, injury or illness;
- Be currently employed and have been working in the job for at least 12-weeks or there is an expectation that the employee's current Employment will last for at least 12-weeks.
- Be assessed by the Provider as having difficulty carrying out the essential requirements of their job; and
- Meet general eligibility requirements for the new specialist disability program:
 - are aged at least 14 years but have not yet attained the Age Pension qualifying age;
 - are at or above the minimum legal working age in their state or territory;
 - meet Australian residency requirements in accordance with any guidelines;
 - are not studying full time; and
 - are not already receiving assistance from another employment services provider.

Ongoing Support (Work Assist) participants will be exempt from the Employment Services Assessment (ESAt) and Job Capacity Assessment (JCA).

In line with the new broader eligibility arrangements for the new program, the requirement to be working at least 8 hours a week to receive Ongoing Support (Work Assist), will be removed.

Questions for consideration:

- What are the risks and/or benefits of removing the 8-hours a week minimum for access to Ongoing Support (including Work Assist)?

Ongoing Support Assessments

OSAs and Timing of OSA Reviews

OSAs will remain a key feature in the new program for access to Ongoing Support, with assessment services continuing to be provided by the NPA.

The provider will refer the participant for an OSA when the provider has determined the participant is likely to require Ongoing Support to remain in employment. The referral can occur when a participant in Post Placement Support is approaching a 26-week employment outcome, at any time from a 26-week employment outcome until the participant exits the program after a 52-week employment outcome, or when an employee directly registers with a provider to receive support to maintain their employment.

The OSA will be completed within 4-weeks from when the participant first enters Ongoing Support from Post Placement Support, or within 8 weeks from when an employee directly registers with a provider for Ongoing Support (Work Assist). The OSA will make a recommendation on the level of support required (Flexible, Moderate or High).

If a participant has completed their 26-Week Employment Outcome and is awaiting the results of an OSA, the provider will place the participant into the Moderate or High Ongoing Support based on the provider's assessment of the level of support needed. The support level will be updated if necessary, following the outcome of the OSA. Participants requiring Flexible Ongoing Support can only be moved into Ongoing Support and access their first instance of support following the outcome of their OSA.

If an employee who directly registers for Ongoing Support (Work Assist) is awaiting the outcome of the OSA, the provider will place the participant into Moderate Ongoing Support pending the outcome. The support level will be updated, if necessary, following the outcome of the OSA.

Participants will continue to have reassessments of their Ongoing Support need in the new program to ensure that they are receiving the appropriate level of support to meet their needs in the workplace.

The new program will introduce individual intervals for the timing of OSA reviews. This aims to reduce the administrative burden for providers and participants by recognising that some participants have more permanent and long-term support needs while others may have more changeable circumstances.

Each OSA will set the timing for the next OSA review for each individual participant at either 1, 2 or 5-years. The NPA assessor will determine the review interval required based on the participant's circumstances, the requirements of their employment, and the stability and permanence of their support needs, and in accordance with relevant guidelines. Aside from a set OSA review at either 1, 2 or 5-years, a participant will receive an OSA review when:

- the maximum instances of contacts over a 6-month period have been reached for a participant in Flexible Ongoing Support; or
- a change in circumstances means that the participant may need a higher level of Ongoing Support.¹

Questions for consideration:

- What key factors should NPA assessors take into account when deciding the timing of OSA reviews?

In what circumstances should a participant be given an OSA review period of 5-years?

- What are the risks and/or benefits of a 5-year review period?

OSA requirements for Ongoing Support (Work Assist) Participants

The new OSA process will be largely the same for Ongoing Support (Work Assist) participants, apart from a few key differences.

In the new program, employees who are eligible for Ongoing Support (Work Assist) will be able to directly register with a provider to receive immediate access to Ongoing Support. The provider will refer the participant for an OSA, which must be completed within 8-weeks from when the participant first enters Ongoing Support. The 8-week timeframe for completion of the OSA will, if required, allow providers time to understand the support needs of these participants who are completely new to the program, before they request an OSA.

While an Ongoing Support (Work Assist) participant awaits the results of their initial OSA, the provider must place the participant into Moderate Ongoing Support. The level may be changed to High Ongoing Support if necessary, following the outcome of the OSA.

Ongoing Support (Work Assist) participants will be required to undergo their first OSA Review 1-year after their initial OSA, where the NPA assessor would review their support level and, if continuing in the program, would recommend whether they should be reviewed again at 1, 2 or 5-years.

Flexible Ongoing Support cannot be recommended through the initial OSA for Ongoing Support (Work Assist) participants in the new program. Flexible Ongoing Support will be an option for these participants if they continue to require support following their first OSA review. However, if a participant has been in Ongoing Support (Work Assist) for at least 26-weeks and no longer requires Moderate or High support, a Change of Circumstance Reassessment can be triggered by the provider to move the OSA Review forward and allow for a movement to Flexible Support if required following the OSA review.

¹ In most circumstances if a participant requires a lower support level the provider can make this change without requiring an OSA review.

Questions for consideration:

- Should an NPA assessor be able to recommend Flexible Ongoing Support in the initial OSA for Ongoing Support (Work Assist) participants? What would be the risks and/or benefits of this approach?
- What are the risks and/or benefits of allowing the OSA to be completed within 8-weeks for Ongoing Support (Work Assist) participants? Would this change allow the provider to get a better understanding of the participant's support needs prior to triggering an OSA?
- If an Ongoing Support (Work Assist) participant is likely to need High Ongoing Support, it is proposed an OSA be sought as soon as possible rather than within 8 weeks? Is this sufficiently flexible?

Flexibility in contact requirements for Ongoing Support

In early 2024 the Government consulted with providers on a proposal to increase flexibility in the delivery of Ongoing Support contacts. The majority of providers consulted (more than two-thirds) supported the proposal, while some providers thought current arrangements were working well and didn't need to change, and some providers were concerned about the administrative requirements of a more flexible approach.

The feedback received has helped to inform refinements to the flexible servicing or averaging of contacts proposal being put forward for the new program.

The proposal will introduce greater flexibility in the way in which minimum contact requirements for moderate and high levels of Ongoing Support can be managed, and importantly, providers will be able to choose flexible delivery of contacts for some or all of their caseload, or to continue to deliver Ongoing Support contacts as per current arrangements.

The contact targets for each level of support would not change (6 per quarter for Moderate and 12 per quarter for High Ongoing Support), however providers would have the discretion to allocate more contacts to one participant and less to another, based on their individual support needs.

Providers using the flexible contact approach across some or all their caseload would still be required to meet the total number of contacts across their caseload. They would also need to ensure that, at a minimum, each participant receives at least 50% of their allocated contact target each quarter (3 of 6 contacts per quarter for Moderate and 6 of 12 contacts per quarter for High Ongoing Support).

Flexibility in the delivery of contacts across some or all of a caseload aims to support a more tailored and responsive approach to servicing. It will allow more support to be delivered to a participant with greater support needs, such as the need for temporary additional support to manage a workplace change, balanced by a temporary reduction in contacts for another participant with lower support needs at that point in time. The Ongoing Support contacts each individual participant received should inform future Ongoing Support Assessments.

Recovery of fees will be on a pro-rata basis for minimum contacts not delivered to Moderate or High Ongoing Support participants across the caseload, rather than the recovery of full service fees. For example, where a provider with 10 moderate Ongoing Support participants (60 contacts per quarter) only delivers 55 contacts – fee recovery will be for 5 contacts.

The new proposal would continue to include assurance based on a random-sampling approach to confirm the integrity of reporting and the quality of contacts provided. Providers must continue to keep evidence of contacts delivered but improvements to the IT system will support recording for a wider range of contact types along with new reporting to assist in managing contacts. The Department will continue to implement system improvements into the new system in a phased approach and will work with providers to simplify the administration of Ongoing Support.

The Department also considered alternative proposals, including an outcomes-based approach, which was supported by some stakeholders. However, it was considered that this option would not address concerns raised that all participants are being serviced adequately or support transparency about the use of public funding. Another proposed approach was, fee for service with a cap on the number of contacts based on the OSA. This would increase administration for claiming, would not necessarily meet the objective of flexibility to meet individual participant needs and would require additional administrative rules to manage the costs of the program.

Questions for consideration:

- What type of administrative considerations would make averaging contacts across a caseload easier for providers?
- Does the flexibility proposed allow for participants experiencing cyclical/higher than normal requirement for additional support to receive that more rapidly, while also better supporting the provision of these services?

Proposed modes of contact

Providers can deliver Ongoing Support face to face, by verbal conversation (phone), video conference, or by meaningful email or text messaging. Providers must both agree the mode of Ongoing Support with the participant and must record this in the participant's Job Plan.

A meaningful email or text message exchange must be personalised to the participant, engaging, conversational and have an outcome. One email or text message to a participant is not an acceptable instance of Ongoing Support. If the participant does not respond, the provider must reach out to the participant through other modes of contact, which would be classed as one instance of Ongoing Support.

Submitting feedback

This information paper has been released to provide additional information about the proposed changes to Ongoing Support policy. It is not a formal consultation paper with an open and close date.

A formal consultation process is currently being undertaken through the Exposure Draft version of the Request for Tender for the new program. Feedback on the proposed changes to Ongoing Support policy can be provided through the Exposure Draft process, or directly via DESconsultations@dss.gov.au, or through industry peak organisations and Disability Representative Organisations.

A formal consultation process will also occur through the planned release of an Exposure Draft version of the Request for Tender for the NPA. Further details will be provided in relation to this shortly.

Any information collected will be handled in accordance with the [Privacy Notice](#).

Further information

For more information about the new specialist disability employment program and related consultation, visit the [Department of Social Services](#) or [DSS Engage](#) websites.

You can also contact the Department via DESConsultations@dss.gov.au