



# Disability Employment Reforms

4 September 2024

## Disability Employment Reforms

### Community Development Program Provider Forum

#### Adelaide Hilton

4 September 2024, 11.00am to 12.00pm

### Slide 1: Introduction

- Ms Jacinda Still, Branch Manager, Disability Employment Implementation Branch, Department of Social Services (DSS).

### Slide 2: Acknowledgement of Country

- I would like to start by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet today, and their connections to land, water, culture and community.
- I pay respects to the Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

### Slide 3: Probity Statement

- The department is committed to conducting a fair, honest and transparent process for the design and implementation of the new specialist disability employment program and related services.
- For today's event, this means that this presentation will be made publicly available on the Department's website and any views expressed or information provided by attendees to this event will be considered along with the views expressed and information provided by other stakeholders.

### Slide 4: Overview

- To start today, I will outline some key changes in the new specialist disability employment program design (the new program) including the service provider market.

- I will provide some background about the participation and outcomes of First Nations people in the current Disability Employment Service (DES) program.
- I will finish with talking about the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence that will support the new program.

## Slide 5: Program Design

- The new program will commence from 1 July next year with the aim of improving the employment and career outcomes for people with disability.
- We are combining the existing DES into one single program to reduce complexity and enable providers to spend more time building relationships and better understanding the needs of participants and employers.
- Providers will be expected to design services to meet the unique needs of their participants and will have greater flexibility to do so.
- Eligibility will be expanded which means:
  - People with an assessed future work capacity of less than 8 hours per week will be able to volunteer; and
  - People will not need to receive an income support payment to be eligible for the new program.
- This responds to a recommendation of the Disability Royal Commission – as well as stakeholder feedback.
- The 2-year service limit is being removed, meaning people will be able to stay in the program as long as it's needed.
- There will be two new service offers – an intensive service and a flexible service.
- The intensive service is the core service, targeting all participants who are able – with the right help – to engage intensively in services and activities that will help them prepare for, find and keep a job.
- The flexible service is for participants who are unable to participate more intensively at a point in time. This includes participants who are already engaged in activities that meet their requirements or have complex or multiple barriers.
- Providers will also need to work closely with employers to identify job opportunities and assist employers to design jobs that are suitable for individual participants. This may include assistance with job design or job customisation. It's important that participants are given the best chance to have the skills and training needed in their local communities.

- Employers will also benefit from increased support including a revised wage subsidy program of up to \$10,000 when hiring an eligible participant.

### *Meaningful Engagement*

- The new program will focus on meaningful engagement between providers and participants to build positive relationships and take a partnership-based approach to goal setting and participation activities.
- The proposed approach is within the existing legislative framework and aims to drive meaningful engagement and support more flexible servicing.
- A participant's Job Plan will continue to be the primary agreement for mutual obligation requirements.
- On commencement in the program, the mandatory requirement in the Job Plan will be around participating meaningfully in the program by engaging with the provider to prepare for, seek or maintain employment.
- Working with the participant, providers will make sure that participants are carefully consulted before adding activities into the Job Plan.
- A provider will decide if a participant is meeting the requirement to meaningfully engage by considering their overall participation and willingness to work towards achieving their employment goals. Participants who aren't engaging meaningfully with the program will have their obligations to participate managed more traditionally.
- The provider will be required to shift to a Job Plan with detailed requirements if a participant is not engaging and Job Plans will include mandatory items for all key activities, such as appointments, job search and other activities. Any further non-compliance will result in application of the Targeted Compliance Framework.

## Slide 6: First Nations Peoples

- Around 3.8 per cent of the Australian population are First Nations people, yet First Nations people account for 8.1 per cent of the total current DES caseload.
- We also know people with disability have lower employment outcomes than those without. For First Nations people with disability these outcomes are even worse. This tells us that the current DES program is not meeting the needs of First Nations people with lower outcomes across all categories:
  - For First Nations peoples with a disability, only 35 percent remain in employment after 13 weeks compared to 39 per cent of all DES participants.

- This falls to 28 per cent after 26 weeks and 18 per cent after 52 weeks, in comparison to 34 per cent and 22 per cent for all DES participants.
- In the current DES program, we have three first nations specialist providers, servicing around 107 participants.

## Slide 7: First Nations Participants in Each ESA

- This slide simply demonstrates where our First Nations participants are located across the country.
- There is currently 111 Employment Service Areas in non-remote Australia and this will continue in the new program.
- We are looking to increase the diversity and range of providers to assist people with disability.
- Increasing the number of First Nations specialist providers will:
  - enable better support for First Nations participants,
  - support better placement of First Nations people with a disability in employment in organisations that are also culturally safe, and
  - lead to better and longer lasting employment for First Nations peoples with a disability.
- We have designed the new program to make it easier for small and specialist providers to enter the market, reduced administrative burden, and simplified the program to focus on delivering quality services and achieving tailored outcomes for people with disability.

## Slide 8: Market Strategy

- The Government is seeking to procure a diverse network of providers who offer high-quality expert services to participants and employers.
- This will include attracting providers with deep expertise in working with a specific cohort of participants. This is proposed to include specific disability types such as vision or hearing impairments as well as cultural diversity such as First Nations people.
- There will be an expectation of providers to demonstrate leadership in employing people with a disability. They are expected to have staff and leadership that reflects the diversity of the communities they are working with. They are also expected to engage participants and employers in the design of their services and for ongoing feedback.
- In addition, there will be changes to support market viability and increase the diversity of choice for participants.

- The market settings introduced in the 2018 DES reforms produced an oversaturation in some locations at the detriment of smaller providers.
- We also know from previous consultations with stakeholders that smaller community organisations, including specialists, find it difficult to engage and compete in a complex market with a highly competitive process.
- To address these market imbalances, the new program's market structure will prioritise diversification to further support participant choice and will build a more viable and attractive market to a wider range of small and specialist providers.

## Slide 9: Disability Employment Centre of Excellence

- The Disability Employment Centre of Excellence is an important complementary program as part of the reforms.
- The Centre of Excellence will be an evidence-informed, best-practice hub that provides resources, tools and training to help providers deliver quality employment services and supports to participants with disability and employers to improve disability employment outcomes.
- Specifically, the Centre will collect, translate, and disseminate disability employment related research and evidence of what works into best practice resources, bringing together and using existing resources available both nationally and internationally.
- The Centre will support all providers who help deliver employment outcomes for people with a disability.
- This includes providers of the new specialist disability employment program, Workforce Australia, and remote employment services.
- We expect the Centre to commence in March 2025, to support the introduction of the new specialist disability employment program from 1 July 2025. A dedicated online hub will be available from September 2025.
- The National Panel of Assessors (NPA) is a standing panel of service providers who undertake assessments for Ongoing Support, workplace modifications and the Supported Wage System.
- The NPA will also continue from 1 July 2025 and providers will set the timing of the Ongoing Support review based on stability and permanency of disability.

## Slide 10: Current Strategy and Timeframes

- Key dates for today's purposes are firstly, the timeframe for the Exposure Draft comments on the Request for Tender which has closed. I thank those who may have provided feedback.
- Secondly, the draft Deed has also been released and is open for comments until 11 September.
- We have also published information papers on 3 topics, namely: Market Strategy; Payments Model; and the newest one, Ongoing Support, which is open for comments until 6 September 2024.
- As you can see, it is a tight timeframe - however we are committed to a release a formal request for Tender by September / October.

## Slide 11: Feedback and More Information

- All information relating to the reforms, including this presentation and speaking notes will be available at [DSS dot engage dot gov dot au](https://dss.gov.au/engage) to meet the requirements of probity. I encourage you to keep connected.
- If you have any further questions and feedback, please email DES Consultations at [DSS dot gov dot au](mailto:DES@DSS.gov.au).