



TALKING POINTS

Subject	National Panel of Assessors Request for Tender Exposure Draft Public Briefing	
Date & Time	6 September 2024	12.30-1.30pm
Presenter	Tamara Weaver (MCEE), Jacinda Still and Carolyn Graham	

Tamara to present

Slide 1/Title 'Public Briefing for the National Panel of Assessors program'

- Good morning everyone.
- [introduce yourself]

Slide 2/Acknowledgement of Country

- I would like to start by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the lands 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 [to be read verbatim]

- Before we go further, I firstly need to read the Probity Statement.
- The Department of Social Services is committed to conducting a fair, honest, and transparent process for the design and implementation of the National Panel of Assessors program and related services.
- For today's event, this means that:
 - this presentation will be made publicly available on the DSS Engage website; and
 - any views expressed, or information provided, by attendees to this event, including as part of the live chat questions, will be recorded and considered, along with the views expressed and information provided by other stakeholders.
- I am really pleased to be hosting this public briefing for the National Panel of Assessors, or NPA, program commencing on 1 July 2025.
- Today we have Jacinda Still, the Branch Manager, Disability Employment Implementation and Carolyn



Graham, the Director of Supported Employment Policy.

- Carolyn will provide an overview of the NPA program policy and Jacinda will provide information about the tendering aspects.
- At the end of the presentation, we have time for questions and answers.

Slide 4/QR Code

- We invite you to join the discussion using the QR code on the slide on screen.
- I'll now hand over to Carolyn.

Slide 5/ Overview

- Thank you Tamara.
- [Carolyn to introduce herself and give a visual description]
- To start, I will provide an overview of the key topics which relate to the topics that we will cover today, including:
 1. Approach to Market



2. Indicative timeline
3. Overview of the National Panel of Assessors or NPA program
4. Key changes from the current NPA program
5. Request for Tender or RFT process, and
6. Consultation and feedback.

Slide 6/ The Approach to Market

- The approach to market will be a two-stage process, the first stage being public consultation through the Exposure Draft, and the second stage being the Request for Tender.
- The Exposure Draft stage provides an opportunity for stakeholders and interested parties to ask questions and provide feedback to the department on key policy areas and tender arrangements.
- The Exposure Draft describes the services the Government wants to buy and the process through which the department is planning to select providers of those services.
- The Exposure Draft consultation is for all stakeholders, including people with disability,



Disability Representative Organisations, employers, providers and other interested parties.

- It is an opportunity to test the details and confirm whether the services and processes proposed support the policy intent. The broad policy is set, and this consultation process helps us understand if we are taking into account all the details, have missed anything and are being clear in our communication. We welcome views from all users and stakeholder perspectives.
- Questions, feedback and requests for clarification can be forwarded to the department.
- Please keep in mind that as the Exposure Draft has been released to facilitate consultation, tender responses must not be lodged in response to the Exposure Draft.
- We will use feedback to refine our detailed program design and communications for the NPA program.
- The Request for Tender stage will then provide the formal opportunity for potential providers to submit tenders to deliver services under the NPA program.



Slide 7/ Indicative timeline

- Before we get into the detail of the presentation, I'll take you through the indicative timeline that we are working to and shown on the slide.
- Just to briefly recap, the Government's 2024 Budget announcement outlined that the NPA program would continue from 1 July 2025 in line with the new specialist disability employment program.
- The Government has agreed to undertake an approach to market to select providers for the new program.
- This timeline sets out the indicative dates for the approach to market.
- The closing date for comments on the Exposure Draft is on 27 September 2024 at 5.00 pm Canberra time.
- The Request for Tender is expected to be released in October/November, and the Request for Tender Public Briefing will be around this time too.
- The closing date and time for submitting tender responses to the Request for Tender is expected to be in November/December.



- The notification of tender outcomes is expected to be in March 2025.
- Commencement of the transition period to the new NPA program will be in April 2025.
- The new program will commence on 1 July 2025.

Slide 8/QR Code

- In case you missed it earlier, here is the QR code to support questions and feedback throughout the webinar.
- Questions and feedback submitted as part of the discussion will be recorded by the department.

Slide 9/Overview of NPA Program

- The Government is committed to ensuring that from 1 July 2025 there continues to be NPA Providers to deliver high quality, fair and independent assessment services for people with disability.
- NPA Providers will provide three types of assessment services:
 - Supported wage system or SWS assessments
 - Ongoing support assessments or OSAs, and
 - Workplace modification services or WMS assessments.



- I will provide more detail of each of the assessment types a bit later on.
- The Government wants to ensure that a diverse range of suitably qualified and experienced Respondents have the opportunity to become Providers.
- Respondents will be able to bid to deliver either:
 - All three assessment types,
 - SWS and OSA only, or
 - WMS only.
- To become a Provider, Respondents will be required to have an understanding of employment support requirements, including workplace barriers, for people with disability, including people with high support needs.
- Respondents will also be required to have qualified and experienced Assessors who meet the mandatory qualifications and skills that I will outline soon.
- It is important that all Assessors have strong communication skills to ensure high quality assessments for the person with disability.



- The Deed term for the NPA program will be from 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2028. This is in line with the new specialist disability employment program.
- From 1 April 2025, arrangements will be in place to support the transition to the new NPA program.

Slide 10/ Mandatory Qualifications and/or Skills

- As I mentioned earlier, Assessors are required to have the following skills:
 - high level communication skills with the ability to consult and provide advice in a sensitive and appropriate manner
 - ability to complete assessments to a high standard
 - ability to produce detailed written reports on completion of assessment
 - ability to assess barriers and negotiate appropriate solutions to meet the needs of people with disability, and
 - technical skills related to the relevant process of assessment.
- Each Assessor will be required to have a minimum of 2 years practical experience in disability employment,



workplace productivity assessments, or related sectors.

- Each Assessor will be required to have knowledge of:
 - duty of care and professional ethics
 - employment assistance options available to people with disability seeking employment, and
 - relevant work health and safety, industrial relations and anti-discrimination legislation.
- Assessors who want to deliver OSA or SWS assessments should also have a minimum of a diploma, or higher level qualification in one of the following fields:
 - psychology
 - rehabilitation counsellor, or
 - vocational training,
- If a potential Assessor has another diploma or higher-level qualification which the Provider considers is relevant to providing the required assessments, they should contact the department for approval.
- WMS Assessors are required to have a full, up to date, qualification that is registered, accredited or recognised with the relevant association, being:



- occupational therapy (registered with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency or AHPRA)
 - physiotherapy (registered with AHPRA)
 - nurse (registered with AHPRA)
 - medical practitioner (registered with AHPRA)
 - exercise physiologist (accredited with Exercise and Sports Science Australia), or
 - rehabilitation counsellor (recognised with Australia Society of Rehabilitation Counsellors or Rehabilitation Counselling Association of Australasia).
- I will just reiterate that if there are individuals who wish to be Assessors who do not hold these qualifications, approval must be sought from the department in writing.
 - Assessors will be provided with links to a training for OSAs and SWS assessments that must be completed before they begin undertaking assessment work.

Slide 11/ Performing Assessment Services

- As mentioned, the three assessment services will be undertaken from approved Assessors.



- Under the new NPA program, it will be the responsibility of the NPA Provider to approve their individual Assessors.
 - Assessors should only be approved if they have the mandatory qualifications and/or skills outlined by the department.
- This change has been implemented to reduce red tape on NPA Providers.
- If an NPA Provider wishes to approve an Assessor who does not have the listed mandatory qualifications, that Provider will be required to write to the department seeking approval.
- The department will reserve the right to request documentary evidence of relevant qualifications and skills for each Assessor at any time.
- NPA Providers will be subject to program assurance activities.
- Program assurance activities will include checks that Assessors are not undertaking assessments where there may be a conflict of interest.



- What this means is that Assessors should not be undertaking assessments for any organisations who are considered a related entity.
 - As an example, lets take an Assessor who works for two Providers - Provider A and Provider B, who is also a DES Provider.
 - Provider A gets allocated an assessment of a Participant of the DES Provider (Provider B).
 - The Assessor should not undertake the assessment on behalf of Provider A as they also work for Provider B and it would be considered a conflict of interest.
- Assessment services will be allocated to Providers using the department's IT systems on a fair and equitable basis.

Slide 12/ Supported Wage System

- The Supported Wage System, or SWS, is an industrial relations mechanism that has been in place since 1994.
- The SWS enables employers to pay a productivity based wage to people whose work productivity is reduced because of disability.



- For example, someone with an assessed work capacity of 70 per cent is entitled to 70 per cent of the relevant pay rate in their award or registered agreement.
- This assessment can only be undertaken by a qualified independent NPA Assessor.
- Further detailed information on SWS assessments will be provided in guidelines.

Slide 13/ Ongoing support assessments

- From 1 July 2025, ongoing support assistance will be available to participants of the new specialist disability employment program who meet specific criteria.
- Ongoing support will also be available to participants in another category referred to as Ongoing Support (Work Assist).
 - Ongoing support (Work Assist) will provide support to an employee, and their employer, if they are not currently receiving assistance from a new program provider.
- The assessment process for an ongoing support (Work Assist) provider will be the same process as a regular ongoing support assessment.



- An NPA Assessor will undertake the assessment to determine the level of support the participant requires. The levels are:
 - none – where the OSA recommends the Participant does not require Ongoing Support
 - Flexible Ongoing Support
 - Moderate Ongoing Support, or
 - High Ongoing Support.
- The NPA Assessor will also make a recommendation on the duration of support and timing for the next OSA review.
- The review interval will be 1, 2, or 5 years based on the participant's circumstances and needs.
- The OSA will normally consist of:
 - an interview with the new program Provider and new program Participant
 - a file assessment of support provided in the period since Job Placement or since the last OSA, and
 - a workplace assessment which should include an interview with the Participant's employer.



- Further detailed information on ongoing support assessments will be provided in guidelines

Slide 14/Workplace Modifications Services assessments

- NPA Assessors will conduct an WMS assessment for people with disability to identify barriers to accessing or performing their work.
- WMS assessments will recommend equipment, modifications and other support, funded through the Employment Assistance Fund, to remove the identified barriers.
- Respondents can also bid to deliver specialist WMS assessments.
- Specialist WMS assessment can be undertaken by an Assessor who has specialist skills in a particular disability.
 - For example, an Assessor may be suitably qualified to deliver specialist WMS assessments for individuals with vision impairments.
- Further detailed information on ongoing support assessments will be provided in guidelines



Slide 15 – Coverage

- The NPA program will provide services across 110 Employment Services Areas or ESAs, as well as potentially on Norfolk Island, which will be confirmed with the final RFT.
- The department will implement a change from the current program and introduce caps on the number of NPA providers who deliver services in each ESA.
- Currently, there are no caps on how many providers are in each ESA and the department has heard that there are issues of oversaturation in many ESAs.
- The department has also heard that many providers would like to take on more assessment services.
- In response to this feedback, the department will cap the number of providers based on the historical number of assessment services in each ESA.
- We are very interested in your feedback on this change and welcome any feedback today or via email to DESConsultations@dss.gov.au.
- Respondents can bid to deliver services in an entire ESA or to only provide partial coverage.



- Respondents must be able to deliver face-to-face assessment services in each ESA they tender for.

Slide 16/Performance management

- The department is committed to ensuring NPA Providers deliver high quality assessment services for people with disability.
- NPA Providers will be required to adhere to a NPA Performance Framework, as well as comply with the:
 - Disability Services and Inclusion (Code of Conduct) Rules 2023
 - Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as outlined in the RFT document, and
 - National Standards for Disability Services (NSDS).
- As per the current arrangements, NPA providers will be required to obtain a certificate of compliance with the NSDS.
- This will include having an audit undertaken by an accredited certification body.
- The department will provide more information about these processes in guidelines.

Slide 17/Fees

- All assessment fees will be paid via a fee for service model when an assessment is completed.



- Fees for providers will be indexed annually on 1 July, with the first indexation point on 1 July 2026.
- All fee amounts I mention will be inclusive of GST.
- The fee for an OSA will be \$475.36.
- The fee for an SWS assessment will be \$679.10, with additional fees available for long assessments or assessments in remote areas.
- The fee for a WMS assessment will be \$135.82 per hour up to a maximum of 5 hours, with additional fees available for long assessments or assessments requiring travel.

Slide 18 - key changes from current program

- Before I hand over to Jacinda, I want to reiterate some of the changes from the current program.
- Firstly, that NPA Providers will be responsible for approving individual Assessors who work for them, including subcontractors.
- It will be the responsibility of the Provider to ensure all of their Assessors are appropriately qualified.



- The department will undertake program assurance activities to ensure that Assessors are appropriately qualified.
- Secondly, that the department will introduce caps on the number of NPA Providers in each ESA.
- This is in line with feedback from current stakeholders.
- The department welcomes feedback on these changes, as well as on any information in the Exposure Draft.

Slide 19/QR Code

- Another reminder of the QR code on the slide so you can join in the questions and feedback.
- I'll now hand over to Jacinda to go through processes relating to the tender process.
- [Jacinda to introduce herself and give a visual description]

Slide 20/Request for Tender process – lodging a response

- I'll now go through the key aspects of the Request for Tender process.



- These next few slides are very important for those organisations that are considering whether or not to prepare a response to the Request for Tender.
- For other stakeholders, the subject of criteria is also an area we are interested in receiving feedback on. This is to ensure we are identifying what is important for assessing responses.
- I will go through these in some detail, and it is important that you read the relevant parts in the exposure draft and then the Request for Tender when it is released.
- They are pretty technical as a result, so please bear with me.
- Throughout the next few slides, I will refer to a Respondent. What I mean by this is the organisation or body that prepares a tender bid or response and submits it.
- Lodging a response to the request for tender will constitute an offer by the Respondent to provide the services on the terms and conditions set out in their response and the Draft Deed.



- It is the document that the department will use for the evaluation.
- When lodging a response, there are a few aspects that you need to be aware of.
- The Request for Tender document will include conditions for participation and minimum content and format requirements.
- Respondents must satisfy these elements in order for their response to be considered against the evaluation criteria. In other words, these are the threshold requirements for a response to move forwards into technical evaluation.
 - The Conditions for participation are set out in Section 3.1 of the Exposure Draft.
 - Respondents must meet a number of conditions in order for their response to be included in the evaluation process.
 - There are also Minimum content and format requirements.
 - These are set out in in Section 3.2 of the Exposure Draft.



- The Request for Tender will also include information about employment service areas and coverage. For this process:
 - For Employment Service Areas
 - ESA boundaries will remain the same.
 - Maps of each region are available in Appendix C of the Exposure Draft.
 - The department is looking to publish data on data dot gov relating to the historical number of assessment services in each ESA.
 - A link to the information will be uploaded onto DSS Engage once it has been published.

Slide 21/Request for Tender process – evaluation of responses

- Responses will be evaluated through a staged approach as outlined on this slide.
 - Stage 1: Responses will be downloaded and undergo checks, including checking that all information was provided and was received by the closing time and date.



- Stage 2: Responses will be assessed, noting that the department will use all information available, including the responses to criteria and any available data and referee reports.
- Stage 3 – Right Fit For Risk assessment: The department, with the assistance of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), will consider the status of a Respondent’s RFFR accreditation, or readiness to achieve RFFR accreditation under the External Systems Assurance Framework (ESAF).
- Stage 4 – The department will determine the financial viability of Respondents, again using all information available to it, including the information provided by Respondents.
- Stage 5 – The department will conduct an overall value for money assessment to inform recommendations for offering a Deed.
- Stage 6 – The department may enter into negotiations with one or more respondents, including detailed discussions with respondents



with the goal of achieving the best value for money.

- The Group Manager – Disability Employment is the Delegate for this process and will make the final decisions. Any decision of the Delegate in relation to the outcome of the Request for Tender process is final and not subject to review or appeal.

Slide 22/How will tenders be assessed?

- There are three proposed selection criteria.
 - The first criterion is Organisational Capability. This will apply to all Respondents.
 - The second criterion is Quality. This will apply to all Respondents.
 - The third criterion is capability and specialist knowledge to be able to deliver specialist WMS assessments. This will only apply to Respondents who wish to bid for specialist WMS services and only they should complete this selection criteria in their response.
- I will go through each criterion shortly.



- Respondents should include evidence such as case studies, examples or relevant data to support their responses.
- Responses to each criterion will be scored (subject to weighting), and the scores will inform the value for money evaluation and allocation of business.
- In responding to the selection criteria, Respondents should refer to the Statement of Requirements in the Request for Tender.

Slide 23/Organisational Capability (SC1)

- The first selection criterion is about organisational capability.
- It is proposed that this criterion asks the Respondent to demonstrate, against each of the sub-criteria, their organisation's capability to deliver OSA / SWS and or WMS assessment services.

Slide 24/Quality (SC2)

- The second selection criterion is about quality.
- It is proposed that this criterion asks the Respondent to describe how their organisation will provide and



maintain quality assessment services, including any assessment services provided by subcontractors.

Slide 25/Specialist WMS (SC3)

- The third selection criterion applies to Respondents who wish to deliver specialist WMS services only.
- Respondents who do not wish to deliver specialist WMS services should enter 'not applicable' into the tender form.
- It is proposed that this criterion asks Respondents to describe their organisation's capability and specialist knowledge to be able to deliver specialist WMS services, in line with the sub-criteria.

Slide 26/Financial viability and other checks

- The department may perform security, probity and financial investigations as necessary in relation to any Respondent, its employees, officers, partners, associates, subcontractors or related entities.
- Respondents must satisfy the department of their financial viability to meet the requirements of the Request for Tender.



- Respondents must also provide information to allow the department to undertake a credentials check on the organisation.
- The department reserves the right to make any enquiries it considers appropriate to the evaluation of an organisation.

Slide 27/Legal and other matters

- Chapter 8 of the Exposure Draft offers comprehensive information on conditions and requirements for organisations that intend to submit a response.
- It is the Respondents' responsibility to ensure that it has met these requirements when lodging the Request for Tender. For example, you will need to:
 - read the entire Request for Tender
 - make your own inquiries regarding the risks, contingencies and other circumstances that may impact on your decision to submit a response
 - satisfy yourselves as to the terms and conditions of the Draft Deed and ability to comply
 - make your own assessment and investigations
 - take note of the closing date and time



- satisfy yourself that your organisation's response is complete, accurate and provides the necessary information to be assessed
- keep a copy of the submitted response and attachments.
- Respondents should note that the Indigenous Procurement Policy applies to this procurement. Further information on the Indigenous Procurement Policy is at www.niaa.gov.au.
- Essentially what this means is that:
 - The department may apply the principles of the Indigenous Procurement Policy in selecting providers for each of the ESAs.
 - Mandatory Set Aside requirements may apply to this RFT for ESAs that intersect with a 'remote area' as identified in the Remote Indigenous Procurement Policy (RIPP) map on the National Indigenous Australians Agency website.
 - This means that in those ESAs, the department will first determine whether an Indigenous small or medium enterprise could deliver the required good or service on a value for money basis.



- If any resultant Deed is a High Value Contract (i.e. at least \$7.5 million), the Mandatory Minimum Requirements for Indigenous participation will apply.
- This means the provider must meet certain Indigenous employment and business participation targets.
- Respondents must also ensure compliance with all relevant laws and government policy in preparing and lodging tenders and taking part in the RFT process.
- The department is committed to conducting a fair, honest and transparent process for the procurement of services for the NPA program.
- The department has appointed Ashurst Law as the external Probity Adviser. The role of the Probity Adviser is to advise the Delegate on the probity and integrity of the procurement processes.

Slide 28/Consultation and Feedback

- We want to hear from stakeholders.



- Feedback, comments and questions on the **Exposure Draft** can be submitted to DESConsultations@dss.gov.au
- The department has issued a Companion Document to suggest questions that stakeholders and potential respondents may wish to provide feedback (although any other feedback is also welcome).
- Easyread versions of the NPA Exposure Draft and companion guide will be available shortly.
- Submissions need to be made before 5.00 pm (Canberra time) on 27 September 2024 to ensure they will be considered in preparing the formal Request for Tender.

[hand back to Tamara]

Slide 29/Questions and Answers

- We now have approximately 30 minutes to answer your questions on the Exposure Draft.
- Please note that per probity statement at the start of this session, any views expressed, or information provided, by you will be recorded and considered,



along with the views expressed and information provided by other stakeholders.

Slide 30/Thank you

- That's all we have time for today.
- If you have any further questions and feedback, please email DES Consultations at DSS dot gov dot au.
- We welcome your feedback and will be keeping track of all the comments and questions we receive to inform our further communication and the final design.
- <Closing remarks>
- <Thank everyone for their time>