

Next Steps in Supported Employment: consultation on the way forward Paper (the Consultation)

Email Submission Cover sheet

Please complete Table 1 and include this form with your submission if you are sending it via email to sepolicy@dss.gov.au

Submissions close 5pm AEST, 22 June 2025.

Table 1: Submission details

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Name:	Organisation: Consumers of Mental Health WA
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Next Steps in Supported Employment

Consumers of Mental Health WA

June 2025



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1. Acknowledgement of Country

Consumers of Mental Health WA proudly acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australia's First Peoples and the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Land and Water on which we live and work. We acknowledge Western Australia's First Nation's communities and culture and pay respect to Aboriginal Elders past, present and emerging.

We recognise that Sovereignty was never ceded and the significant and negative consequences of colonisation and dispossession on Aboriginal communities.

Despite the far-reaching and long-lasting impacts of colonisation on First Nations communities, Aboriginal people remain resilient and continue to retain a strong connection to culture. We acknowledge the strong connection of First Nations Peoples to Country, culture and community, and the centrality of this to positive mental health and wellbeing.

2. Preamble

2.1 About the Respondents

Consumers of Mental Health WA (CoMHWa) is Western Australia's peak body for and by mental health consumers (people with a past or present lived experience of mental health issues, psychological or emotional distress). We are a not-for-profit, systemic advocacy organisation independent from mental health services that exists to listen to, understand and act upon the voices of consumers. We work collaboratively with other user-led organisations and a diversity of stakeholders to advance our rights, equality, recovery and wellbeing.

2.2 Request for Feedback

CoMHWa works to uphold the dignity and human rights of consumers, through providing advocacy in leading change with and for consumers. We appreciate notification of the outcomes of our submission to this consultation in order to understand and communicate the difference made through our work.

Please provide feedback via the contact details on this submission's cover page.

2.3 Language

CoMHWa uses the term mental health 'consumer' throughout this submission. Mental health consumers to refer to people who identify as having a past or present lived experience of psychological and emotional distress, irrespective of whether they have received a diagnosis of mental illness or accessed services. Other ways people may choose to describe themselves include "peer", "survivor", "person with a lived experience" and "expert by experience".

This definition is based on consumers' call for respect, dignity and choice in how we choose to individually identify. As individuals we choose different ways to name and describe our experiences that may confirm or trouble ideas about 'mental illness'.

CoMHWa endorses Black Dog Institute's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre's [universal definition](#) of lived experience for First Nation communities:

A lived experience recognises the effects of ongoing negative historical impacts and or specific events on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It encompasses the cultural, spiritual, physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of the individual, family or community.

People with lived or living experience of suicide are those who have experienced suicidal thoughts, survived a suicide attempt, cared for someone through a suicidal crisis, been bereaved by suicide or having a loved one who has died by suicide, acknowledging that this experience is significantly different and takes into consideration Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ways of understanding social and emotional wellbeing.

This definition recognises that there are fundamental differences to how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience and define mental health challenges and suicide compared to mainstream definitions.

2.4 About the consultation

Information reproduced from the Department of Social Services: <https://engage.dss.gov.au/next-steps-in-supported-employment-consultation-on-the-way-forward/>

On the 25th of March, the Department of Social Services (DSS) opened consultation on the Next Steps in Supported Employment. This consultation sought views on the way forward for supported and open employment, particularly options for increasing inclusive employment, raising subminimum wages, and ending segregated employment. The findings contribute to DSS's consideration of the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability Final Report (hereafter, the Disability Royal Commission report) in relation to employment for people with disability.

Feedback was invited on the following questions:

- Is there any other existing work that is missing from the table at Appendix 3?
- What is your ideal future state for the supported employment sector and employment of people with disability with high support needs?
- What additional actions do you consider are necessary to increase employment of people with high support needs in open/inclusive settings?
- The Royal Commission recommended the development of a Plan or Roadmap to guide further reform in the supported employment sector.
- What would you like to see included in such a plan?
- How could the sector best increase wages for people with disability while avoiding job losses?
 - Are there examples that currently exist that can be leveraged?
 - Are there new approaches that could be tested?

-
- Do you see a role for workplaces which provide specialised employment opportunities for people with disability in the future?
 - If so, what should these workplaces look like?
 - How could the benefits of supported employment settings be reflected in open employment settings?

3. Introduction

CoMHWA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Department of Social Services on the Next Steps in Supported Employment consultation. As the peak body in WA for mental health consumers, we focus in this submission on providing feedback informed by the experiences of people with psychosocial disability and/or mental health challenges, including those who have experiences with supported employment and/or disability employment services.

CoMHWA's position is that segregated employment must end, in line with Recommendation 7.32 of the Disability Royal Commission report, which supports a transition away from segregated employment. CoMHWA has heard from our members that the current system of supported employment, and current pathways to open employment, are not providing the tailored, person-centered support that people with psychosocial disability need in order to find and maintain meaningful work. However, many people with psychosocial disability also told us that some of the supports available through segregated employment pathways were useful, and so CoMHWA feels that these supports must be made available in open employment settings, with sustained investment, work, and policy reform to build supported and inclusive open employment. We believe that reforms and work should be led by people with disability, including psychosocial disability, and in particular, those who have had lived experience with segregated systems.

We base our submission on:

- A survey that was distributed to CoMHWA members, open between 23rd of April and 4th of June 2025, with 17 responses. 11 of those responses were from people who have personal experiences with supported employment or with accessing disability employment services.
- A focus group conducted on Friday, May 23rd, and an additional consultative discussion on Wednesday, June 4th, through which we heard from a total of 7 members.
- Ongoing data collection and input from CoMHWA's Individual Advocacy and Peer Pathways (service navigation) programs.
- Ongoing consultation with consumers in Western Australia on joint priorities for an improved mental health system
- Consumer representation in relevant settings, including but not limited to: Primary Health networks (WAPHA), WA regional equivalents of the Local Health Networks (regional mental health services under the WA Health Board structure), the Mental Health Commission and the health complaints agency, Health and Disability Services Complaints Office (HaDSCO).

CoMHWAs has structured our submission around the questions asked in the consultation. We have not answered all questions, focusing instead on the key questions that pertain to those issues highlighted as most important to our members and to consumers.

4. Response to Consultation Questions

What is your ideal future state for the supported employment sector and employment of people with disability with high support needs?

CoMHWAs ideal future state is one in which people with psychosocial disability and/or mental health challenges are able to access specialised supports to find and maintain employment within an integrated and inclusive employment system where people with disability do not experience segregation in employment. In the words of one of the consumers we heard from during our consultations, this should look like:

Empowering work environments with a culture focussed on quality-of-life outcomes that are universally available to the everyday Australian citizen. Nothing less.

CoMHWAs believes that this should be a state in which people with psychosocial disability have access to:

- **Genuine choice and control around work**, with better options for type of workplace and work they are engaging with (including more options around roles where there is more support available) and clear, facilitated pathways to transition to employment in open workplaces
- **Economic justice**, with people with psychosocial disability enjoying the same right to a minimum wage that other workers experience. CoMHWAs supports the statements made by Disability Rights Organisations in *Economic Justice for People with Disability: A National Blueprint*.¹
- **Employment opportunities in open workplaces that have the knowledge and capacity to support employment of people with psychosocial disability, including opportunities where they are able to access significant support if needed**. Supports and accommodations currently only available in supported employment that are helpful in enabling people with psychosocial disability to find employment should be available in open employment settings.
- **Meaningful inclusion in workforces across industries and sectors**, encouraged by Government initiatives such as requirements for a certain percentage of employees to be people with disability for larger enterprises, requirements for recruitment/employment of people of disability as part of winning government contracts and the setting of targets for employment opportunities in the Australian Public Sector.

- **Person-centered disability employment services** and employment supports that provide people with psychosocial disability connection with meaningful work that matches their strengths, skills, and needs.

What additional actions do you consider are necessary to increase employment of people with high support needs in open/inclusive settings?

1. Ensure the diverse voices, needs and experiences of people with psychosocial disability design and inform actions, initiatives and plans to increase employment of people with disability.

A major theme in CoMHWA's consultation with consumers was that people with psychosocial disability and/or mental health challenges are rarely asked for their perspectives and experiences, and, when they do speak up, are seldom heard by the services and systems that are there to support them in employment. It is important to ensure that the voices of people with psychosocial disability are heard and acted on at both the individual level, to ensure they receive meaningful support and employment, and at the service and systems levels to ensure that the structures and services that are in place to support them are informed by their experiences and a strong understanding of what best meets their needs. Consumers are experts on their own experiences and needs, and ought to take priority in the development of the policies, programs, and systems that affect them. We support the recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission report, calling for increased involvement of people with disability in decision-making and reform, including in identifying the need to engage participants in DES reform and design (7.16), and to include people with disability in convening a Disability Employment Rights Council (7.24).

Consumers suggested that disability employment services could develop connections with the experiences of consumers through mechanisms such as having consumer advisory groups. It is important for organisations and enterprises to develop a strong sense of the intersecting identities and experiences of people with psychosocial disability, in the words of one consumer:

They need an understanding of what it takes practically to be a person with disability.

Some participants described staff seeming to have very little understanding of how to support people with psychosocial disability and mental health challenges, meaning they were put in the position of having to educate services:

I have to do all these bits of prep and research. [Staff] have no idea about the values and standards about what the standards and legislation is. You then end up having to take the weight of learning and informing people.

2. Extensively reform disability employment services in order to increase employment of people with psychosocial disability in open settings

Another dominant theme in our discussions with consumers was that disability employment services are not meeting the needs of people with psychosocial disability, even though people with psychosocial disability make up a large proportion (41%) of those accessing DES.² Several participants noted that while they experienced benefits from and valued specific supports they accessed through DES, to get those supports they had to endure inadequate services focused on deficits rather than participant strengths. Most participants described having poor experiences with services and agencies:

I have yet to meet anyone who has found a job using a disability employment service or who has had a good experience with one.

Consumers shared that the shortcomings of those services are that they are characterised by a one-size-fits-all approach, stigmatising language, lack of open communication, and participants not being heard or given the opportunity to explain their capabilities, skills, experiences and needs:

They have an assumption of deficits, and should be more strength-based.

I was treated like my needs don't matter [...] you're made to feel like you're asking for a lot.

CoMHWAs notes that work to reform DES is already underway, with plans to implement reforms in this year. CoMHWAs hopes this reform delivers better experiences and outcomes for people with psychosocial disability. To add support to reform, and provide feedback for future work to strengthen DES, we summarise here what our consultation with consumers revealed about how reform could embed person-centered approaches in DES, and capability to respond to the needs of people with psychosocial disability. Consumers felt that disability employment services reforms should focus on the following areas:

Encouraging person-centered support that respects the dignity, choices, capability and rights of people with psychosocial disability. Participants spoke about not being fully informed about specific circumstances of their employment, with agencies communicating with their employers without their knowledge, and some were not asked for consent before their personal information was shared, sometimes very publicly. A couple of participants described encountering stigma and problematic language, including language using diagnostic labels they don't use for themselves. Consumers spoke of the importance of DES respecting their rights to privacy and confidentiality, given the stigma that is attached to mental health. Participants were, as a result, left feeling they were not understood or heard, and not involved in their own employment choices. The very few consumers with positive experiences described that what made the difference was agencies that work in a person-centered, trauma-informed manner suggestive of good understanding of mental health and psychosocial disability.

Prioritising meaningful employment opportunities and remove disincentives to this. Consumers described that DES placements take a generic approach that sees the abilities, skills and capacities of all people with disability as the same, resulting in consumers being offered roles that were inappropriate. Their experiences are echoed in recent research into DES, which has found that poor practice in DES is often a result of “narrow conceptualisations of ‘disability-appropriate’ jobs” and therefore little time spent exploring good job matches and connecting into pathways enabling future career growth.³ The types of roles consumers were offered were limited to specific workplaces, and were often entry-level, as one consumer described:

They said “here are the employers we work with:” big players, Maccas, Woolworths. I said, I am functional enough to return to my old sector at a lower level with support, they just flat out refused. [...] They then sent me to a café, I have physical disability that makes me clumsy, the café sacked me and it was so awful and upsetting, a totally inappropriate placement that was not thought through. [...] I asked about some meaningful employment opportunities and they really didn’t want to hear that.

Inadequate job placement was seen by a significant portion of consumers to be the result of DES trying to meet quotas for interviews and placements, as the following quotes from different consumers illustrate:

I was on DSP and one week away from commencing a PhD I had been accepted into. They [The DES] called me and told me that I had to go to an interview for a position to wash cars in a dealership. I told them that I would have to tell the employer that I would be studying full time from the week after the interview. The DES staff were rude and tried to frame this as my refusing the interview, which would have suspended my pension for breaching my participation agreement.

Nothing works for me so far. I felt most agencies were more focused on their own funding than their services.

I have multiple skills and can be a productive employee if the employer is willing to accommodate my disabilities, and these government funded employment agencies should do their best to help people like me connect with employers who are willing to accommodate people with disabilities, not just focused on how to get government funding!

CoMHWB therefore feels there is a pressing need for disincentives to meaningful job placement, such as quotas, to be removed. One consumer highlighted the benefits of shifting to an emphasis on meaningful work placements:

The benefit to organisations is healthy work environments, that are transparent and capable of accepting difference as a norm and not a diminished threat. The value to organisations can be measured in trust levels and engagement, versus a primary focus on monetary KPI outcomes.

Removing onerous reporting, engagement, and employment hours requirements will enable more people with psychosocial disability to engage with supports. Some providers require consumers to attend check-ins in person, and for consumers, this often meant that time they needed off to attend to their wellbeing to maintain their capacity for work was instead spend attending a check-in:

You need to engage more to keep them but you're working so you don't have the capacity to engage as much.

Some consumers described how filling in forms and questions took up whole check-in sessions, even eating into time they needed to discuss urgent supports. One consumer told us about tedious reporting of employment hours and income, despite their DES provider having access to their Centrelink reporting on the same figures. The requirement to work a minimum threshold of hours to maintain supports through DES, and the requirement to be referred through Centrelink to get supports, have both been a barrier to support experienced by several consumers, and so it is a welcome change that these requirements are being changed as part of the reforms currently being implemented.

3. Resource mental health and disability advocacy organisations and community services to provide tailored employment supports

Outside of existing DES, supporting the growth of initiatives that are embedded in the community and service settings where consumers are already getting supports would make available the kind of tailored, integrated support for employment that consumers tell us they would find most valuable. CoMHWA heard from consumers of the need for individualised, tailored supports, provided in a context where their mental health experiences would be understood and not stigmatised. One consumer explained that they would like a program in which:

Workers check for understanding from participants before undergoing placements with employers. Education provided to employers about different disabilities to reduce stigma. Participants are supported to understand their rights as an employee. Participants are supported to communicate their needs to employers so appropriate workplace adjustments are made.

Another consumer commented that when reflecting on their experiences with DES, they wished for:

More creativity and not assuming someone isn't capable. [...] They weren't willing to put in the effort of finding the obscure options, speaking with a company about creating a new role and really analysing my strengths.

An existing model that provides a guide for delivering the type of support consumers describe is Individualised Placement Support (IPS), which is already successfully running in some service settings across Australia, including in WA, and which often complements or partners with existing Disability Employment Services.⁴ IPS is built on eight core practice principles;⁵ in plain terms:

- It is open to anyone who wants to work
- It is often embedded into service settings where employment specialists work with mental health professionals
- Employment specialists aim to give information about impacts of employment on benefits (such as DSP)
- It aims to get people into work by finding jobs they want to do that fit their skills and needs
- It connects individuals with employment options in open/competitive settings
- It aims to secure work fast, beginning job searches quickly (within 4 weeks)
- Employment specialists work together with employers, developing relationships with different employers to create tailored and appropriate employment opportunities in open workplaces and learn about different work environments
- Employment specialists provide ongoing individualised support to the person and employer for as long as needed once a person is in a job.

IPS has a compelling evidence base demonstrating its effectiveness in securing positive employment outcomes for people with mental health challenges,⁶ though evidence also shows positive outcomes for other groups, including other people with disability.⁷ Australian research has shown it achieves better outcomes for people with psychosocial disability than DES.⁸ A cost-benefit analysis of a trial IPS program has showed favourable results for return on investment and impact of IPS compared to both DES and Jobactive.⁹

Acknowledging the evidence and impact of IPS, the 2020 Productivity Commission mental health report recommended broad rollout of IPS programs across Australia to community mental health services;¹⁰ however, action on this recommendation has been uneven. IPS programs are run in community mental health services in all but one health region in South Australia, and are delivered by Community Bridging Services, a not-for-profit disability service provider, but other states do not enjoy the same level of access to this program. DSS has funded rollout of IPS for young people in many headspace centres, and IPS

programs are also currently run in some Medicare Mental Health Centres, though recent research has highlighted that vocational supports in adult mental health have not kept pace with the youth mental health sector.¹¹ For people with psychosocial disability and/or mental health challenges to access this support, federal Government commitment to resourcing and rollout of the program across mental health and disability organisations and services is needed.

Having options for initiatives tailored to meet the needs of people with mental health challenges, rather than those taking a one-size-fits-all approach, will allow people to get support from programs that have the knowledge and capability to provide helpful support for them. As one consumer commented:

Don't fall back into a one size fits all approach and then squeeze everyone into it.

4. Develop more pathways and support options for building employment skills, capacity and knowledge, accounting for the intersecting needs of people with disability

Consumers felt that having access to something to supplement or build their capacity and employment skills is important, such as training or even support to develop a business. Consumers who have received capacity-building supports of this kind have valued them. CoMHWa heard that there are services that do this well, and that the hallmark of those services is considering the intersecting needs of consumers, including connecting in broader mental health and family and domestic violence supports where needed to support consumers' wellbeing. Consumers who access NDIS for supports around psychosocial disability told CoMHWa that access to employment coaches through NDIS is helpful. However, recent changes to NDIS funding and supports had, some noted, made it more challenging to access the supports with employment they had previously found helpful.

5. Increase Disability Support Payments (DSP) and other support payments, or the threshold for income affecting such payments, to better support people when they are building capacity for work

Many consumers shared that the impacts of supported employment and DES engagement on DSP and other payments causes uncertainty and anxiety, as the following comments illustrate:

[W]hat [people] earn is impacting payments like DSP. Centrelink needs to come along with the reform.

It's not just your Centrelink – If you have social housing, these working placements can bring your rent up and impact housing.

One consumer shared that there came a point at which the hours they were working so significantly impacted their payments that they struggled to support themselves as their income was not sufficient to cover day-to-day needs. As highlighted by the National Mental Health Consumer Alliance in their *Federal Election Platform*, the DSP is insufficient to cover basic costs of living, and, for people with psychosocial

disability, falls far short of covering mental healthcare and specialist services. These payments must be increased to enable more consumers to get the mental health and everyday living essentials they need, which is an essential prerequisite for building their capacity for work.¹²

6. Undertake efforts to counter stigma around mental health and psychosocial disability in disability employment supports and in open employment settings

Stigmatising assumptions of reduced capacity and ability is a major barrier consumers identified, as they spoke of the need for:

Less stigma! Employers need to realise that people with disabilities want to work and we are more than capable to work. We shouldn't be seen as our diagnoses.

This was so both for consumers finding work themselves in open employment, and those who access services to support them to find work. Many consumers shared that accessing supported employment and DES came with a sense of internalised stigma, stigma encountered from some staff in those settings (including some who use stigmatising language) and stigma from the community:

[A]ny time I accessed an organisation to find work - without a MH label - I got referrals. Any other time - never got referrals.

Consumers often fear encountering stigma and discrimination when accessing supports, as this requires disclosing details of their mental health and psychosocial disability to staff who may carry internalised stigmas:

The system forces you to disclose, even if you don't feel safe enough. To get the benefits, you have to be really open, and then you cop the stigma and the judgements.

7. Develop the Peer workforce both as a career pathway for people with psychosocial disability and to increase availability of peer supports in disability employment services and other service sectors

Some consumers noted the need for job placement opportunities to include opportunities in the Peer workforce, where the strengths of their Lived Experience are recognised:

As someone on NDIS, now places are acknowledging Lived Experience, it would be great if this was taken into account for job placement. [...] If they are looking to hire people, what about us?

Consumers noted that when more people with disability were employed within a service, they had a better experience of that service. As one consumer phrased it:

A professional with experience enacts support differently to a professional with experience, and the addition of a psychosocial disability. The first professional predominantly believes they are delivering the

same practices; they are not. The first professional is the majority of the workforce. Change is needed that acknowledges and enacts improving outcomes from client-centred and evidence-based practices versus professional expertise and evidenced-based. Change the culture.

Several consumers mentioned that more workplaces should look at developing Peer workforces if their work is in a field with Peer workforces, and suggested that this would enable people with disability to feel better supported in the workplace, as the following comments demonstrate:

[What would be helpful is] a support/peer worker, someone you can call on [...] Now we have the rise of the peer workforce, and businesses are so slow to implement this, it took ages for them to take up diversity issues in the past, to add to their social capital. I think we should encourage businesses to take up the peer workforce along the same lines.

Get peer workers into more places or better yet assist peer workers that are already working to be recognised as a peer worker. Encourage, reward [...] and assist businesses to implement a peer worker program.

Several consumers specifically mentioned that NDIS could benefit from more Peer workforce inclusion, and that this would provide career prospects for NDIS participants seeking employment.

The Royal Commission recommended the development of a Plan or Roadmap to guide further reform in the supported employment sector. What would you like to see included in such a plan?

CoMHWA believes that any such Plan or Roadmap should be co-designed with people with disability, including people with psychosocial disability, and people with disability with experiences of the supported employment sector. People with psychosocial disability should also be involved in overseeing implementation of plans, reporting and evaluation of outcomes, to ensure that actions are authentically led by people with disability. CoMHWA would like to see this Roadmap lay out a plan for a transition out of segregated employment, with a clear timeline and accountability mechanisms identified, as opposed to a Roadmap that plans merely to reform supported employment. Recommendation 7.32 of the Disability Royal Commission Report contains a starting point for what a Roadmap ought to cover. Our consultation with consumers highlighted that the people with psychosocial disability and/or mental health challenges we spoke with feel that future plans, such as those outlined in a Roadmap, should explore how supported employment settings and enterprises can integrate with open employment and provide pathways to open employment where people with psychosocial disability can access supports to gain and maintain work.

How could the sector best increase wages for people with disability while avoiding job losses?

CoMHWAs supports increases to wages for people with disability, as outlined in the national blueprint on *Economic Justice for People with Disability*.¹³ CoMHWAs is concerned that the question of how to increase wages yet avoid job losses embeds an assumption that job loss is an inevitable result of increased wages, and that the only options available for many people with disability are poor pay, which significantly impacts their quality of life and wellbeing, or no job at all. While we understand that modelling suggests that job loss may be a consequence of increased wages, the modelling that this consultation refers to recognises that government subsidies would ameliorate this. Furthermore, it perpetuates perceptions of people with disability that are significant barriers to increasing employment inclusion rates (which have remained stubbornly slow moving for around 20 years).¹⁴ Embedded into the system of lower wages for supported employment is a problematic assumption: namely, that the labour of people with disability is somehow inherently less valuable, and that the only way that employers will engage them is if they can purchase their labour cheaply.

People with disability in supported employment are not working on an equal basis with others, which violates Australia's obligations under the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.¹⁵ The cost of providing support to people with disability should not be viewed as part of their wages, or as a cost they should bear, as that support is necessary to render employment accessible for them. In the words of one consumer:

People shouldn't be getting paid less just because they need more support.

Another consumer put in succinctly when they wrote:

[The] Royal Commission needs to stand firm on wages changes.

People with disability are as likely as the rest of the population to have an income, and yet their income is markedly lower, and a greater percentage of people with disability have a low level of personal income compared to people without disability. A greater proportion of people with psychosocial disability in particular have a low income. While people with disability in work have high levels of job satisfaction, they report significantly lower satisfaction with their pay, with people who have work restrictions reporting a lower satisfaction again.¹⁶

Most consumers we spoke to as part of our consultation felt that paying people with disability less than minimum wage was not an acceptable practice, as this communicated that the labour of people with disability was not valued or meaningful, which perpetuates stigma, as expressed by the following comments from different consumers:

Make the reality visible, not swayed by the misconception that disability equals a diminished person of less value.

It's baffling that it's legal to pay people with disabilities less than minimum wage. This is blatant discrimination and exploitation, there's no other way of looking at it. It's disgusting and shameful that this is being allowed.

Several consumers noted the need for reform, given these implications:

The reform is needed. The pay is absurd, on a human decency level, it's embarrassing.

There needs to be reforms about how much people are being paid [...] people in these positions should be better remunerated, to show that they are valued, and doing meaningful work. It doesn't matter if it is a food-prep role or higher-level office work.

CoMHWB believes that government action mandating increased wages and initiatives encouraging employment of people with disability must be undertaken in tandem to avoid job losses. As several consumers suggested, government subsidies to support training and education of employees, and to part pay the wages of people with disability is one option to support increased wages:

It's very simple. The government already has grants to help subsidize businesses when they hire people with disabilities. The government should put their money where their mouth is and agree to things such as matching 50% of the employees pay. So the employer gets back 50% of the wage from the government.

Including a requirement for organisations and companies receiving government contracts to employ people with disability has been suggested by disability rights organisations recently in *Economic Justice for People with Disability: A National Blueprint*, which suggests including disability employment requirements in the new foundational support program. One consumer made a suggestion along similar lines:

Long term solutions could be meeting the government's own commitments to increasing disabled people in government jobs, improving the enforcement powers of the equal opportunity commission and other relevant bodies to investigate discrimination complaints, and making strong disability representative within a company a mandatory requirement for large companies to receive government contracts and grants.

Legislative mechanisms are also needed to ensure accountability and prevent discriminatory hiring and firing. One consumer advocated that the government should:

Push for legislation that protects workers!!!! Moratorium on firing workers with disabilities over a 6–12-month period while wage changeover is implemented.

Another consumer noted the importance of celebrating and promoting the capability of people with disability in order to oppose stigmatising ideas about their capability to do valuable work:

Start to employ professionals with disability in the professional sector. Absolutist thinking is dictating the idea that a person with a disability has diminished capacity. Conduct research and find the people with disability who are capably functioning, even excelling. Publish the research. Publish the stories and celebrate the success stories. Be proactive and uplifting. Celebrate. Make the reality visible, not swayed by the misconception that disability equals a diminished person of less value.

Are there examples that currently exist that can be leveraged?

Leveraging learnings from work done to increase Peer workforces, especially the Mental Health Lived Experience/Peer workforce, could promote employment of people with psychosocial disability. As explored earlier, participants in our consultation stated their desire for Peer workforces to be expanded in order to both provide more options for career pathways, and to reform organisational cultures and work practices, providing better support to people with disability in workplaces, and building a culture in which the experiences of people with disability are acknowledged and valued. Recent research notes that growth in the size of the disability workforce has done little to increase the employment of people with disabilities themselves, despite the evidence-base around increasing peer workforce participation and the benefits of peer worker inclusion.¹⁷ Encouraging increases in Lived Experience identified roles and lived experience leadership in disability sector organisations can promote the development of the Peer workforce, alongside continuing existing drivers of development including advocacy, promotion by mental health commissions, and the development of pathways for accreditation, training and employment of Peers.

CoMHWA's own initiatives supporting the Peer workforce are a case in point of successful initiatives contributing to the development of new Peer workers. Our programs include ASPIRE, which builds Peer worker skills and readiness for employment,¹⁸ and our Peer Work Positives training builds the capacity of organisations and workplaces to support Peer workers in their teams. CoMHWA also has a partnership with the WA Mental Health Commission and North Metropolitan TAFE to support Peer workers and aspiring Peer workers to undertake a Certificate IV Mental Health Peer Work, which enables Peer workers to secure qualifications and find employment.¹⁹

Do you see a role for workplaces which provide specialised employment opportunities for people with disability in the future?

CoMHWA is not in favour of continued segregation in employment. However, CoMHWA does not feel that ending segregation should mean a loss of specific, needed supports and employment opportunities providing tailored supports and conditions for people with psychosocial disability. Instead, CoMHWA

believes that integration should mean that people with psychosocial disability are able to find the supports they need to access and maintain meaningful employment, including more options for ongoing support in open and inclusive workplaces. The question posed in this consultation closes off opportunities for thinking about alternative options for what access to specialised employment opportunities could look like beyond the current system of segregation.

CoMHWA's position is informed by our commitment to promoting the human rights of people with psychosocial disability and mental health challenges, and by our consultation with members. Segregated employment violates human rights instruments to which Australia is a signatory, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).²⁰ For example, general comment 23 on the right to just and favourable conditions of work in the ICESCR states that "Workers with disabilities should not be segregated in sheltered workshops. [...] They should also enjoy equal remuneration for work of equal value and must not suffer wage discrimination due to a perceived reduced capacity for work."²¹

As suggested in the Disability Royal Commission report, segregated employment settings can be places where people with disability experience exploitation, violence and abuse.²² One consumer drew attention to the need for increased accountability and monitoring mechanisms to prevent exploitation people with disability may experience in those settings:

Workplaces that offer supported employment need to be more carefully monitored to try and tackle the exploitation that runs rampant.

Many consumers who participated in our consultation expressed that the idea of segregation of people with disability perpetuates the stigmatising idea that people with disability, including psychosocial disability and mental health challenges, do not have as much to contribute to society and workplaces.

Our members have diverse views on the future role of workplaces providing specialised employment opportunities, however. Some were unequivocal about the need to remove them. Many who were against segregation also did not want to see specific supports for people with disability to find and maintain employment vanish. Some saw a future in which the types of opportunities currently accessible through supported employment would be available, yet integrated more closely with open employment rather than segregated, as highlighted in the following comments:

I would like to see these two streams talk to each other more, and work together rather than separately. I like the idea that there should be an ability to move between these spaces to provide more choice and control to meet people where they are at.

Different things work for different people. It sounds great as a way to link up with other people with psychosocial disability, I don't want to rule out anything for anyone. There needs to be a balance where these systems are talking together, rather than similar parallel options that don't always align.

Consumers also noted that people need pathways out of supported employment when they would like it, as one consumer noted:

People in supported employment also need pathways out of this space. Some people have, in the past, been locked into this for life it seems. Even when their circumstances and capacity has changed.

A minority of consumers supported a future state in which supported employment plays a large role, though of those, only a small number identified as having personal experience of accessing or attempting to access supported employment themselves. However, even those few consumers who stated they feel specialised employment opportunities should play a large role in the future did not feel that they should continue the way they are. One consumer highlighted employment accessibility concerns, yet noted the need for pay reform:

Segregated employment is fantastic and highly needed in country towns, but the pay has to be at minimum [wage], they still do their jobs at the end of the day!

Equity was a common reason that some consumers explained that they feel that specialised opportunities are needed to address the barriers in open employment, though they also agreed that open employment must be more inclusive and accessible for people with disability:

Basic principle of equity. Specialised services are required for anyone facing barriers to employment, disability is a major barrier, some barriers can be minimised and overcome with appropriate communication between PWD, employers, employment agencies, govt.

I am torn between each side of the issue 'taking' opportunities from the other, employment set aside only for one group of the community, the simple fact that some people are disadvantaged by the employment system and need some help.

CoMHWA believes that supports ensuring equitable opportunities to participate in employment are essential, but that these should not take the form of supported employment where people receive less pay and fewer industrial protections, as is currently the case. CoMHWA feels that employment reforms should be led by people with disability, including people with psychosocial disability, who have lived experience in segregated systems.

If so, what should these workplaces look like?

CoMHWAs do not believe that the current system of employment segregation and supported employment workplaces should continue into the future. If such workplaces are to operate in some fashion into the future, CoMHWAs feel that there should be a radical shift in how they function, so that they enable people with psychosocial disability to be afforded support, choice and control over their work and workplace. This aligns with the views of many of our members who participated in our consultation, who raised the need for reforms if these workplaces are to operate into the future.

The supports that people with disability find helpful should continue to be available, within an integrated system where people with disability are able to earn at least the minimum wage and work in conditions that are supportive of their work safety and their wellbeing. Some consumers told CoMHWAs of the supports and accommodations available in supported employment that are helpful in enabling people with psychosocial disability to gain and maintain employment, which included:

- Reasonable accommodations
- Support from a person on the site
- Transport
- Assistance getting a driver's license
- Extra sick days
- Opportunities for developing social and community connections at work.

One consumer felt that these workplaces should be:

Safe spaces where they are supported to work to their potential surrounded by peers and workers who care for them.

Another consumer noted:

[Specific SEA provider] do have a person on site that helps, and you get to keep your full DSP/Centrelink payment. They also help with transport towards work, and extra sick days [...] These are lifelong spots if you want them, and you cannot really be fired. You can get switched between different roles instead. I found that there was a huge sense of community in this setting, [including] pizza nights and socialisation.

Consumers described how these supports allowed the opportunity to learn skills, gain experience and build capacity, and how supported employment included options for roles that can be filled by a variety of people with different abilities and skillsets.

I find it so hard to learn new skills, so it can be hard. Supported employment can lighten the load and make this less daunting. My plan co-ordinator told me 'Your new job should be able to make it less stressful.' But I don't want to ask about the supports that I need because it might make me vulnerable. I would love it to be more flexible.

Despite identifying that supports available through some supported workplaces are useful, most of those consumers we spoke with who had personal experiences in supported employment described having poor experiences with pathways and enterprises they had engaged with, where they felt that they were not supported to develop or leverage their capabilities, skills, experiences and needs.

The following reforms are required:

- **Build in, and fund appropriately, more pathways and support options for transition to open employment, study, and other opportunities**

Currently, there are few pathways for transitioning out of supported employment settings, which means that people with disability are not supported to engage in open employment, study, or other opportunities.²³ Research has found that people with disability who start their careers in segregated employment typically do not move to open employment,²⁴ and that supported employment settings “have not been set up to use a model that facilitates transitions into the mainstream labour market, and this perpetuates a cycle of exclusion from mainstream employment.”²⁵

Studies have been undertaken to identify opportunities for how supported employment enterprises could play a role in creating connections to open employment opportunities, including one paper that explored the creation of customised pathways to open employment through “customised and tailored roles, client–employer matching, and job negotiation.”²⁶ These settings could also play a role in educating open employment settings about supporting people with disability. Research has shown that there is a need for adequate and appropriate funding, especially through NDIS, to facilitate this.²⁷

More options in supported employment settings to enable workers to build skills for the open employment marketplace could also broker connections. Consumers with experiences of receiving skills and knowledge-building supports in supported employment settings and disability employment services described that it was helpful in building capacity to engage in employment in open settings.

In terms of the broader landscape of disability employment supports, [as discussed earlier](#), Individualised Placement Support (IPS) programs are an evidence-backed model supporting employment of people with psychosocial disability through customised employment placement supports.

- **Promote equality in wages and remove exemptions allowing employers to pay less than the minimum wage**

As explained in our [response to previous questions](#), CoMHWAs do not believe that it is acceptable to pay people with disability less than the minimum wage, and most consumers we heard from regarded this practice as discriminatory.

- **Broaden the types of roles available in supported employment settings to overcome deficit-based assumptions that people with disability cannot perform skilled work and promote meaningful employment**

Consumers described supported employment as operating through the assumption of deficit, as they offered restricted options of role, level and type of work, evidencing perspectives that people with disability are not able to engage in skilled work. Consumers shared that supported employment options are often not appropriate and tailored, and described being offered unsuitable roles that do not account for their needs, strengths, skills and ability to engage in that workplace:

I got referred to Supported Employment. It was totally inappropriate. It was in a suburb that I couldn't get to, and they didn't seem to see me as anything more than a number.

The types of roles available to them in supported employment were severely limited, and, in the words of one consumer:

If it's unskilled, boring and meaningless, segregated employment would perpetuate stigma and would limit opportunities for people with disability.

- **Introduce mechanisms to ensure the diverse voices, needs and experiences of people with psychosocial disability inform supported employment enterprises**

People with psychosocial disability told us they do not feel heard in supported employment settings and their needs and experiences are not acknowledged in the way those settings operate. Currently, supported employment settings often preclude people with disability from occupying managerial, leadership or oversight roles, and exclude them from involvement in the design, monitoring and oversight of those enterprises. To improve the control that people with disability have in their workplaces, they should be included at all levels and in decision-making positions within these settings.²⁸

- **Develop education and embed standards in delivery of supports within supported employment enterprises that promote and respect the decisions, dignity, choices, capability and rights of people with psychosocial disability**

We heard of consumers encountering staff who did not involve them in the process of securing a role or in decision-making, as the following comments illustrate:

I didn't feel included and valued in the supported space, I was able to understand those process, [and] would rather upskill myself to find meaningful supported work.

They made the decision for me, not with me.

One consumer noted that there should be more support for programs that focus on inclusion of people with mental health challenges and that have person-centered practices, as these enable more people to find and keep meaningful roles:

One SEA [Supported Employment Agency] I was in had really good policies and practices to help people to keep the roles. It lost funding because the placement rate was lower because of the extra support and tailored approach, they said it was too specialised because it was focused on mental health.

Many consumers shared that accessing supported employment meant encountering stigma – sometimes from within the supported workplace itself, as one consumer recounted:

I have experienced staff saying inappropriate things that indicate they haven't had enough training about people with disabilities.

One consumer noted experiences of being bullied for having a mental health diagnosis, and said that instead of stigma:

Essentially the workplace would enjoy people for who they are - no division - and not give them a disgustingly ridiculous hard time for who they think they are.

Education promoting better understanding of the rights and experiences of people with disability, and training to enhance ability to tailor support for people with psychosocial disability would address some of the causes of negative experiences consumers have had with supported employment.

- **Address practice, legislation and attitudes that contribute to perceptions that supported employment is not legitimate work**

Some consumers conveyed that there was a worry that supported employment might not be viewed as legitimate work, and were reluctant to disclose their experiences out concern they would be judged and out of worry that disclosing supported employment experience also meant disclosing details of their mental health. Education is needed to address this widespread stigma, as one consumer stated:

Education is the enemy of stigma; the more people know about a particular label, the less they are afraid of it.

The fact that supported employment has fewer industrial protections, and comes with lower wages, entrenches the idea that it is less valuable or meaningful work, and so altering these conditions so that they are equal to the protections and wage enjoyed by workers in open settings would challenge the idea that it is not legitimate employment.

How could the benefits of supported employment settings be reflected in open employment settings?

CoMHWA's consultation with members explored both key areas for development in open employment settings to enable inclusion and greater support of people with disability and specific supports that could be integrated into open employment settings. We do not restrict ourselves in this section to only addressing supports or benefits unique to supported employment that we feel should be ported across to open employment settings, as our consultation revealed that what makes for inclusive and supportive open workplaces goes beyond the ways in which supported employment currently operates. It is noteworthy that several consumers did not recognise that there were *any* benefits of supported employment to reflect in open employment settings, though all consumers addressed in some way what they saw as the need for open employment settings to make changes to be more inclusive and accessible. We also explore in this section particular mechanisms to promote embedding of supports enabling benefits, as leaving the onus upon individual workplaces to undertake such work is unlikely to result in significant development.

Consumers in our consultation observed that changes to make workplaces inclusive and supportive for people with disability generally benefit the entire workforce. Many of the things that are helpful in promoting inclusion and accessibility are already recognised to be good practice in management and workplace operations.

Five major themes emerged from our consultation with consumers that would help embed the supports people with disability access through supported employment into open employment settings:

1. Address attitude and culture barriers to inclusion in open employment settings
2. Create and encourage the development of employment opportunities and pathways for people with disability in open workplaces
3. Encourage investment in capacity, skills, and knowledge-building opportunities for people with disability
4. Support open employment settings to better understand and embed accessibility and the supports people with disability need to thrive at work
5. Promote accessible, flexible design of jobs and work to open employment settings to encourage inclusion of people with disability

These are elaborated below.

Address attitude and culture barriers to inclusion in open employment settings

A major barrier to people with psychosocial disability having the support in open employment to find and maintain a job that they might currently have with supported employment are deficit-based understandings held by employers. It is important to point out that the consumers we spoke with felt that supported employment itself took a deficit-based view which limited employment options and pathways, indicating the need for a broader campaign to change social perceptions of people with disability. Sustained effort, and Government investment in public campaigns and in development of industry and sector-specific training and awareness-raising campaigns could focus on challenging deficit-based understandings of people with psychosocial disability, while promoting awareness of the benefits of inclusion.

Increased legislative protections and antidiscrimination measures are an essential part of discouraging stigma and preventing discrimination in recruitment and employment, and should be accompanied by sector-specific advice and training addressing how workplaces can avoid discrimination.

Consumers spoke about how they had encountered a deficit-focused and risk-averse attitude in workplaces that was a barrier to gaining employment, and to maintaining employment as these workplaces encourage silence rather than enabling people to seek support when needed. Some consumers mentioned the judgement and discrimination they encountered when some in their workplace learned about their mental health challenges or psychosocial disability. Changing those attitudes was identified as key to ending discrimination and providing better workplace environments; in the words of one consumer:

The attitudes of employers and co-workers towards people with psychosocial disability are one of the key elements to provide a supportive employment environment for these people, and education in the workplace is the key in such a setting.

Consumers spoke about how assumptions were often made about supports that might be needed and impact to the workplace. One consumer commented that:

They have a fear about assumptions of huge supports needed and a lack of understanding.

Another noted that:

It is absolutely the culture of the workplace. Not seeing you as a human being with challenges and needs. A lot of the things I asked for weren't special accommodations, they were human rights: breaks, a lunch break where I could go and get my lunch and eat it.

Data demonstrates that while many employers believe hiring people with disability will be costly, 88% of Australians with disability do not need any specific arrangements from their employer to work, and 60% of

workplace adjustments do not cost anything.²⁹ Therefore, the assumption of a large cost to businesses is based on a lack of information and in a deficit-based or stigma-informed understanding of people with psychosocial disability, and did not account for their actual support needs. Increasing workplaces' awareness of government help available to cover expenses of adjustments for eligible people would also help to build the capacity of open workplaces to support people with disability in employment.

Create and encourage the development of employment opportunities and pathways for people with disability in open workplaces

A rationale often deployed in arguments for continuing supported employment is that it creates jobs that would otherwise not exist for people with disability, but policy levers exist that could enable job creation in open employment. Creating new employment opportunities in open employment is important as a complement to developing inclusive practices and attitudes. One consumer stated:

Simply increase jobs. Otherwise you are disadvantaging everyone and being without a job is not good for anybody's survival.

To facilitate this, CoMHWAs support the *Economic Justice for People with Disability: A National Blueprint* recommendations that the government should require employers with 100+ staff to track and report disability employment figures, introduce a 15% disability employment target for the public sector, and include disability employment requirements in the new foundational support program.³⁰

Encourage investment in capacity, skills, and knowledge-building opportunities for people with disability

Investing in developing capacity and skills of people with psychosocial disability was also felt by consumers to be essential to find and maintain employment in open employment settings, and could emulate some of the ways supported employment opportunities can function to develop capacity to undertake work. Consumers indicated a desire for options to access traineeships, education pathways and professional development:

I would love to have a traineeship, and that is what would really help.

Another consumer recalled a past program that encouraged development of entrepreneurial skills, and suggested something similar might provide more options for workforce participation:

Why not train people with psychosocial disability skills to start their own business, so then at least we have alternatives. They could pay for these courses, actually build up our capacity.

Some consumers shared that when engaging with Disability Employment Services, they found barriers to pursuing studies, even though for several consumers the study they undertook was what enabled them to secure a job in an open workplace:

I wanted to do a cert 4 to reskill, and they blocked the idea, saying that there weren't roles available for trainers (workplace training cert 4). I did end up getting it, but the woman who tried to stop me made so many biased assumptions.

Some consumers found that employers who themselves offered professional development opportunities and traineeships had assisted them to feel prepared for and supported in their roles. However, consumers noted that, with changes in employment dynamics, including the rise of casualised work, they have seen a decrease in employers investing back into their workforces. Encouraging investment into capacity and skills building could benefit the whole workplace as well as people with disability, and encourage longer-term employment.

Support open employment settings to better understand and embed accessibility and the supports people with disability need to thrive at work

Sustained government investment in initiatives to increase the readiness of open employment settings to be inclusive, accessible and supportive workplaces for people with psychosocial disability through is needed. This could include education about how workplaces can best support people with psychosocial disability, provide reasonable accommodations, and address and prevent psychosocial hazards in the workplace. Open employment settings should also be provided with support to complete training to understand how to include and support people with psychosocial disability, and to implement improvements to work culture, practices and environment. Workplaces that make efforts to create inclusive and safer spaces enable people with psychosocial disability and/or mental health challenges to feel comfortable, accomplish good work, and thrive:

I find that some of the orgs I have worked for that have been safer and let me be myself I have been able to achieve such better work. The inclusive lens they have adopted really did provide support. This was really foundational, the holistic support. Even things like having agendas and clearly flagged roles in meetings etc, preventing ambiguity.

This is distinct from workplaces that expect people with psychosocial disability to conform to work practices and cultures that are not accessible to them, or that are detrimental to their wellbeing. Some consumers felt that the NDIS could play a role in altering this paradigm, as it has typically focused on providing supports for people to integrate into existing systems, rather than working on addressing the need for systems to learn to be inclusive. Consumers suggested that NDIS could do more to assist workplaces to prepare to employ people with mental health challenges and/or psychosocial disability, including educating workplaces about the episodic nature of many people's experiences of mental health challenges.

Consumers noted that education and training is need for workplaces to adopt specific hallmarks of good work cultures and practices that included:

- support from those in leadership and supervisors
- clear, accessible, and timely communication
- stability and structure in work, where expectations are clear
- accurate JDFs
- working with individuals to develop a mutual understanding of strengths, skills, work styles and preferences, and needs
- a strong understanding of the negative impact of stigma around mental health and disability
- not requiring disclosure of information not essential to work, and ensuring confidentiality of information that is disclosed
- measures to protect psychosocial wellbeing and avoid burnout.

One consumer shared a time when they had received such supports in an open workplace, and how it enabled them to feel supported:

When I started with one employer, I was asked about the way I like to work. Questions with the team about what time of day you work best, how to collaborate best, what kind of communication do you prefer. I felt seen as a person, and it built trust. Other places were great in giving examples about what accommodation might actually look like, and that open communication felt like a human focused approach and it absolutely helped me to thrive.

Some consumers noted that government supports to assist and encourage open employment workplaces to make employment safer and more accessible for people with psychosocial disability could encourage better integration of open and supported employment. Consumers felt that implementing improvements to workplace environments would enable open workplaces to offer:

- physically accessible spaces
- accommodations for employees' sensory needs and sensitivities
- provision of *equitable* supports to ensure that those who need more or different supports can access them, rather than capping supports offered by having a standard, one-size-fits-all policies prescribing standard accommodations/supports to which all are entitled.

This could include pools of funding for open employment settings that are more accessible, and accountability mechanisms for workplaces receiving such supports. One consumer commented that to include people with disability, open workplaces must:

Improve accessibility features as a priority. So many are not safe or possible to enter with complex disabilities.

The government already invests funding and supports into supported workplaces, so investment in open workplaces along the same lines could enable more people with disability to access the supports they need at work. Some consumers engaging with Disability Employment Services mentioned they already had access to funding for purchasing things like equipment to enable accessibility at work, and other supports. Many consumers stated their preference for accessing those supports in open workplaces without needing to engage with the complex, often disempowering and stigmatising system of disability employment supports. As one consumer stated:

I would love to exist in a world where I could get these supports in open employment and I would not have to suffer indignities to achieve this.

Providing resourcing and initiatives encouraging open employment settings to build in specific support people and networks could facilitate some of the benefits of the support people often available onsite in supported employment settings. Having sources of support onsite was valued in supported employment workplaces, and consumers noted that open workplaces could develop similar supports through developing mentors, buddies, advocates, having Peer workers onsite or other sources of support for employees with psychosocial disability in the workplace. One consumer drew from examples they had seen of a successful initiative driving inclusion in open workplaces:

We have had experiences of both having job coaches, and dedicated roles that we set up for specific periods of time. Job coaches would go on site, and the employment coordinators were the interface with the workplace and would be the middle person that would look at other supports the person would need. The job coach would only be taken out of the setting once people said they were extremely comfortable, but you could call them back when needed.

Increasing funding for and availability of advocacy supports for people with disability in employment settings would improve access to support independent of specific workplaces and would be a mechanism for people with disability to have their voices heard and rights respected at work. One consumer suggested:

Have a different policy in place or a middle person that the employee and employer can chat to if they aren't performing well or if the worker is having issues.

Another consumer felt that a pathway to developing a source of support is for union representatives to have training to develop a better understanding of disability:

My last open employment job, I feel that a union would have really been able to help me. I think there should be a disability advocate that can step in and help with workplace issues. Separate from HR, who

are often lacking in the specialised knowledge in psychosocial disability. This is hugely important given the differences. Union reps need to be better trained, and we weren't given any real info about disability.

Promote accessible, flexible design of jobs and work to open employment settings to encourage inclusion of people with disability

Several consumers noted that encouraging employers to explore options around how they approach job design with accessibility, flexibility, and support built in, could make for more options for people with disability to undertake a variety of roles across different sectors and workplaces in open employment:

Job design here would do so much, be more open minded about the workplace policies would really give comfort and allow people to speak up and get support before crisis sets in. [...] We could fix the foundations.

Create a culture of valuing employee mental health and showing compassion. Having flexibility and designing job roles for people rather than trying to fit people into job roles.

Consumers noted that increased flexibility acknowledges the often-fluctuating nature of their needs for support and was important in several areas, including in scheduling, shift/work hours, offering possibilities for job sharing, and having longer onboarding and probationary periods if needed. Open employment settings that allow flexibility will be more accessible for people with psychosocial disability:

The episodic/cyclical nature of psychosocial disability means that you need a sick day or two here and there. If there was a space that allowed for this, it would totally avoid burnout.

5. Conclusion

CoMHWAs supports recommendation 7.32 of the Disability Royal Commission report to end segregation and transition towards integrated, inclusive employment for people with disability. CoMHWAs believes that segregated employment is fundamentally discriminatory and its continuation is contrary to the human rights of people with psychosocial disability, but that the supports currently accessed through supported employment must not be removed. Rather, work is needed to ensure those supports are embedded in open employment settings, and that people with psychosocial disability do not go without supports during a transition away from segregation. The current systems and services providing employment pathways to people with psychosocial disability or mental health challenges are largely not providing the kind of support that they need, and entrench a deficit-focused understanding of disability. People with psychosocial disability must be included with people with disability at the centre of transformation of the employment system, where their expertise and experiences can shape a future state of employment that respects the human rights of people with disability to find and maintain meaningful work in inclusive workplaces.



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