

Questions 2. What is your ideal future state for the supported employment sector and employment of people with disability with high support needs?

I want supported employment and ADEs to continue- as far I'm concerned the benefits outweigh the negatives. I do not support completely phasing out supported employment in segregated settings. I have volunteered with people with intellectual/cognitive disabilities with behaviour and communication issues. It is very difficult to concentrate to undertake work around such people- this is not discrimination it's just saying they're not suitable for mainstream employment roles due to the disruption to other employees. Hence, keeping this cohort together with adequate supervision and guidance is necessary if they are to maintain employment. Without this they would likely be long-term unemployed and would likely end up in day programs with opportunity to earn money.

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

DES and supported employment: Currently (to my understanding) DES providers have no financial incentive to place clients in supported employment or ADEs. This creates an unhealthy bias and pressure to push disabled people to apply for jobs in open employment they aren't suitable for. For sure, if someone could get a job in the open market, go for it. But for many of us, we've been stuck locked out of open employment with no where else to go- and DES providers don't even tell us that we could apply for an ADE job or supported employment. Whilst it might seem like a step backwards, getting a job in a supported employment environment (or even volunteering in one) can give people the confidence and opportunity to learn the necessary skills to get a job in open employment. There needs to be less stigma around supported employment, and more scope to employ people with extra supports who may not qualify for DSP (Jobseeker as a 'partial capacity to work') but still need a high level of support to maintain employment. Supported employment should be an option at least short term even if they don't qualify for NDIS support (there could be an option to have DES fund the support cost to attend an ADE or supported work placement). But DES needs to open and fair in their operating model to allow people with high support needs to be directed to the best employment option for them, not the one that makes the most money. This is especially pertinent given that many people on Jobseeker (partial capacity to work) really should be on DSP but can't afford the medical paperwork to apply, yet might happily work somewhere if there is enough support provided (disability support workers etc).

4. 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?

I would like to see a revision of DSP income rules, especially as it pertains to tapering income support for people on supported wages. Losing 50 cents out of every dollar earned is just unfair- its higher than any tax rate ordinary Australians pay. Why make people earning less than minimum wage give up half of those meagre wages?

I would also like to see options for supported employment (permanent wage subsidies, or productivity wages, and or/access to disability support worker assistance in ADE or open employment) for people on Jobseeker with partial capacity to work who have failed to get a job in the open market (after say 3 or 6 months). Getting a job at all (especially if it offers a high level

of individual support) can be a “circuit breaker” for people stuck in a failure cycle. Having supportive job could give them the confidence to transition into open employment in the future. Even if it pays less than minimum wage- this is still better than volunteering or doing work for the dole. I think supports in employment should be available to people even if they’re not on the NDIS- sometimes they just need that type of support.

Questions 5. How could the sector best increase wages for people with disability while avoiding job losses? a. Are there examples that currently exist that can be leveraged? b. Are there new approaches that could be tested?

I think there are two simple solutions to fix the problem of subminimum wages without compromising business viability or risking mass layoff especially for the most severely disabled. The government could implement one or both to make a real difference.

- 1) Making the government wage-subsidy funding 50% of the minimum wage permanent instead of phasing out in 2034. Likewise, if the minimum wage needs to be transitioned to full minimum wage, then the government needs to fund the gap. Otherwise, employees with the highest support needs will simply have no opportunities for employment. I also think the ongoing wage subsidies/productivity wages should also be offered to jobseeker recipients with a partial capacity to work- as they are often just as disadvantaged in the open workforce as DSP recipients.
- 2) DSP income test- reducing the financial penalty for paid work whilst on the DSP and Jobseeker (only for those with partial capacity to work less than 23 hours per week). Instead of losing 50 cents for every dollar earned reducing it to 15 or 20 cents (equivalent of normal marginal tax rates most Australians pay) would mean disabled people could keep a fair share of earnings (which given they already earn below minimum wage currently means they effectively lose half of the small wage they earn). Losing less earnings would also provide incentive to work more hours and help lift disabled people out of poverty whilst acknowledging they need the DSP as a life-long safety net.

6. Do you see a role for workplaces which provide specialised employment opportunities for people with disability in the future? a. If so, what should these workplaces look like?

Either continuing ADE’s (allowing for more creative and innovative ideas to emerge given participant number caps have been removed) and/or where ADE companies specialise in providing 1:1 assistance for participants to undertake job trials outside their organisation, but with support workers still teaching necessary job skills with the aim of helping the person gain independence in their job or the capacity to earn a higher wage.

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

1) Public Service jobs: The process for applying to work in the public service needs to change. We are screened out of the process right from the resume stage even if we have appropriate qualifications. It is an opaque application process with DES providers virtually unable to apply directly on our behalf to negotiate or ‘job carve’ positions to suit our strengths even though we have much to offer. Also, because the application process is so inaccessible it is impossible to have the conversation about having NDIS supports put in place to ensure job success. Also, the way DES is currently set up, wage subsidies are unable to be provided for government jobs- this

means we are effectively locked out of public service jobs. I think inclusive employment needs to start in the public service, with DES providers given priority access and alternative pathways for direct job applications of behalf of their clients and the power to negotiate appropriate workplace accommodations and NDIS supports without fear of being discriminated against. Productivity wages should also be available in the public service if this is deemed appropriate

2) Work from home jobs in supported office spaces: For intellectually abled people with high physical support needs, there is perhaps scope to set up office spaces where several NDIS participants can share a space or individual office rooms, complete their work online whilst having disability support workers rotating between participants as needed providing personal care supports, and or/additional assistance completing their work tasks etc. This could achieve 1:3 or 1:2 ratios in instance where 1:1 support ratio would otherwise be needed due to a lack of other participants to share supports with (especially when 1:1 support is not needed 100% of the time but when the person still needs help to be available on demand). Creativity and lateral thinking are needed to make support arrangements work in a way that is tailored to individual needs.

[REDACTED]