

Next steps in Supported Employment

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

The ideal future for supported employment is one where it remains a vital and valued part of the broader employment landscape. There will always be individuals who benefit from tailored support in the workplace, and supported employment plays a crucial role in ensuring that people of all abilities have access to meaningful, sustainable work. This not only allows individuals to contribute economically to their local communities but also fosters personal growth, independence, self-worth, and social inclusion.

For people with high support needs, employment opportunities must be diverse and flexible. A one-size-fits-all approach does not work. Instead, individuals should have genuine choice and control over their employment pathways, selecting options that align with their strengths, preferences, and goals. These options might include supported employment, open employment, micro-enterprises, self-employment, or social enterprises. The key is that the choice belongs to the person with disability, not dictated by service providers, funding bodies, or societal expectations.

To ensure that all employment services are delivered safely, ethically, and consistently, mandatory registration should be introduced for all providers. This would establish a baseline of quality and accountability across the sector. Registered providers would be required to meet clearly defined standards, ensuring that people with disability receive high-quality support regardless of where they live or who they engage with. It would also help build trust among participants, families, and employers, knowing that providers are held to a national standard.

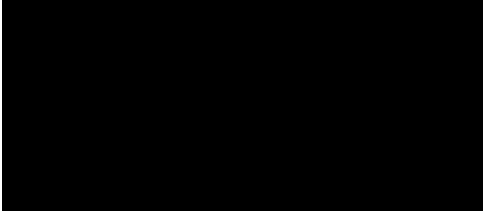
Mandatory registration would also support the professionalisation of the sector, encouraging continuous improvement, workforce development, and innovation in service delivery. Ultimately, it would help create a more inclusive and equitable employment system, one that recognises and values the contributions of people with disability and supports them to thrive in the workforce.

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

To build a more inclusive and effective employment system for people with disability, we must start by learning from what has already been trialled. Recent initiatives in customised and integrated employment have provided valuable insights, and it's essential that we use this evidence to shape a national framework. This framework should be grounded in real-world outcomes, clearly identifying what strategies are effective and which are not. It must be practical, measurable, and designed to deliver tangible results, rather than relying on theoretical models or idealistic assumptions.

A key component of this framework should be a review of wage subsidies. These subsidies play a critical role in enabling businesses to pay full award wages to employees who may not meet standard productivity benchmarks. Without this support, many businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises, may find it financially unsustainable to employ people with higher support needs. While social inclusion is a worthy goal, it cannot come at the cost of business viability. Employers need to be supported to do the right thing without being placed at financial risk.

In addition, there is a pressing need for a consistent, national approach to ongoing workplace support. Too often, support in open employment is treated as temporary, focused on building capacity and then gradually withdrawn. However, for many people with high or complex needs, support is not a short-term requirement but an ongoing necessity. Removing that support can lead to job loss, disengagement, and a cycle of unemployment.



Currently, the employment support system is fragmented. Different government departments and funding streams often overlap or contradict one another, creating confusion for both providers and participants. In some cases, essential supports are assumed to be funded by another agency, or are deemed ineligible under the NDIS, leaving individuals without the help they need. This lack of clarity and coordination results in people falling through the cracks, particularly during transitions between services or funding programs.

To address this, we need a streamlined, transparent system that ensures continuity of support throughout every stage of a person's employment journey. This includes clear responsibilities across agencies, secure funding pathways, and a commitment to long-term support where needed. Only then can we create a truly inclusive employment landscape, one that empowers people with disability to thrive in the workforce and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

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?

We believe the future of disability employment must be guided by a national plan that is grounded in real-world data and evidence. This plan should set clear, measurable targets that are both realistic and achievable, not based on idealistic visions or designed to suit only a narrow group of individuals. Too often, strategies are developed with a one-size-fits-all approach, which fails to reflect the diversity of people with disability and their unique needs, goals, and preferences.

A truly inclusive framework must offer flexible pathways that accommodate different types of support and employment outcomes. Whether someone is working towards open employment, supported employment, self-employment, or a social enterprise model, the system should be built around the individual, not the other way around. The person's voice, choice, and control must be central to every decision.

Equally important is the financial sustainability of the organisations delivering these supports. If providers are expected to deliver high-quality, person-centred services, they must be adequately funded to do so. Without financial viability, even the most well-intentioned programs will fail. Providers need confidence that they can continue to operate, invest in their workforce, and innovate in how they deliver support.

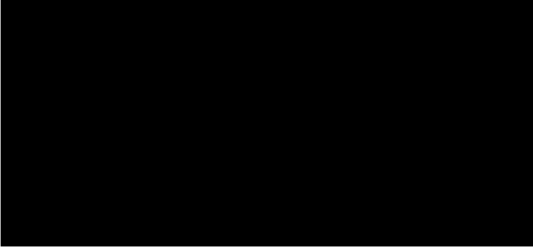
To achieve this, we need a clear, consistent, and nationally recognised framework that outlines how supports should be delivered. Ambiguity in policy and practice leads to confusion, inconsistency, and inefficiencies across the sector. Providers should not be left to interpret vague guidelines or guess what's expected of them. Instead, they need practical, transparent guidance that enables them to deliver services with confidence and consistency.

Such a framework would not only improve outcomes for people with disability but also strengthen the entire employment support ecosystem. It would promote accountability, encourage best practice, and ensure that all Australians with disability have access to meaningful, sustainable employment opportunities, regardless of where they live or who they engage with.

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

To create a truly inclusive and sustainable employment system for people with disability, we must recognise the importance of tailored, ongoing support in the workplace. Not every individual will thrive with minimal or short-term assistance. For many, particularly those with higher or more complex support needs, consistent on-the-job support is essential to maintaining meaningful employment.

These individuals should have access to a dedicated support person—often referred to as a “job coach/mentor”, who can assist with task management, workplace routines, and communication. This support not only helps the employee succeed but also reassures employers that they are not alone in managing additional needs in the workplace.



To make this model viable, government funding is critical. This could take the form of a wage subsidy or a dedicated program that covers the cost of on-the-job support. Without this, the burden often falls on employers, who may experience reduced productivity, increased time demands, or financial strain. These barriers can discourage businesses from hiring people with disability, even when they are willing and motivated to do so.

The gap between the SWS rate and the minimum wage must be subsidised by government, not left to employers. If businesses are expected to absorb this cost, many will simply be unable to participate, leading to reduced employment opportunities and the potential collapse of inclusive employment initiatives.

Beyond financial support, the government must also lead by example. A mandated quota requiring a percentage of public sector roles to be filled by people with disability would demonstrate genuine commitment to workforce inclusion. Leadership in this space cannot be left solely to the private sector, systemic change must be driven by those with the power to shape policy and funding.

Additionally, government procurement policies should include quotas for engaging disability enterprises in the delivery of goods and services. This would provide these organisations with a stable and predictable revenue stream, enabling them to confidently invest in their workforce and infrastructure. It would also help normalise the inclusion of people with disability in all aspects of economic life.

Together, these measures would not only improve employment outcomes for people with disability but also build a more inclusive, equitable, and economically sustainable workforce for all Australians.

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

Yes, there will always be a need for supported employment because not everyone is suited to open employment environments. People with disability have a wide range of needs, and while some may thrive in open employment with minimal support, others require more tailored assistance, whether that's ongoing guidance, job-specific training, personal care, or adjustments to the work environment.

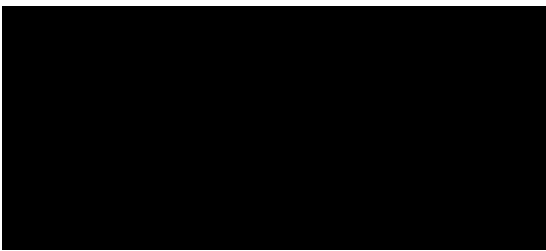
Supported employment plays a vital role in ensuring that people with disability who face higher or more complex barriers to employment are not left behind. These models provide structured, inclusive, and flexible work environments that are designed around the individual, rather than expecting the individual to conform to a standardised workplace model.

Ideally, supported employment should be delivered through community-facing businesses, such as not-for-profits or social enterprises that are embedded in and responsive to the needs of their local communities especially in regional and remote areas. These businesses not only create meaningful employment opportunities for people with disability but also contribute to the social and economic fabric of their communities. They often provide services or products that meet local needs, while also fostering inclusion and awareness.

One of the key strengths of supported employment is the ability to create safe, supportive, and predictable environments. For individuals with sensory sensitivities, anxiety, or behaviours of concern, open employment settings can be overwhelming or even unsafe. These environments may lack the understanding, flexibility, or resources to accommodate such needs, which can lead to exclusion or job loss.

In contrast, supported workplaces are intentionally designed to be adaptable. They can modify tasks, routines, and environments to suit the individual. For example, someone who requires a quieter workspace, visual schedules, or regular breaks can have those needs met without stigma or disruption. Similarly, individuals who require personal care during the workday can receive that support in a way that is respectful and integrated into their routine.

Supported employment also fosters a sense of belonging and purpose. Employees are not only given the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to their workplace, but they are also part of a team that values their presence and understands their needs. This sense of inclusion is critical to wellbeing and long-term engagement in the workforce.



Ultimately, supported employment is not a lesser alternative to open employment, it is a necessary and valuable part of a diverse and inclusive employment ecosystem. It ensures that all people with disability, regardless of their support needs, have the opportunity to participate in the workforce, build skills, earn an income, and be recognised for their contributions.

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

Supported employment plays a vital role in Australia's employment landscape by offering tailored, flexible, and inclusive work environments for people with disability. These settings are designed to meet individuals where they are, providing the support, structure, and safety they need to thrive in the workplace. Unlike open employment, which often assumes a standard level of independence and productivity, supported employment recognises that people have different needs and that success looks different for everyone.

In supported employment, participants are given the opportunity to develop practical skills, build confidence, and engage socially in ways that suit their individual preferences and abilities. These environments are not only inclusive but also deeply connected to local communities, often through social enterprises or not-for-profit organisations that provide meaningful work while delivering services or products that benefit the broader public.

One of the most significant advantages of supported employment is the availability of ongoing, responsive support. This is particularly important for individuals who may experience behaviours of concern, require personal care, or need help managing tasks throughout the day. In open employment, support is often time-limited and focused on building capacity with the expectation that it will eventually be phased out. While this model may work for some, it does not reflect the reality for many people with high or complex support needs, for whom ongoing assistance is essential for long-term success.

Supported employment settings can also serve as a bridge to open employment. With the right supports in place, such as a dedicated job coach, skills and routines developed in supported settings can be transferred to more mainstream workplaces. A job coach provides on-the-job training, helps break down tasks, supports communication, and works closely with both the employee and employer to ensure the workplace is inclusive and accessible. This model not only benefits the employee but also helps employers understand how to support diverse workers effectively.

Another key practice that should be more widely adopted is the individualisation of support strategies. This includes using clear communication, simplifying tasks, and creating structured routines. It also involves educating employers and co-workers about disability inclusion, helping to build a workplace culture that is respectful, understanding, and adaptable.

Ultimately, supported employment is not just about providing jobs, it's about creating environments where people with disability can feel valued, safe, and empowered. It offers a sense of belonging and purpose, which is often missing in traditional employment settings. For many, it is the foundation for personal growth, community connection, and economic participation.

By recognising the unique value of supported employment and integrating its principles into broader employment strategies, we can build a more inclusive workforce that truly reflects the diversity of our society.