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**AFDO Policy Position Statement:**

**Effective Supports to Secure Employment**

## Summary:

* Employment and financial security are one of seven key outcome areas in *Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021-2031*; with work and employment recognised as a fundamental right in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD).
* Just 48% of working age people with disability in Australia are employed, as compared to 80% of working age Australians without a disability[[1]](#endnote-1). Welfare dependence, coupled with rising living costs, disproportionally increase the risk of poverty for people with disability and their families.
* Despite significant investment by the Australian government over several decades to address disability employment, people with disability remain under-employed; large employers report fragmented support and a mismatch to corporate requirements; and small employers share frustration regarding bureaucratic reporting processes that fail to recognise time and resource poor businesses.[[2]](#endnote-2)
* With Disability Employment Services (DES) set for reform in 2025 and the National Disability Insurance Scheme firmly established, we have an opportunity to rethink how people with disability are best supported, what constitutes effective employment support, and how such supports can be delivered.

Many of our recommendations, developed in mid-2023, have also been identified by the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability as priority areas (final report released in October 2023). These recommendations are cross-referenced in this Position Statement in brackets as DRC, recommendation number.

## AFDO’s Recommendations:

1. **People with disability and employers are at the centre of co-design processes, aimed at addressing disability employment rates, and of disability focused reforms.**

Reforms seeking to improve the lives of people with disability must include people with disability, and their representative organisations, in their design, execution and evaluation (DRC, 7.16 relating to the reform of Disability Employment Services).

1. **People with disability are recognised as experts of their own experience of disability and are able to freely choose who they engage to assist them to gain employment.**
2. **The preferences of people with disability are respected.**

In the types of work they are interested in; to how meetings with support providers are conducted; to how employment goals and plans develop over time. People with disability have access to high quality providers, irrespective of where they live in Australia.

1. **Funding for support to help get and keep a job is flexible, enabling people with disability to choose the type of support that best meets their needs.**
   1. People with disability should be able to choose who they work with; and not be restricted to contracted government services. The supports available should extend beyond contracted DES providers or Workforce Australia providers to a wider suite of services that understand, and are well connected to, the labour market.

Industry specific experts, recruitment agencies and job coaches, working in tandem (where needed) with more specialist disability supports, may be more effective based on a person’s career aspirations, interests and needs, particularly in a tight labour market.

* 1. The underpinning framework for this approach could be modelled on existing panels and frameworks.
  2. Models that have demonstrated strong outcomes for particular cohorts (such as through Information, Linkages and Capacity building projects and other funding sources) should be evaluated and funded to continue.
  3. Any person with disability who wants to work should be able to access flexible support. This includes people with disability who have been assessed as having a work capacity of less than 8 hour per week (consistent with DRC, 7.16).

1. **The Australian government increases collaboration and addresses silos to better support people with disability and employers.**

This includes:

* 1. recognising and leveraging the expertise, and industry connections, of recruitment agencies and labour hire firms, with incentives to work with DES, Workforce Australia and specialist disability organisations. Leveraging these connections recognises existing commercial relationships and the preferred recruitment processes of large employers; provides a level of assurance to employers of jobseeker readiness and fit; frees up service provider capacity to provide more tailored support to jobseekers; and opens new opportunities for people with disability.
  2. the NDIS
     1. complementing support offered by DES to ensure holistic, wraparound support to build employment aspiration, job readiness and practical skills;
     2. ensuring employment features in goal setting conversations, with open, mainstream inclusive employment the first option that is explored (consistent with DRC, 7.29);
     3. helping to actualise these goals, with clear pathways and assistance to broker connections. This includes identifying skills that may be needed, the types of roles that might be of interest and establishing connections to progress these goals. This support should also be available to self-managed NDIS participants.
     4. recognising that people with disability can now start planning for life, rather than focus solely on their basic support needs. This change in mindset can take time for people who have fought for basic supports and expended a lot of energy to ensure their supports work for them. Planning for life – not just supports and employment – is a shift in language and action by the NDIA and people with disability themselves.

1. **Providers contracted by the Australian government to support people with disability to gain employment must:**
   1. be high performing (70% or more clients secure employment of their choosing; a minimum of 40% of clients secure employment of 12 months or greater; people with disability report high satisfaction with the responsiveness and knowledge/understanding demonstrated by the service).

These figures must be measured by disability type to ensure that providers are not motivated to just support the employment of people with disability who may be "easier" to place. Different models of payment for providers should be on the table, noting that some groups, such as people with intellectual disability and their employers, may require more upfront support.

* 1. have specialist experience of different types of disability or barriers to employment; including how to apply the concept of job carving to create suitable job roles for people with disability who would benefit from this approach;
  2. offer training of their staff (at induction, and ongoing training delivered by people with lived experience of disability) to build disability awareness and ensure practical knowledge and evidence-based practice to support people with disability into employment (consistent with DRC, 7.17);
  3. invest in a genuine discovery process by getting to know a person’s strengths and interests, their contributions, and the conditions needed for success;
  4. provide supportive goal setting and recognise supported decision making, with clear steps to achieve goals and evidence of progress;
  5. provide support in the lead-up; during and post-placement;
  6. keep appropriate records that capture people’s experiences and goals to minimise people with disability having to retell their story;
  7. be delivered by a professional, skilled workforce that understand the labour market and have well-developed business networks;
  8. be appropriately resourced; with distinct funding within government contracts for staff professional development to ensure up-to-date knowledge of the labour market; skills and experience that are in demand; and workforce trends.
  9. have clear, measurable targets relating to the employment of people with disability within their workforce, including in senior leadership roles.

1. **All communication – from information in written formats to in-person interactions – is inclusive**.

People with disability have access to readily available, easy to understand, culturally appropriate and accessible information to make informed choices. Accessible communication includes Easy Read, plain English, large print, Braille, Auslan, captions, availability of hearing augmentation (such as a hearing loop), and digital communications that comply with WCAG 2.0.

At minimum, resources should cover:

* 1. what to consider when choosing a high-quality service;
  2. Quality Framework principles and markers of high-quality service provision;
  3. expectations, of both clients and service providers; and
  4. how to provide feedback or make a complaint.

People with disability may choose to use a support person to understand information and make decisions.

1. **Continuous improvement is built into service contracts.**

At minimum, this should include:

* 1. regular consumer engagement to ensure services are responsive and accessible;
  2. active encouragement of feedback, with evidence of how it informs improvements by an individual service provider and of Australian government contract delivery.

**Aligned Policy Position Statements:**AFDO Position Statement on Inclusive Employment  
AFDO Position Statement on Income Support  
AFDO Position Statement on the Disability Support Pension  
AFDO Position Statement on Inclusive Supported Employment

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, People with disability in Australia, July 2022, Australian Government - <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/employment/employment-rate-and-type#Employment%20type> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Boston Consulting Group, *Mid Term Review of Disability Employment Services Program*, August 2020, Department of Social Services, Australian Government - <https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2021/des-mid-term-review-august-2020-v2.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)