



Issues Paper 4: Commonwealth Government Assistance

What Commonwealth government assistance is available to ensure equality of opportunity for people with disabilities in employment?

There are several different questions that need to be addressed to foster equality of opportunity for people with disabilities in employment. These questions include:

- how to increase participation by people with disabilities in the workforce
- whether people with disabilities can get a job once they have decided to enter employment
- whether there are equal opportunities for job retention, promotion and development once they find employment.

Government has a role to play in addressing each of these questions.

This Issues Paper identifies some of the major Commonwealth government services that aim to increase the participation and employment rates of people with disabilities.¹

The paper is intended to be the first step towards addressing a problem identified by many parties in the preliminary stages of this Inquiry – that there is no single place where people with disabilities who wish to enter the workforce, and employers wishing to hire them, can go to find out what services are available to help them.

The paper also sets out some of the recommendations made by recent government reviews of various Commonwealth government initiatives.

The Inquiry is interested in your feedback on all of these issues.² Please use the questions set out below as a guide to your responses.

¹ The primary sources for this paper are Commonwealth government websites. In particular: www.JobAble.gov.au; www.workplace.gov.au; http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/services/disability_emp.htm#des; <http://www.facs.gov.au/disability/cds/index.htm>.

² Under the Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA), the Commonwealth government has responsibility for the planning, policy and management of employment assistance. While this paper focuses on Commonwealth government services, the Inquiry is also interested in information about how State government disability services may impact upon employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

1. What government support is provided to people with disabilities to assist them in seeking, obtaining and retaining open employment?

- Centrelink Disability Officers – specially trained staff who conduct assessments and provide assistance to people with a disability who are seeking employment
- Job Network – provides assistance to people with disabilities who are seeking employment and have no ongoing support or rehabilitation needs. There are also specialist Job Network providers
- CRS (Commonwealth Rehabilitation Scheme) Australia – provides employment assistance and vocational rehabilitation for people with a disability entering employment
- Disability Open Employment Services – government-funded employment services that provide assistance to people with disabilities who have ongoing support needs to enter and maintain open employment.

Your feedback: Commonwealth government assistance to people with disabilities

- (a) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Commonwealth government services listed above?
- (b) What other Commonwealth government services are available to assist people with disabilities who are seeking employment in employment?
- (c) What additional supports and services do people with disabilities need from the Commonwealth government to seek and obtain employment in employment?

2. What financial incentives are provided to employers by the Commonwealth government in order to encourage employment of people with disabilities?

- **Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSS)** – when an employer hires a person with a disability through a Commonwealth-funded open employment service, the employer may be paid a wage subsidy equivalent to 13 weeks pay (See: www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/disabilities/people-wage_subsidy_scheme.htm)
- **Supported Wage System (SWS)** – there is provision for employees with a disability to be paid a lower wage, according to their level of productivity
- **Workplace Modification Scheme (WMS)** – financial assistance up to \$5,000 to help employers make workplace modifications, including the lease, purchase or hire of equipment. (See: www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/disabilities/people-workplace_modifications_scheme.htm)
- **New Apprenticeship Access Programme (NAAP), Disabled New Apprentice Wage Support (DNAWS), Assistance for Tutorial, Interpreter and Mentor Services** - schemes aimed at encouraging employers to train people with disabilities (See: <https://naap.dest.gov.au/Default.aspx> and www.newapprenticeships.gov.au/employer/disabled_app.asp)
- **Disability Recruitment Coordinator** – assists large employers looking to hire people with disabilities³
- **CRS Australia** – offers free recruitment services for employers.⁴

³ <http://www.facs.gov.au/disability/cds/pubs/bep/support2.htm>

⁴ <http://www.crsrehab.gov.au/76g.htm>

Your feedback: Commonwealth government assistance to employers

- (a) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the initiatives listed above?
- (b) What other Commonwealth government services are available to employers to encourage them to recruit, hire and retain people with disabilities in employment?
- (c) What additional supports and services do employers need from the Commonwealth government to encourage employers to hire and retain people with disabilities in employment?

3. What do the Commonwealth government's own reviews say about the services available to encourage equality of opportunity for open employment of people with disabilities?

Over the past five years the following reviews have been conducted by various government bodies.

- **Productivity Commission Report (2004)** – The Commonwealth Productivity Commission found that the employment situation of people with disabilities had not improved greatly since the introduction of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA).⁵ Amongst other things, the Productivity Commission recommended that the government 'review the effectiveness of the various schemes it uses to subsidise the costs to organisations of adjustments needed by people with disabilities'.⁶ In January 2005, the Commonwealth government accepted this recommendation.⁷
- **Interim review of the DSP Pilot (2004)** - Between December 2003 and June 2004, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) conducted a pilot project looking at ways to help people receiving the Disability Support Pension (DSP), who wish to enter the labour market to have better access to Job Network services. The interim results of the pilot suggest that an active effort to engage DSP recipients with the Job Network services often results in people using them more. The recommendations in the interim report include:
 1. Remove disincentives to participation for DSP recipients.
 2. Increase DSP recipients' awareness of available employment services and promote best practice in engaging with interested job seekers at the local level.
 3. Promote flexible servicing arrangements that currently exist within the Active Participation Model.
 4. Promote best practice, training and support mechanisms and tools for servicing DSP recipients.
 5. Streamline administrative systems and processes associated with servicing DSP recipients.
 6. Improve awareness in the labour market of the benefits of employing people with a disability.

As at February 2005, the government was considering changes to the DSP aimed at encouraging people with disabilities to enter the workforce and access job assistance services.

- **Employer Incentives Scheme Report (2003)** - the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) review of the Commonwealth government's Employer Incentives Strategy looked at what helped to motivate employers to increase their recruitment of people with disabilities.⁸ The review listed ten areas for action as part of 'an effective, integrated suite of measures to encourage businesses to employ people with disabilities'.
 1. Undertake a collaborative policy development and implementation process involving stakeholders
 2. Build employer awareness of the contribution people with disabilities can and do make.
 3. Provide targeted information, advice and support to employers about employing people with disabilities.

⁵ Productivity Commission, *Review of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, Report No 30, 30 April 2004, Vol 1, p82.

⁶ Productivity Commission, *Review of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, Report No 30, 30 April 2004, Vol 1, ppLIV-LV; pp426-428.

⁷ For the full response of the Commonwealth Attorney-General see <http://www.ag.gov.au/PCDDA>.

⁸ Department of Family and Community Services, *Improving Employment opportunities for People with a Disability*, Report of the Review of the Employer Incentives Strategy, March 2003, [www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/vIA/EIS/\\$file/EISReviewReport_0303.pdf](http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/vIA/EIS/$file/EISReviewReport_0303.pdf)

4. Identify mechanisms to recognise employers' performance and encourage ongoing improvement in employers' efforts to recruit people with disabilities.
 5. Improve job matching services to increase mainstream recruitment of people with disabilities.
 6. Develop a robust platform for work trials.
 7. Improve productivity based wage assessments.
 8. Monitor usage of wage subsidies for people with disabilities in case based funding.
 9. Improve the administration of the Workplace Modifications Scheme to make it easier to access.
 10. Encourage and support best practice among Disability Employment Service providers.
- **Supported Wages System Report (2001)** - the FaCS review of the Supported Wage System (SWS) found that while there was general support for this initiative, several improvements should be made.⁹ Those areas include:
 1. Establishment of clear objectives, performance indicators and operational procedures
 2. Improved program administration and assessment processes
 3. Monitoring the impact of removing additional 'on the job support' funding for SWS placements
 4. Awareness raising of the existence of the SWS
 - **McClure Report (2000)** - the Commonwealth Reference Group on Welfare Reform made recommendations regarding alternative approaches to welfare, Some of the recommendations which specifically relate to people with disabilities include:
 - A8 Develop a better means of assessing the capacity of people with disabilities to participate in employment and other activities...
 - A9 Move towards a significant change in the framework of employment services to people with a disability, including a greater focus on outcomes, earlier intervention, better case monitoring and support for job seekers with a disability...
 - D13 Develop participation expectations and requirements for people with a disability in the light of the outcomes of the Disability Assessment and Contestability Trial.
 - D14 Review the capacity for work criterion (the 30- hour threshold) for people with disabilities ensuring that any such criterion is in line with contemporary patterns of labour market participation.
 - D16 Government and business to work in partnership to achieve attitudinal change and improve incentives and recognition for business to employ people at risk of long term joblessness. New initiatives could build on:
 - The Employer Incentives Strategy for people with disabilities, to increase awareness and take up of provisions that support the employment of people with disabilities...

Your feedback: government reviews

- (a) What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of the recommendations listed above?
- (b) Which of these recommendations are most important for improving equality of opportunity in employment for people with disabilities?
- (c) Which of these recommendations have been implemented and how?
- (d) Where recommendations have not been implemented, what needs to change so that they can be implemented?
- (e) What other changes should be made to government services to improve equality of opportunity to employment for people with disabilities?

⁹ For a copy of the report see <http://www.facs.gov.au/disability/ood/sws/index.htm>

4. What do you think about the government services available to encourage equality of opportunity for open employment of people with disabilities?

Your feedback: government services generally

- (a) What are some of the successes of current government services?
- (b) What are some of the failures of current government services?
- (c) What government services, other than those listed here, have you used?
- (d) What do you expect from the government in the terms of employment opportunities for people with disabilities?
- (e) Where do you go to find information about what government services are available?
- (f) What improvements would you suggest to improve access to government services?
- (g) Do you think that the government services available to people with disabilities, when looking for employment in employment, varies depending on whether the disability is physical, intellectual or psychiatric?
- (h) Do the government services available vary depending on the type of physical disability, the type of intellectual disability or the type of psychiatric disability?

5. How do you make a submission?

Further information about the Inquiry can be found at:

www.humanrights.gov.au/disability_rights/employment_inquiry/index.htm

Submissions are due by **15 April 2005**.

You can email your submission to: employmentinquiry@humanrights.gov.au.

Submissions may also be sent in hard copy, audiotape or videotape, to:

Employment Inquiry
Disability Rights Unit
Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
GPO Box 5218
Sydney NSW 2001

Questions can be directed to:

Kate Temby
Policy Officer
Disability Rights Unit
Phone: 02 9284 9767