

Boosting work outcomes - including supported employment

This NDIS challenge

- A key aim of the NDIS is to facilitate employment for people with disability.
- Work promotes social and economic independence, providing families and carers with an increased ability to maintain and build their own social and employment relationships.
- Work and employment for people with disability will significantly benefit not only people with disability but Australian society and the economy.
- In late 2017, the Productivity Commission noted that only one in five participants have NDIS plans that include employment supports.
- To illustrate the impact at the individual organisational level, Alliance20 members are aware that a number of employment providers have seen drop in the intake of new employees under the NDIS. This drop is as high as 75% for some Alliance20 members.
- Providers also report significant delays for people trying to access supported employment and an overall reduction of new people accessing supported employment.
- The current funding for supported employment (Australian Disability Enterprises or 'ADEs') is considered "transitional" until administrative arrangements are finalised.
- There is concern that participants may not be able to access comprehensive employment opportunities if the process results in pro-rata funding based on days or hours of work per week only.
- This scenario could result in a significant reduction in supports and threaten the viability of the ADE sector.

Causes of this challenge include:

- Limited awareness of supported employment supports amongst Local Area Coordinators (LACs) and planners. (Pleasingly this has been acknowledged by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).
- Lack of awareness of the range of potential employment options by participants.
- Lack of recognition of supported employment as an employment outcome (as evidenced by anecdotal feedback that some participants are not presented with supported employment participation).
- Unclear funding mechanisms. A participant needs to select an ADE before the planner can include the funding for that specific ADE. This is in contrast to other supports, that is, a participant is provided funding and then locates a provider.

Impacts of this NDIS challenge

People with a disability are denied work and employment opportunities.

Unclear employment pathways for people with moderate to severe disability. This issue, combined with an uncertain future for many ADEs, may result in the loss of a vital employment option for people with disability, particularly people with intellectual disability, along the employment continuum.

Significant delays in employment access whilst awaiting review. Participants who have been offered employment with an ADE must wait for a scheduled review of their plan or request a review to obtain funding. These reviews can take up to nine months - delaying or denying people access to supported employment.

Lack of ADE provider choice. People who required to nominate a single ADE in a plan to receive funding are denied choice of employer.

Alliance20's Proposed Solutions

1. Planning Process amendments

- Include a generic employment line item in the plans of all NDIS participants of working age that could be used to access employment services. If the participant does not access employment, funding could be reabsorbed.
- Clear guidance about the use of 'Core Support' funding for employment:
For people with an existing plan without "Finding and Keeping a Job":
- Any person with an existing NDIS plan who is offered employment by an ADE can supply proof of offer of employment to the LAC/Planner and have employment included in the plan.
- The plan is then amended, without the need to have a review meeting, to include "Finding and Keeping a Job" at the corresponding funding level specific to the organisation making the offer of employment.
- Plan dates are not changed – ensuring no impact on other items in the plan.
- Plan then continues normal cycle of review as per dates of existing plan.

2. Re-institute interim funding arrangements

- Re-institute the process that existed under Case Based Funding whereby a new employee is funded by DSS until appropriate NDIS funding in their plan.

3. Education and awareness

- Unfortunately, many people with a disability and their carers may not even consider work. As awareness of work options grows, people will pursue employment and ask for facilitative supports to be included in their plan. The full range of employment options needs to be able to be considered by participants and families.
- Information to be provided to Planners and LACs to highlight the social and economic benefits of all employment options and also explain the contemporary operation of supported employment services.

4. Referral pathways

- Implement a review mechanism for School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES) participants who do not achieve an employment outcome, a trigger to discuss all employment options with participants.
- Greater engagement with specialist schools and Support Teachers Transition (STTs) to foster better awareness of all employment options.
- Supported Employment to be considered as a possible option for suitable Disability Employment Services (DES) participants who do not achieve an employment outcome after a specified time.
- Potentially allow DES/SLES participants to access Supported Employment in some capacity i.e. work whilst looking for a job in Open Employment.