

BOOSTING WORK OUTCOMES - Including Supported Employment

The introduction of the NDIS was greeted with significant expectation that employment outcomes would be enhanced, but this has not eventuated. In late 2017 the Productivity Commission noted that only one in five participants had plans with employment supports. Work promotes social and economic independence, providing families and carers with an increased ability to build and maintain their own social and employment relationships. This is an area of significant priority.

Alliance20 has identified possible solutions including raising awareness among planners and participants of employment opportunities, the inclusion of a generic employment line item in the plans of all NDIS participants of working age and improvements to the plan review process.

BACKGROUND

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 for people with disability will significantly benefit not only people with disability but Australian society and the economy

CURRENT ISSUES

New Supported Employment Model Development & Implementation: Indications of the new supported employment model to date are for improved rights and economic goals that are commendable.

The Government's goals of greater numbers of people being in open employment, having the opportunity to earn a living wage and having greater work choices, will require significant transformational and next generation level of thinking and action.

The financial and operational realities of not only the change, but ongoing sustainability cannot be ignored. The new model must be rigorously tested before its approval by the NDIA Board through a representative group of ADEs that are willing to drive transformational change and innovation in the sector. Failure to do this will bring a real risk of unemployment for those currently working in the existing supported employment setting, due to highly likely risk of ADEs deteriorating financially (potential for closure) during and post the transition period if the model proves to be unrealistic.

The significant shifts in skills and jobs that are foreshadowed for the Australian workforce apply regardless of ability. Current projections for employment growth in Australia are dominated by higher skilled occupations and below average

employment growth is projected for skill levels 2 – 5, with the effects of automation contributing to the projected employment decline.¹

Supported employment must be considered as an extension of skill level 5 or its own skill level of 6 or more. Therefore, the current policies and related strategies of Government to address future mainstream workforce skills and related job shortages must be seamless with disability. The new NDIS supported employment model coupled with Government Disability Employment/Workforce policies and strategies pertaining to training, skills development, workplace employment incentives etc must be efficiently integrated in line with that of the mainstream workforce.

Critically, NDIS service lines in the new supported employment model must be priced for success at the outset.

- The Fair Work Commission Supported Wage decision. The impact of a wage increase must be considered by Government in the development of the new Supported Employment model and any consideration for a Government transition funding structure.
- In late 2017, the Productivity Commission noted that only one in five participants have plans with employment supports.
- To illustrate the impact at the individual organisational level, Alliance20 members are aware that many employment providers have seen a 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 NDIA ADE (Australian Disability Enterprise) funding is considered “transitional” funding until NDIA finalise this area of support. There is great concern in the sector that this new model will be pro-rata funding based on days or hours of work per week. Resulting in a significant reduction in NDIA funding and rendering the ADE sector unviable.
- A20 members have observed a number of contributing factors to this:
 - Limited understanding of supported employment amongst Local Area Coordinators (LACs) and planners, acknowledged by the NDIA in June 2018 at an NDS conference
 - People with disability may have less insight into supported employment opportunities
 - lack of recognition of supported employment as a genuine employment outcome (as evidenced by anecdotal feedback that some planners have actively discouraged people from supported employment participation), and
 - unclear mechanisms by which funding is apportioned to a plan. A participant needs to select an ADE before the planner can include the funding for that

¹ Employment Outlook to May 2023, Based on the Department of Jobs and Small Business' 2018 employment projections. Australian Government, Department of Jobs and Small Business

specific ADE. This is in contrast to the way the Scheme works for most other supports, that is, a participant is provided funding and then locates a provider.

IMPACT STATEMENT

IMPACT FOR PARTICIPANTS

- People with disability are denied work and employment opportunities.
- Direct threats to current employment and employment pathways for people with moderate to severe disability. These issues combined may compromise the viability of many ADEs, resulting 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 gaining access to supported employment.
- Lack of ADE provider choice. People who are required to nominate a single ADE in a plan to receive funding are denied choice of employer.

IMPACT FOR PROVIDERS

- Existing providers will cease to be viable and exit the market.

IMPACT FOR THE MARKET

- The market will cease to be able to provide a suitable range of options for people with disability.

ALLIANCE20'S PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Consideration should be given to:

- Testing the new NDIS Supported Employment model and any supplementary Government funding initiatives must be rigorously tested prior to approval by the NDIA Board and Government with a representative group of ADEs that change and drive innovation in the sector.
- 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 Core Support funding for employment:
 - For people with an existing plan without "Finding and Keeping a Job":
 - Any person with an existing NDIS plan, and who is offered employment by an ADE, can supply proof of offer of employment to the LAC/Planner.

- 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.
- Re- and awareness initiatives such as:
 - many people with disability and their carers have been ‘conditioned’ to 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. Promotion of supported employment also needs to address the negative associations that have been made with ADEs
 - Education and awareness for Planners and LACs to highlight the social and economic benefits of supported employment and explain supported employment, as opposed to outdated “sheltered employment” perceptions.
- Referral pathways initiatives such as:
 - Implement a review mechanism for School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES) participants who do not achieve an employment outcome, a trigger to discuss Supported Employment as an option.
 - Greater engagement with specialist schools and Support Teachers Transition (STTs) to foster better awareness of Supported Employment and its benefits
 - Supported Employment to be considered as an employment outcome for suitable Disability Employment Services (DES) participants who do not achieve an employment outcome after a specified time.
 - Allow DES/SLES participants to access Supported Employment in some capacity i.e. work whilst looking for a job in Open Employment.