



Monday, 23 May 2016

The Hon Christian Porter  
Minister for Social Services  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

The Hon Jane Prentice MP  
Assistant Minister for Disability Services  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

The Hon Jenny Macklin  
Shadow Minister for Disability Reform  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Senator Rachel Siewert  
Family, Ageing, Community & Disability Services  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

## Open Employment Participation and People with Intellectual Disability

Dear Ministers, Members of Parliament, and Senators

**Inclusion Australia** is a peak national association representing people with intellectual disability and their families. **Down Syndrome Australia** represents the needs, interests and aspirations of people with Down syndrome and those that support them.

We are seeking a renewed effort by the Commonwealth to develop policy to increase the open employment participation of people with intellectual disability. We want to focus on *what works* for people with intellectual disability.

We started the ***We Can Work with the Right Support*** campaign in response to two facts.

1. People with intellectual disability can work in the open workforce when provided with the ***right type of support***,<sup>1</sup> and,
2. The number of users of disability services with intellectual disability over the age of 15 and employed in the open workforce, fell from 8,735 in 2003-04, to 5,152 in 2013-14, a decrease from 16.3% to 7.9% over eleven years.<sup>2</sup>

In the face of this negative trend, there is a need to discuss how we can improve policy to increase access to the **right type of support** across Australia to help people with intellectual disability participate in the open labour market.

Access to the **right type of support** is critical if we are to achieve the economic participation objective of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the National

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<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. *Evaluation of Disability Employment Services, 2010-2012, Final Report*, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. *Disability support services: services provided under the National Disability Agreement*. Annual reports from 2003-04 to 2013-14; & disability data sourced from aihw.gov.au

Disability Strategy. Evidence based support provides the best chance of improving employment participation rates and generating savings for the Commonwealth.

The Centre for International Economics found that effective transition-to-work combined with effective open employment support for people with significant intellectual disability offers potential savings of between \$18 million and \$53 million per year across Australia, and between \$308 million and \$916 million over a 40 year lifetime.<sup>3</sup> These estimates are based on actual practice of the **right type of support** in Australia.

The origin of open employment support for people with intellectual disability in Australia was marked by support across political party lines via the Disability Services Act 1986.

From 1986 there was significant growth in the number of people with intellectual disability participating in open employment, but this growth has now been in steady decline for over a decade. It is now 30 years since the Disability Services Act and it is time to consider what has worked and what has not.

We call on the Commonwealth to design with Inclusion Australia and Down Syndrome Australia a national system of transition-to-work and open employment support based on evidence based practice for people with intellectual disability. We cannot responsibly allow the current erosion of open employment participation to continue when the evidence of successful support and outcomes is readily known.

Our ***We Can Work with the Right Support*** campaign petition states that;

**— A new disability employment support system should build on what is achieving good employment outcomes for people with intellectual disability.**

After thirty years of open employment support practice we have sufficient evidence to know *what does* and *what doesn't* work in assisting people with intellectual disability to participate in the open labour market.

We wish to inform government about evidence based open employment support for people with intellectual disability, and discuss how we may make this standard practice across Australia.

**— A market-based approach should provide individuals, families, and employers with genuine choice informed by published provider outcomes by disability.**

Due to the efforts of Kate Ellis MP, and Senator Mitch Fifield, as previous ministers for disability employment services, people with disability and families have access to transparent employment outcomes of funded providers by disability type. Inclusion Australia wants to reinforce the critical importance of this policy to ensure that individuals and families can make an informed choice of support in the provider market place.

**— Any changes should not unintentionally harm services performing well in the current employment support system.**

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<sup>3</sup> The Centre for International Economics. *DES and the NDIS: opportunities for portfolio wide savings*, 4 March 2016.

We are fortunate to have some providers who are achieving high rates of open employment outcomes for people with intellectual disability. The national DES average 26-week employment outcome for people with intellectual disability is 43.3%.<sup>4</sup> For every 10 persons remaining in DES for at least six months, about 4 are getting a job that lasts at least six months.

There are twenty-one DES providers that achieve an average 26-week employment outcome greater than fifty percent (>50%) for people with intellectual disability, with the highest achieving eighty-four percent (84%). These providers deserve our acknowledgement for their high performance.

We need to urgently discuss the the lack of indexation of DES funding since 2010, and the absence of forward budget plans to address indexation. We also need to discuss the need for bespoke policies for ongoing support funding to help maintain the employment of people with intellectual disability.

We need Commonwealth policy to support a seamless interaction between the NDIS and DES so people with intellectual disability can move from school into jobs in the open labour market. We again acknowledge the work of previous ministers Kate Ellis and Mitch Fifield in addressing this issue which resulted in the Better Pathways initiative announced in the 2015 Federal Budget. We do, however, request a meeting to review the implementation of this policy to ensure the initiative supports best practice support.

We appreciate that the Parliament is on the verge of being dissolved with a pending election. Inclusion Australia and Down Syndrome Australia, however, would like to begin discussions with government and party policy leaders to find a way forward to develop a long-term national plan to provide all people with intellectual disability with the opportunity to access the right support to participate in the open labour market.

Yours sincerely

Mark Pattison  
Inclusion Australia

Ruth Webber  
Down Syndrome Australia

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<sup>4</sup> Disability Employment Services Outcome Rates by Disability, December 2015. Source: [imip.gov.au](http://imip.gov.au)