

Submission in response to the Victorian Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers

National Disability Services (NDS) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Victorian Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee. We note that the Victorian Government has in place strategies and policies intended to facilitate the increased employment of disadvantaged jobseekers. Various Victorian government agencies have also worked closely with NDS members through initiatives such as the Victorian Government Social Procurement Framework and the Jobs Victoria Employment Network.

NDS submission will discuss policy initiatives that the Victorian Government utilises to help increase the employment participation of people with disability; provide examples of evidence based good practice in promoting employment success and champion a whole of government 'Employment First Approach' for young people with disability.

Recommendations

In order to enhance the achievement of sustainable employment for jobseekers with disability, the Victorian Government should:

- Update its three Disability Employment Plans to reflect the new National Disability Strategy from 2020
- Commit and invest in a Work First approach where employment is the expected outcome for all young people regardless of disability.
- Extend implementation of Ticket to Work across Victoria, in light of its demonstrated success.
- Ensure that young people with disability receive the support they require to participate in the workforce as early as possible, whilst at school, to ensure effective long-term employment outcomes.
- Commit to a collaborative approach bringing all stakeholders such as potential employees, parents and support services and employers together, and invest in effective coordination to achieve such collaboration. Furthermore, work collaboratively with all governments to ensure effective school to work transition.
- Actively engage Disability Employment Services (DES) providers to help meet its public sector recruitment targets for people with disability

- Complement existing policy initiatives with incentives for businesses such as payroll tax concessions or wage subsidies for employers that recruit jobseekers with disability.
- Complement the Jobs Victoria Working Stories by investing in a campaign to promote the benefits of employing people with disability
- Collect relevant and reliable data on educational performance and school-to-work progress of students with disability, made available to stakeholders in a timely manner, and use this to inform design of evidence based policy responses and continued government monitoring and evaluation.

The social and economic benefits of seeking to place disadvantaged jobseekers into sustainable employment

The benefits for individuals in employment are well known. Employment enables wider engagement with society as well as giving our lives both meaning and purpose. For a disadvantaged jobseeker who gains employment, the outcomes can include improved health and overall wellbeing, a wider social circle and the opportunity to learn new skills, which are likely to further enhance their ongoing career prospects and participation in rewarding, sustainable employment.

Young people with disability are one of the most disadvantaged groups of young people transitioning from education to employment (Winn & Hay, 2009). Successful transitions are critical to ensuring their social and economic futures. A successful transition to work can help towards them achieving full social and economic participation, which is a key underpinning of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) 2006 (Stafford, Marston, Chamorro-Koc, Beatson, & Drennan, 2017).

The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016) stated students with disability should receive the support to ensure the effective transition from learning at school to vocational and tertiary education, and work. Likewise, the National Disability Strategy (key policy strategy 3.1) identifies the need for greater employment opportunities as a key to improving economic security and personal wellbeing for people with disability. 'Economic security is critical to the wellbeing and empowerment of people with disability and underpins the ability to make progress in all other outcomes and areas of life (Department of Social Services, 2018, p. 42)'. The Strategy (key policy strategy 5.5) also identifies the need for high quality programs designed to create smooth transition from education and employment (Department of Social Services, 2016). Without support to successfully transition for school to work, young people with disability are more likely to be excluded from social and economic participation.

The jobseekers who may be considered as being disadvantaged in the labour market and the types of barriers to employment they might face

Young Australians with disability have similar career and financial aspirations and priorities to other young people, yet are more than twice as likely as other young people, not to be employed or satisfied with their employment opportunities and job prospects (Emerson, Honey, & Llewellyn, 2008; Yu, 2010). People with disability are significantly disadvantaged in the labour market and their workforce participation and employment rates are very low compared with the wider Australian workforce. Employment rates for people with disability are slightly higher in Victoria than the national average. These included an employment rate of 48.8% (48.1% nationally), an unemployment rate of 8.6% (10% nationally) and a participation rate of 53.4% (same as the national rate). In June 2019, the rates for the wider workforce in Victoria were an unemployment rate of 4.7% (5.2% nationally) and a participation rate of 66.2% (66% nationally). In addition, the 2015 SDAC revealed that the workforce participation rate of Australians with severe or profound disability actually fell between 2012 and 2015, from 30% to 25%. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

During the transition from school, all young people can encounter great uncertainty and tremendous developmental challenges. These issues are likely to be even more stressful for young people with disability, which further increases their risk of social exclusion (Kraemer & Blacher, 2001; Winn & Hay, 2009; Yu, 2009).

Unsuccessful transition from school into further training or employment is often indicative of long term, even often life-long, disadvantage. Young people with disability are more likely to drop out of school early, face exclusion from the labour market, obtain fewer educational qualifications, are more likely to experience poverty and be socially isolated.

Despite significant efforts to address the exclusion of young people with disability from the labour market, the employment of those with high support needs has declined, and the labour force participation of women with disability has not increased Davy et al. (2019). Likewise, Emerson and Llewellyn (2014) identified that over a ten year period the education and employment gap between young people with disability and those without had widened. They noted a 10% decrease in the number of young people with disability in employment and an 8% decrease in the number of young people with disability being fully engaged in education or work although Year 12 or equivalent attainment for young people with disability is on the rise, it is still much less than their non-disabled peers.

Improving these outcomes is both a social and economic imperative; enabling all people to participate fully in society as active citizens, addressing impending labour shortages due to an ageing population, reducing dependence on social security and improving the overall financial and wellbeing status of individuals.

Types of barriers young people with disability face

Young people with disability face a multitude of barriers preventing them from transitions from school to the workforce. A range of studies identify the barriers they face that prevent them entering and remaining in the workforce.

The needs of young people with intellectual disability are of particular concern. Only 56% of young people with intellectual disability complete year 12 or its equivalent. Siperstein, Parker, and Drascher (2013) make the claim that if young people with intellectual disability do not engage in mainstream employment by age 21, it is unlikely they ever will.

According to the Executive Summary of Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (2012) "a poor education is one of the key reasons why the economic and social participation rate of people with disabilities is so low.'

In Victoria, young people with disability are a substantial and increasing cohort.

- 17% of Victorian students received education adjustments due to disability, of these 36% received the highest level of adjustments (quality differentiated teaching practice (QDTP).
- Students with cognitive disability make up the largest disability cohort with 8.8% (Department of Education and Training, 2015)
- While indigenous people only making up 1.6% of Victoria's over population, they are overrepresented in the Program for Students with Disability, (PSD) making up 3.6% (Victorian Equal & Human Rights, 2012).
- The labour force participation rate of Victorians with a disability of working age is 54%, compared to 83% for Victorians without a disability (ABS, 2011). In comparison, only 6.9% of people with intellectual disability are in open employment (Caneva, 2014).

Improving the transition from school to work for young adults with disability has been a mainstay of many inquiries in Australia, however, it has not been well actualized and the actual process of post school transition has remained ill-defined (Children with Disability Australia, 2015).

In Australia, there is a pervasive culture of low expectation, resulting in a lack of opportunities for students with disability, particularly in relation to genuine, sustainable employment. This view is sometimes held by the young people themselves, as well as parents, employers, disability providers, educators and government (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012; Dell'Armo & Tassé, 2019; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011). To make a significant difference in employment for people with disability, there is a need to build the capacity of key stakeholders, including mainstream services.

In Victoria, policy and practice encourages young people with disability to transition to non-vocational pathways that do not lead to open employment. A report for the

Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) found that 23% of students assessed at Support Needs Assessment levels 1 and 2 (indicating high level functioning) transition from school into day programs rather than into employment pathways (The Asquith Group, 2009).

According to data from the Victorian Department of Education, (2015)

- 73% of students in special schools reported they had not received any assistance with job-seeking or job-placement.
- Only 6% of students in special schools were in open employment six months after completing school.
- 58% of young people in special schools transitioned into day services and 9% transitioned into supported employment settings. Currently, less than 5% of people with disability transition to open employment from day services or supported employment settings.
- 26% of young people from special schools were enrolled in Certificate I-III training compared to 3% of young people without disability.¹¹ (There is little employment value in Certificate I-III; and VET students with disability are not progressing to higher qualifications that have proven employment benefits) (Wakeford, 2016).

Often programs are 'siloes', in either schools or adult disability services, pre-employment or employment services. Early intervention has often been the main responsibility of allied health professionals. This creates a dichotomous model whose division of service delivery is reflective of traditional funding arrangements by governments (Winn & Hay, 2009).

Opportunities to break down barriers

Young people with disability need to have access to effective supports, which enable them to effectively transition from school into employment. Just as the impact of disability impacts upon individuals on a continuum, there needs to be a continuum of service responses to address the barriers individuals face. Post-school services need to connect with individuals while at school, with the initiation of career development and pre-employment skills training commencing prior to the school-leaving age (Kruger, Elinson, & Milfort, 2006; Winn & Hay, 2009).

The transition from school to adulthood is a time of particular vulnerability for young people with a disability. Interventions should include preventive and collaborative approaches that address the multiple causes of exclusion (Dyson, Aston, Dewson, & Loukas, 2005).

Early intervention is key. It is crucial for young people with disability to receive the support they require to participate in the workforce as early as possible. This will drive effective long-term employment outcomes and maximise the benefits of improved standards of living and social inclusion that come with employment (Deloitte Access Economics, 2011).

Currently, many Australian students with disability receive prolonged exposure to “horizon-limiting views and experiences which can see these beliefs become internalised and the person’s capacity to recognise their potential diminished (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011)”. The earlier young people gain access to experiences and support networks that positively influence views of themselves as workers and active citizens, the better the long-term outcomes achieved.

Interstate and overseas best practice models that could be implemented in Victoria.

Coordination of collaborative practice is essential

There is a need to ensure relationships are developed and sustained between schools and post-school service providers, educational institutions, training agencies, workplaces, and businesses with that students will eventually find employment to ensure effective outcomes. In other jurisdictions, ‘intermediaries’ act as a mechanism, to create more effective linkages between these range of stakeholders. Through aligning and brokering multiple services across institutional and funding sources, intermediary organisations play a critical role in improving employment outcomes for young people with disability (Kruger et al., 2006) .

Coordination is essential, no single system or agency is capable of providing all the required support. Instead, as young people move from the classroom into the workplace and adulthood, they often need to access services from multiple services at once to have their needs fully met (Federal Partners in Transition Workgroup, 2015). Therefore, cross-agency collaboration needs to occur, to meet effectively the diverse and complex needs of young people with disability.

Jobseekers with disability face many barriers to employment. These include a negative perception of their capacity to work and their job readiness, a lack of work experience, lack of qualifications, poor literacy and possible need for workplace modifications. People with disability may also face other significant barriers to employment including a lack of stable accommodation, interaction with the criminal justice system and/or long term disengagement from the labour force.

How well current efforts, programs or activities meet the needs of disadvantaged jobseekers and/or employers looking for workers and potential improvements

Ticket to Work

NDS has developed a successful initiative which employs a network approach to school-to-work transition using collective impact called **Ticket to Work**, which uses intermediaries to coordinate and support school transition. According to independent evaluations of Ticket to Work, network members feel they achieve better outcomes for young people with disability, in collaboration with other services than they can independently. Members do not duplicate existing processes; instead, practices are coordinated and built on the expertise of network members.

Collaboration supports the smooth transition from school-to-work for young people with disability (ARTD Consultants, 2017; Atkinson, Christian, Cassidy, Rutherford, & Hawkins, 2019; Hawkins & Rasheed, 2016). The coordinating function of intermediaries in Ticket to Work includes a significant role in building the capacity of key stakeholders in the local region, including local schools, employers, employment and training services, parents and families.

The most recent evaluation of the Initiative, undertaken by Atkinson et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of young people with disability having the opportunity to build their employability and participate in paid work experience during secondary school. They were 94% more likely to be engaged in employment upon completing school, 82% more likely to complete secondary school and go on to further education or training opportunities compared to their peers who did not take part in Ticket to Work. The students reported being more independent and leading happier lives (Atkinson et al., 2019).

Provision of support in employment

People with severe or profound disability will often require ongoing “on the job support” to maintain their employment. Concerns have been raised that recent changes to the Disability Employment Services (DES) contracts (introduced 1 July 2018) make it difficult to offer “Ongoing Support” to employees with disability in mainstream workplaces. Provision of Ongoing Support is hindered due to excessive (and often punitive) compliance obligations and an inflexible funding model that prevents providers allocating their funding across their caseload based on actual (as opposed to projected) participant support requirements. The proportion of DES participants receiving Ongoing Support has declined from 10.1% in July 2018 to 7.8% in May 2019 (Australian Government, DES monthly data). In contrast the supported employment model offered through Australian Disability Enterprises is specifically designed to provide this on the job support.

NDS notes that the Victorian Government has implemented policy initiatives such as its Social Enterprise Strategy, Social Procurement Framework, the Jobs Victoria Employment Network and the Boost your business vouchers for Entrepreneurs with Disability. These initiatives have achieved very positive outcomes and engaged significant numbers of providers of both open and supported employment services for people with disability. By complementing the NDIS and the DES program, these initiatives assist marginalized jobseekers who face barriers to finding and retaining work or who might not be receiving adequate or appropriate support from other services.

The National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 has been recently reviewed in order to inform the development and implementation of the new Strategy from 2020. One of the Strategy’s six key policy outcomes includes improving employment outcomes for all Australians with disability. It states: *All Australian governments are committed to ensuring people with disability receive opportunities to reach their potential and achieve meaningful participation in the workforce.*

In regard to employment of people with disability and addressing the barriers they face, the review of the National Disability Strategy noted the following:

“Despite the introduction of new employment strategies in many jurisdictions, stakeholders commented that economic security of people with disability had deteriorated in recent years. In particular, employment of people with high support needs had declined. Labour force participation of women with disability has not improved over the last two decades. Stakeholders wanted disability discrimination at work to be a priority focus, stating that it is the most frequent type of disability complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission. Education was highlighted as a policy area that had received increased attention over the life of the Strategy”, Davy, et al. (2019).

NDS notes that the Victorian whole of Government disability plan, *Absolutely Everyone and Every opportunity*, the economic participation plan for people with disability, which will run until 2020. *Getting to Work*, the Victorian public sector disability employment action plan is in place from 2018–2025. These plans should be updated as required to reflect the new National Disability Strategy.

The Victorian Government has committed to a target of six per cent employment of people with disability by 2020, increasing to 12 per cent by 2025. This contrasts with current employment rate of people with disability in the Victorian Public Sector of 2.6% and the Victorian Public Service of 3.6% (Victorian Public Sector Commission, 2018)

In addition to direct procurement from organisations such as Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) through the Social Procurement Framework, the Victorian Government should seek to fulfill its public sector recruitment targets for people with disability by actively engaging DES providers. The engagement of DES providers should be specifically identified in Victorian Public Sector Recruitment Policies.

The Victorian Government’s existing policy initiatives could also be complemented by incentives for businesses such as payroll tax concessions or wage subsidies that recognize the recruitment of employees with disability.

Where possible and to complement its comprehensive suite of Jobs Victoria Working Stories, the Victorian government should also publicise and promote the [Job Access](#) website and the new Employer Toolkit. These are useful online resources that guide employers through the entire process of employing people with disability, using simple, straightforward videos, downloadable resources and highlighting real-life case studies, through the [“Employ Their Ability”](#) Campaign.

Education and training needs to support disadvantaged jobseekers transitioning into work

Promotion of an employment first response

It is our contention that young people aged 14 should receive an ‘employment first’ approach, regardless the severity of disability. School should offer school-to-work

transition support automatically, with an 'opt-out' clause dependent on the individual's circumstances. An 'employment first' approach is the preeminent vocational disability practice in many overseas countries (Blamires, 2015; Monteleone, 2016).

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) will play a leading role to ensure such an approach is taken. However, the Victorian Government through the Department of Education and Training Victoria will maintain a critical role in supporting the NDIS to achieve these outcomes. Evaluations of Ticket to Work clearly indicate employment outcomes are more likely through collaborative practices that cross institutional and funding sources. Consequently, if the Victorian Government fails to collaborative work with the NDIS, opportunities for an employment first approach will be reduced. Therefore, it is critical the Victorian Government works with the NDIS at both a policy and service delivery level to ensure an employment first approach for young people with disability.

School-to-work supports should be based on individualised needs; not group support, in line with evidence-based practice. The most effective means of supporting this group is to provide on the job training.

The Vocational Education and Training system is a key pathway to employment, yet the representation of people with disability in this system is very low. A low level of education generally among people with disability is one of the factors contributing to their low rate of labour market participation. For example, countries with apprenticeship based technical vocational education and training systems have lower youth unemployment rates of compared to those with predominantly school based VET systems (International Labour Organisation, 2018, p. 2).

Correspondingly, evaluations of Ticket to Work show participants who engage in School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SbATs) are four times more likely to complete their secondary education and obtain employment upon completing school than students who did not (Hawkins & Rasheed, 2016).

Evidence suggests that for people with a disability who are not working, completing a VET qualification can significantly increase the likelihood of subsequent employment – and more so for people with disability than without.

Measurement of school to work transition outcomes

The Victorian Government, along with other State Governments and the Commonwealth need accurate quantitative data to assess success. Overall, there is very little consolidated data regarding the experiences and transition outcomes (past, present and projected) of young people with disability in Australia.

In Australia 'general youth' data has been collected since 1995 via the 'Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY)', which is considered the foremost research program tracking young people as they move from school to post-school options in Australia. Yet since 2007, LSAY has not included young people with cognitive or physical disability and students attending specialist disability schools have not been included. Data is only collected on students with disability in mainstream schools, which limits the data.

Australia also participates in International Assessment Programs providing researchers and policy makers with information to guide planning and facilitate comparisons with other nations (Heldsinger & Humphry, 2010). Unfortunately, these assessments also exclude students with disability, which led Schuelka (2012) to conclude: 'this exclusionary discourse establishes that students with disability do not belong in a culture of achievement and educational evaluation, which has an impact on policies concerning educational equity and maintains the oppression of low expectations.'

The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) identifies the number of school students with disability and their level of reasonable adjustment. However, this data does not consider educational accomplishments, post-school outcomes or longitudinal progress; therefore, it is difficult to determine if these adjustments lead to better post-school outcomes and improved quality of life for these young people.

The incomplete collection of data on students with disability from multiple data collections sends a regrettable message to policy makers that the attainment of students with disability and, by implication, their preparations for employment are not realistic.

The Victorian Government needs to consider if the data it collects is fit for purpose if it does not measure the effectiveness of transitions from school to employment for its students. Victorian Government has a role to improve data that tracks the transition outcomes for all students, particularly those with disability, this will ensure education/employment policy and funding is indeed making a difference.

The [Inclusion of People with Disability in VET](#) project, is currently being conducted by PwC's Skills for Australia. Government and industry are participating in this project to develop training packages that will increase the participation of people with disability in VET and the workplace.

Interstate and overseas best practice models that could be implemented in Victoria

The Victorian Government has implemented a suite of policies designed to achieve sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers.

The [Victorian Social Procurement Framework](#) is one of the more comprehensive initiatives of its type in this country. It aims to facilitate employment outcomes for jobseekers and workers from marginalized backgrounds, especially people with disability.

Summary of recommendations

The Victorian Government in consultation with the Commonwealth need to collectively undertake significant work to improve school to employment outcomes for young people with disability. Compared to other OECD countries, Australia is significantly behind in our policy development and practice in this important area (OECD, 2010).

In order to enhance the achievement of sustainable employment for jobseekers with disability, the Victorian Government should:

- Update its three Disability Employment Plans to reflect the new National Disability Strategy from 2020
- Commit and invest in a Work First approach where employment is the expected outcome for all young people regardless of disability.
- Extend implementation of Ticket to Work across Victoria, in light of its demonstrated success.
- Ensure that young people with disability receive the support they require to participate in the workforce as early as possible, whilst at school, to ensure effective long-term employment outcomes.
- Commit to a collaborative approach bringing all stakeholders such as potential employees, parents and support services and employers together, and invest in effective coordination to achieve such collaboration. Furthermore, work collaboratively with all governments to ensure effective school to work transition.
- Actively engage DES providers to help meet its public sector recruitment targets for people with disability
- Complement existing policy initiatives with incentives for businesses such as payroll tax concessions or wage subsidies for employers that recruit jobseekers with disability.
- Complement the Jobs Victoria Working Stories by invest in a campaign to promote the benefits of employing people with disability
- Collect relevant and reliable data on educational performance and school-to-work progress of students with disability, made available to stakeholders in a timely manner, and use this to inform design of evidence based policy responses and continued government monitoring and evaluation.

We would be happy to discuss this submission further. For queries relating to Ticket to Work, please contact Michelle Wakeford, michelle.wakeford@nds.org.au, for queries relating to Disability Employment Services, please contact Paul Musso, paul.musso@nds.org.au or for broader queries, please contact me.



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National Disability Services is the peak industry body for non-government disability services. It represents service providers across Australia in their work to deliver high-quality supports and life opportunities for people with disability. Its Australia -wide membership includes around 1,000 non-government organisations which support people with all forms of disability. Its members collectively provide the full range of disability services—from accommodation support, respite and therapy to community access and employment. NDS provides information and networking opportunities to its members and policy advice to State, Territory and Federal Governments.

Ticket to Work is an initiative of NDS that aims to improve open employment participation in Australia by galvanising local resolve, advocating for systemic change, and providing an architecture for optimal employment and career achievement for young people with disability.

This paper has been informed by the experience, research and evaluations of the NDS Ticket to Work team and the NDS Employment Policy Staff.

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