



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

Dear Chief Executive Officer

As advised in my letter of 13 March 2020, the Department of Social Services is committed to keeping Disability Employment Services (DES) providers informed about relevant developments in relation to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Thank you for the feedback DES providers have conveyed to the department to date. I understand providers are operating under pressure in a quickly changing environment and are seeking clarity to enable informed decisions about your business going forward. I encourage you to keep communication channels open as we continue to investigate additional reasonable adjustments that meet the needs of job seekers and providers.

Advance Payments of Service Fees

In accordance with clause 144 of the DES Grant Agreement, next week all providers will be offered an advance payment of six weeks average service fees, to be offset from future funding in the first half of 2021. This is a similar arrangement to that implemented for jobactive and is designed to help providers support an expected increase in the number of new job seekers requiring assistance. Further information will be emailed to each provider shortly, including the amount of funding to be offered.

Providers should seek their own financial advice about whether to accept the offered payment, including consideration of other Government assistance that might be available to their business.

Participation requirements

Job seeker participation requirements for mutual obligation purposes are currently suspended until 27 April 2020. The joint media release by Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, and Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, Minister for Families and Social Services, can be found at [ministers.dese.gov.au/senator-hon-michaelia-cash/covid-19-mutual-obligations-arrangements-extended](https://www.ministers.dese.gov.au/senator-hon-michaelia-cash/covid-19-mutual-obligations-arrangements-extended).

Job seekers have been notified by SMS that they do not need to attend appointments or other activities during this time, and that they can still receive support from their provider. Further notifications are planned for DES participants over the coming weeks.

I strongly encourage your organisation to continue actively engaging with people on your caseload to ensure they are supported in current jobs and are ready to take up new work opportunities as the economy recovers.

Referral changes

The department is working closely with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) and Services Australia on how best to streamline the registration and referral process to employment services, including DES. Our shared intention is to ensure that, once registered for income support, jobseekers have access to appropriate employment services and support as quickly as possible.

Services Australia is continuing to conduct ESATs by telephone, including referring participants to DES where appropriate. For the immediate future, ESATs will continue to be used to determine eligibility for DES and the appropriate DES service. The department is actively monitoring existing arrangements to ensure people with disability are able to receive appropriate support in a timely manner. Should the need arise, the department will consider alternative options for commencing job seekers in DES.

Additional measures

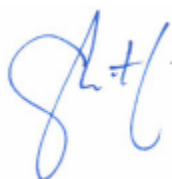
As you would be aware, the Australian Government has announced many measures to assist Australians and organisations with the impacts of COVID-19. Information on COVID-19 news and support announcements is available at www.australia.gov.au/.

To stay updated with the latest advice from health authorities, I encourage you to access the new Whatsapp messaging services, 'aus.gov.au/whatsapp', as well as the Australian Government coronavirus app from the app store.

Communications

The department is seeking to provide information through a variety of channels to keep you informed of developments. This includes regularly updated Frequently Asked Questions and notices on the DES Provider Portal, as well as discussions with peak bodies. We are also investigating technology-based options for interacting with providers through an online forum or video conference, and will advise details of any such event when available.

Thank you for working with the department as we continue to consider ways to support job seekers and maintain a healthy disability employment services sector during these challenging times. If you require further information or assistance, please email DES communications at DESCommunications@dss.gov.au. I also encourage you to continue raising questions and concerns through your Relationship Manager or provider peaks.



Yours sincerely

George Sotiropoulos
Group Manager
Disability, Employment and Carers

9 April 2020