



Jobs Australia



20 March 2022

The Provider Peaks Open Letter in response to the Disability Royal Commission Public Hearing 21: The experience of people with disability engaging with Disability Employment Services (DES)

As stated on the Disability Royal Commission (DRC) website, public hearing 21 focussed on 'a case study about the conduct of a DES provider, Aimbig, and the operation of a specific Aimbig employment program.'

In the context of that case study, the DRC considered DES participant choice and control; DES providers' services and support to DES participants to find a job and keep a job; DES funding models; DES program outcomes; expenditure of the DES program; DES program complaint mechanisms and 'regulation, oversight and safeguard mechanisms, including the role of the Department of Social Services (DSS).'

Overall we were satisfied with how the hearing was conducted, including questions, representations, and themes/issues covered.

DES is a significant investment by the Government to support and assist hundreds of thousands of people with disability in their journey to find and keep a job. There are 106 DES providers across Australia in most suburbs and towns. The majority of DES providers have had contracts to operate DES for at least ten years, with many of these providers operating for 25-plus years.

In its 2020/21 Federal Budget report, DSS records that the DES program had met its KPIs for assisting people with disability into employment. These KPIs include 13-week, 26 week and 52-week outcomes. The Queensland University of Technology conducted an analysis of the DES program and found it delivered a 175-plus percent return on investment for the Commonwealth.

All programs, including DES, should be subject to a process of continuous improvement and refinement based on best practice and learnings from operational delivery. A key improvement would be to give the participant a more representative voice. We have worked with DSS and a broad range of stakeholders through the DES Reforms Reference Group on recommendations to progress this aim. At the DRC hearing 21, DEA CEO Rick Kane endorsed the aim and outlined constructive actions that could be taken. In the lead up to the 2018 iteration of DES, the provider peaks supported the idea of more choice and control for DES participants.

The DES program is producing excellent results for hundreds of thousands of people with disability.

Based on what we understand from the DRC investigation and case study of a DES provider's conduct and their employment program, we do not condone or accept such practices. Like anybody else watching the case study we were shocked and appalled. The testimony by the DES participant, Mzia, was compelling and confronting. That is not what DES is about and Mzia should not have been treated

in that manner. We are not making this point through the lens of the DRC hearing. Such practice is to be condemned at any time. We feel for Mzia and what she experienced.

The employment assistance and support practice investigated by the DRC is an aberration. It does not reflect typical DES provider practice nor the manner in which DES providers assist and support people with disability find and keep a job.

The good work of DES providers has seen employment outcomes increase by 26% between 2020 and 2021. This is done through working with participants, communities, and employers. Real commitment, real work, real results.

Late in 2021 DSS, in discussion with peak bodies, commissioned a survey of DES good practice which was conducted by 89 Degrees East. Its subsequent report, supplied to the DRC, demonstrated that a person-centred approach, employer engagement, community connections, disability service standards and good culture are the key to good and best practice. The report drew on a range of case studies from a mix of DES providers.

We understand the DES Deed contains clear guidelines in reference to matters that came up at the DRC including use of a related entity, wage subsidies, employment outcomes and ongoing support. Currently all DES providers are required to complete rigorous annual Quality Assurance Framework Audits. The DRC hearing has made clear the need to strengthen this framework. We suggest that the Deed, Program Guidelines, and the National Standards for Disability Services Quality Assurance accreditation are reviewed as part of the DES Reform project.

We endorse a fit-for-purpose DES focussed on improving sustainable employment for people with disability. We wholeheartedly support stamping out poor practice and will work with DSS to communicate and promote the wealth of good DES practice boosting job opportunities and placements for people with disability in local communities across Australia.

Yours sincerely,



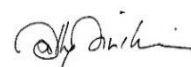
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