



August 9, 2019

Economic and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament of Victoria
jobseekersinquiry@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers. This submission specifically relates to jobseekers with disability.

The Australian Network on Disability supports 250 employers from the private, public and third sectors who in combination employ around 1.6 million people. Employers join us to build their capacity to welcome people with disability as customers and employees.

Social and economic benefits of employment for people with disability

The social and economic benefits of good work is well documented. Work brings confidence, self-esteem and importantly, increased economic choices. It's doubly disadvantaging for people with disability to be poor. Disability often results in additional costs of living. The changes to eligibility to the Disability Support Pension made in 2013 has resulted in many jobseekers with disability relying on Newstart which is well documented as living in poverty.

Jobseekers with disability experience attitudinal, recruitment and infrastructure barriers to gaining employment. A study of community attitudes towards people with disability in 2016 found that employers are more likely to hold positive attitudes towards employees with disability if they have previous experience. This is also supported by our Disability Confidence Survey findings of 2017. Negative employer attitudes typically involve perceptions that people with disability are absent from work more often, may cause a negative impact on work performance and productivity and that there is additional risk and cost. This is particularly prohibitive for small businesses. Additionally, some types of disability, such as mental illness have increased stigma and negative attitudes than physical disability.

The Australian Network on Disability regularly undertakes reviews of recruitment processes and without exception, jobseekers with disability are disadvantaged because recruitment systems and processes are not accessible or inclusive. Many employers do not describe the key requirements of their roles, making it difficult for jobseekers with disability to know whether they could perform a role. Most employers don't provide an opportunity for jobseekers with disability to request adjustments to facilitate a fair and equitable recruitment process. Employers routinely eliminate jobseekers who can't manage a voice phone call – not realising that the jobseeker may be deaf and require an alternate format.

A substantial education program is required to help employers know that they have an obligation to provide a fair and equitable recruitment process and that they are required to make adjustments to accommodate the specific needs of jobseekers with disability.



Success of current efforts, programs and/or activities

The Department of Social Services funds the Disability Employment Services program and the Job Active program. In combination, these programs have more than 300,000 jobseekers with disability. At September 2016, 32% of DES participants are retained for three months or more and this figure is lower than the 38% who were retained for more than 3 months in 2013. This low success rate makes it hard for jobseekers with disability, and potential employers to have high confidence levels in the program.

For both jobseekers and employers, achieving the right job match is critical. Consultations with AND members in late 2016 indicate that:

- Some DES providers lack credibility
- Service is “patchy”
- They don't take enough time to understand the employer's business and
- They can't be relied upon to deliver the right candidates for their roles

We encourage the Committee to make representation through the COAG process if we are to see the employment participation rate of people with disability improve.

Outcomes of efforts to encourage greater labour participation

Effort needs to be applied to helping people with disability who are at school to aspire to, and to expect, paid employment in the open labour market. There is a substantial role for educators as well as the National Disability Insurance Scheme Local Area Co-ordinators and planners to build aspirations and provide encouragement.

It's important to help young people with disability to see the financial benefits of paid work and to create models that help them understand their spending and saving capacity when working in comparison to a lifetime on benefits.

Education and training support requirements for jobseekers transitioning into work

Work experience, traineeships, internships and part-time jobs whilst at school and vacation employment all provide good opportunities for people with disability to improve their work ready skills and assist employers to mitigate fears regarding cost and risk. AND supports the principal that as much as possible, training provided should be directly linked to vacancies with employers who are disability confident.

Best practice models

A 'demand-led' approach that focuses on meeting the needs of jobseekers with disability and employers shows better job sustainability, better employer relationships and high success rates. The Bridges from School to Work Program in the USA, funded by the Marriot Foundation is an excellent example. Additionally, the Bridges School to Work Program has robust data. A 2015 study examined factors that motivated employers to hire job applicants with disability and of the 100 respondents, 77% reported that Bridges employees were retained.

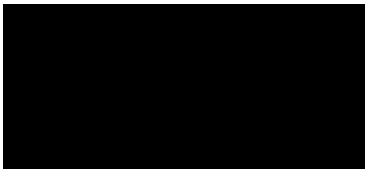
AND's internship program for university student's with disability, Stepping into, results in around 80% of graduates meeting their destination four months after graduation. This compares with 57% of graduates with disability who did not undertake an internship.

AND has also seen remarkable success of employer-led traineeship programs for people with intellectual disability with substantially more trainees completing their study and retaining their employment post qualification.

AND believes that people with disability are social and economic contributors with skills and capabilities who should have the same life choices and economic opportunities as others. We believe that employers can drive disability confidence, engagement and action and in the power of networks, relationships and collaboration to achieve change, grow knowledge and share expertise.

Thank you once again for your Inquiry. Please do not hesitate to call if I can be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely,



Suzanne Colbert AM
Chief Executive Officer