



National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum submission on the Disability Employment Services Review.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this review. The NMHCCF is impressed that the Department of Education Employment and Workplace relations has listened to the concerns of mental health consumers and carers around the hardships faced by people with mental illness under the Welfare to Work policies and that this is reflected in the *Draft Disability Employment Strategy* and the discussion paper *The Future of Disability Employment Services in Australia*.

However the NMHCCF is also disappointed that some of the key messages around the episodic nature of mental illness are still not being taken into account. This is evident in the discussion paper *The Future of Disability Employment Services in Australia*.

This is especially clear in the proposed provision to have Disability Employment Services being required to place someone with one employer for six consecutive months and that achieving this is tied to receipt of funding. The episodic nature of mental illness means that it is not realistic to expect a mental health consumer to remain well for a specified period. Having Disability Employment Services funding tied to such an unpredictable outcome seems to be a great disincentive to Disability Employment services to assist people with a mental illness.

Given that many of the difficulties faced by mental health consumers in relation to employment services are directly related to the episodic nature of mental illness and the lack of flexibility in services able to cater to this, it is essential that these issues should be more of a focus for the Disability Employment Services Review.

We are aware that *ACE National: representing Australia's disability employment network* propose a staged or stepping stone approach for Disability Employment Services in being able to meet their funding targets and provide more flexible services to people with a mental illness. We feel that such an approach is an essential step in meeting these clients and Disability Employment Services needs.

Further, while some work seems to have been undertaken on making the assessment process fairer for people with mental illness, it is still not clear from this document that people with a mental illness would receive longitudinal assessment as opposed to an initial intake assessment that could rely on an incorrect result obtained for someone who is well on that day. This approach will be essential to inform the development of any new assessment tool.

We look forward to working with DEEWR on these issues in the future.

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