



SACOSS

*South Australian Council
of Social Service*

**Submission to the
National Mental Health
and Disability Employment Strategy
Discussion Paper**

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South Australian Council of Social Service
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Introduction

SACOSS is the peak body for social services in South Australia. SACOSS is a not-for-profit independent organisation and our members represent a wide range of interests in social welfare, health and community services. SACOSS is part of a national network assisting low-income and disadvantaged people. SACOSS and its members have a *vision of justice, opportunity and shared wealth for all South Australians*. This submission has been informed by the *Blueprint to eradicate poverty*, our long term anti poverty plan for South Australia, as well as consultation with the SACOSS Policy Council, an elected group of 40 members which inform and shape SACOSS social justice policy positions that affect low income South Australians. SACOSS is supportive of the submission and recommendations made by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

Many of the issues that face harder to employ population groups such as people with a mental illness or other disability (*referred to in the submission as people with a disability or people with disabilities*) are not new and have been addressed both anecdotally and empirically for many years. Despite this knowledge, barriers in accessing education and training in order to enable people with disabilities to enter the labour market along with a lack of well integrated , long term support services to assist people to stay in employment means that the current policy architecture has failed.

SACOSS would like to emphasise a continuing theme in our work with people with disabilities. Access to educational institutions is not consistently accompanied by basic supports: this means that people with disabilities are often unable to fully engage in education systems. This has been presented as an issue for both students with disabilities and teachers. SACOSS advocates for a transition planning policy, beginning in the early years of high school that includes consideration of the challenges a student might face in a new setting and institutions setting a plan in place for how they would support the student prior to them starting a new course. SACOSS also advocates for greater resources for teachers and other educational support staff to support students with disabilities.

It is important to note that the term 'disability', traditionally viewed as a medical and personal tragedy problem experienced by individuals is now more generally acknowledged as referring to the physical, economic and social discrimination that people with disabilities face and the barriers that prevent them from being fully included in society.

People with a disability are more likely to live in households that are in poverty. Research suggests that there is strong evidence of an 'income penalty' when disability is present in a household, and there are significant additional costs related to disability. The importance and value of employment was highlighted in a recent report on labour market changes taking place in Australia;

"In so many ways, having a job is a good thing. It is the best antidote to poverty; it is a source of self-esteem, friendship and social engagement. Work feeds us – physically, socially and emotionally – and being without work is a disaster for many who cannot find it"

SACOSS believes that everyone has the right to meaningful, secure and well paid employment.

Form 2a

Structured submission for individuals and organisations

Submission to the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy

1. Barrier

- What is the issue or problem that you think can make it more difficult for a person with disability and/or mental illness to find and keep work and to develop their career?

Low income.
Long term, integrated support and transition services are often covered in policy documentation but do not translate into effective and meaningful assistance.
Inadequate transportation services
Structural disincentives for people on disability support payments

2. Goal

- What is the goal or goals that you would like the Strategy to achieve—these can be aspirational and high level, but should also be within the Strategy's Terms of Reference.
- If you have more than one goal which fits under a barrier, list the one that you consider the most important first.

First goal

That the income levels of the poorest households, principally, those whose main source of income is government benefits, be raised to the national average.

Second goal

That the employment rate amongst people with a disability or mental health issue is equal to that of the wider community.

Third goal

Eliminate health status, transport and mobility as barriers to employment and training participation.

3. Recommended ideas and solutions (actions, examples or guidelines)

- What are some ideas about how this goal or goals could be achieved?
- What are some specific actions that can be taken to implement this idea?

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- The more specific you are in listing recommended actions, the easier it is to see exactly how you think the barrier can be overcome and the goal or goals achieved.

First idea

Increase income support levels for people with a disability. Wealth and income inequality is an acute problem in Australia which demands active social policy to improve the life chances of the poorest, including people with a disability. Living with limited financial means has a detrimental impact on almost all parts of people's lives and aspirations.

Recommended solutions (actions, examples or guidelines) (numbered)

1. Increase disability related income support payments by 25%. Improving the baseline income of people with a disability will help improve household financial stability and provide a platform for access to the labour market and training opportunities.
2. Provide a disability living allowance and a health care card to all people with a disability. Current income support payments ignore the additional cost of living faced by people with a disability. State based add on payments appear arbitrarily set and vary across jurisdictions and within programs, this should be addressed to achieve national consistency.
3. Further review and reform of the income support and taxation systems in order to eliminate disincentives for people with a disability to find and keep employment. There is currently limited recognition of the additional costs of workforce participation for people with a disability and many entering the workforce can face high effective marginal tax rates.

Second Idea

Develop new economic and social collaborations between private, public and community sectors to improve employment pathways for people with a disability

Recommended solutions (actions, examples or guidelines) (numbered)

1. Promote incentives for employers to recruit and retain employees with a disability.
2. Support a disability social enterprise investment fund to enable disability groups to develop viable social businesses which would employ people with disabilities on standard wages.
3. Build on the current campaign to promote awareness and benefits of recruiting and retaining staff with a disability to key industry groups.
4. Set targets for public sector recruitment and retainment of people with a disability.
5. Increase resources to specialist school service officers to match learning and support needs of students with disabilities.
6. Development of a transition planning policy for students with disabilities that starts at the beginning of high schools and continues throughout the education process and other post school educational pathways

Third idea

Develop health and disability impact assessments on existing and new Government legislation. Impact assessments identify how particular policies and proposals may impact on specific groups, such as people with disabilities.

Recommended solutions (actions, examples or guidelines) (numbered)

1. All public transport to be disability accessible
2. Adequate and accessible private transport for those with mobility issues increased (i.e. Access Cabs)
3. Develop best practice models of effective support services that improve the employment chances of people with disabilities. Many different types of models are utilised in supporting employment participation for people with disabilities but there is little empirical evidence as to which models are likely to maximise efforts.
4. Review and revise job capacity assessment and job placement procedures to reflect greater emphasis on long term secure employment outcomes

4. Measurement

- How would you know that these ideas and actions were successful in achieving the goal?
- How would you measure the success of these ideas and actions in achieving the goal?
- What key performance indicators or milestones could be used to measure the success of these ideas and actions in achieving the goal?
- Are there benchmarks that you would like to see put in place? If so, what are they?

Measurement for first idea

1. The basic rate of income support payments for people with a disability is increased by 25%.
2. The Disability Living Allowance is paid to people with disabilities to recognise the actual additional costs of disability.
3. The interface between the income support and taxation systems is reformed to ensure that people moving between welfare and work are always better off financially.
4. Census data.

Measurement for second idea

1. A national disability employment coalition is formed, comprising of business, government and community groups and supported by COAG.
2. Benchmarks have been set for all employers in Australia on employing people with a disability.
3. Social businesses have developed, providing services to the Australian community and providing meaningful employment for people with a disability

Measurement for third idea

1. People with a disability would be able to use all public transport and access private transport in line with the rest of the community.
2. Outcome payments for employers who employ people with a disability are designed around long term sustainable employment. (I.e. more than 1 year)
3. Employment and education support services are available to people with a disability for the life of their education and employment.

5. Other

- Is there anything else you would like to say about this proposal that is not covered under any of the previous headings?

ⁱ Pocock, B (2006) *The Labour Market Ate My Babies- work, Children and a Sustainable Future*. Sydney (Federation Press) P1