



**MEDIA RELEASE 17 July 2018**

## **Disability employment reforms won't solve employment gap for people with disability**

National disability organisations have come together to highlight concerns about Federal Government reforms to Disability Employment Services (DES) which commenced on 1 July 2018.

“We have repeatedly raised concerns about DES reforms, and the missed opportunity to create a successful employment support system for people with disability,” said Ms Therese Sands, Co-CEO of People with Disability Australia, speaking on behalf of Disabled People's Organisations Australia (DPO Australia).

“Over \$800 million per year is being spent propping up a failed system that is not helping people with disability get paid work. A little more than 1 out of 10 people entering the DES program get a job, and stay in that job, for at least twelve months. Nationally, only 53% of people with disability of working age are in paid work, compared to 83% of their non-disabled peers. This huge employment gap has not changed over the last twenty years.”

Ms Suzanne Colbert AM, CEO of Australian Network on Disability (AND) said, “there are some positive aspects of the reforms, such as the increased focus on sustainable jobs, continued funding of workplace adjustments through the Employment Assistance Fund and support for employees to retain their employment through the Work Assist program”.

“Sadly, the views of people with disability and employers have been overlooked in these reforms and we fear the new system will make it harder for employers to recruit people with disability,” said Ms Colbert.

“We have grave concerns these reforms do not deliver on the promise of informed choice for people with disability seeking employment. These reforms also result in an average funding cut of 31% to jobseekers with intellectual disability due to the program funding restructure. The additional funding announced in the federal budget of \$10m over two years for some providers to address this funding cut is welcomed. However, it does not alleviate our fundamental concern that the DES reforms introduce a disincentive for any provider to serve jobseekers with high support needs and offer the required level of support to help them to find and keep a job,” said Paul Cain, CEO of Inclusion Australia.

“Indeed, the funding model seems to contradict the government’s intention to encourage more participants in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) to seek employment assistance from the DES program. The new DES funding arrangements reduce funding for people with disability most likely to qualify for the NDIS, as we know 65 percent of current NDIS plans are for people with intellectual disability and autism,” said Mr Cain.

Reforms to the DES system began in 2015, and DPO Australia, Inclusion Australia and AND have participated in every step along the way, including roundtables, submissions, consultations and expert advisory groups.

“Throughout the reform process, we have stressed the need for people with disability to be able to make informed choices and decisions about their employment support, and that this support should provide the individualised assistance required by people with disability. These reforms don’t offer people with disability the choice they were promised, or the individual assistance for their particular disability,” said Ms Sands.

The 2016 *Willing to Work* report, from the Australian Human Rights Commission, called for a comprehensive national strategy to address structural barriers to employment for people with disability, such as discrimination, negative employer attitudes and lack of accessibility, to improve employment for people with disability.

“Instead of the comprehensive recommendations of the *Willing to Work* enquiry, the Government is going ahead with piecemeal and flawed reforms to the DES system,” said Ms Sands.

”Despite our deep disappointment with this reform process, we remain committed to working with government to improve employment outcomes for people with disability”.

“We note government commitments to ongoing review of the reforms, including how the DES funding model is working and assessment of outcomes data. We will be continuing to monitor the evidence of whether the DES reforms are making a real difference for people with disability and their engagement in long-term and ongoing employment.”

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## For further information:

- Link to joint DPOA and Inclusion Australia Position Statement on *Barriers to Informed Choice*: <http://dpoa.org.au/position-des-informed-choice/>
- Link to joint DPOA and Inclusion Australia Position Statement on *Opposition to DES Funding Cuts for Participants with Higher Support Needs*: <http://dpoa.org.au/position-des-fund-cuts/>
- Link to DPOA 2016 Submission on Discussion Paper *New Disability Employment Services from 2018*: <http://dpoa.org.au/des-reform-sub/>
- Link to AND Submission on Discussion Paper *New Disability Employment Services from 2018*: <https://www.and.org.au/pages/policy-2018-des-discussion-paper-submission-985.html>

## Disabled People's Organisations Australia

Disabled People's Organisations Australia (DPO Australia) is an alliance of four national DPOs. DPOs are organisations that are led by and constituted of people with disability. The key purpose of the DPO Australia is to promote, protect and advance the human rights and freedoms of people with disability in Australia by working collaboratively on areas of shared interests, purposes and strategic priorities and opportunities. DPO Australia is made up of four national population specific and cross-disability DPOs that have been funded by the Australian Government to represent the views of people with disability and provide advice to Government/s and other stakeholders. The four DPO Australia members are *First People's Disability Network*; *People with Disability Australia*; *National Ethnic Disability Alliance* and *Women With Disabilities Australia*.

For further information about Disabled People's Organisation Australia (DPOA) see: [www.dpoa.org.au](http://www.dpoa.org.au)

- For further information about People with Disability Australia (PWDA) see [www.pwda.org.au](http://www.pwda.org.au)
- For further information on First People's Disability Network see [www.fpdn.org.au](http://www.fpdn.org.au)
- For further information on the National Ethnic Disability Alliance see: [www.neda.org.au](http://www.neda.org.au)
- For further information on Women With Disability Australia see: [www.wwda.org.au](http://www.wwda.org.au)

## Inclusion Australia

Inclusion Australia, previously the National Council on Intellectual Disability (NCID), is the national voice for Australians with intellectual disability. We bring together groups across Australia who are connected to people with intellectual disability and who share the vision of inclusion in all parts of Australian life. Our strength comes from our diverse state members who use their combined experience and expertise to increase the inclusion of people with intellectual disability in all levels of the community. They do this through advocacy across local, state and national governments as well as international agencies, such as the United Nations. We also provide inclusive and holistic policy expertise and advice to government departments and other organisations to drive

systemic change in Australia. To develop this advice, we collaborate with people with intellectual disabilities and our local networks, including families, service providers and advocacy groups. Our state members share their extensive resources, information and knowledge across state lines so that all people with intellectual disability in Australia can benefit directly and advocate for themselves. We are a member of Inclusion International, the international network that represents people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

For further information about Inclusion Australia see: [www.inclusionaustralia.org.au](http://www.inclusionaustralia.org.au)

### **Australian Network on Disability (AND)**

The Australian Network on Disability supports employers to support employees and customers with disability. The Network consists of more than 200 employers from the private, public and for purpose sectors that in combination employ more than 1.5 million Australians. AND helps its members to build disability confidence and capability, connect with others and check their progress on access and inclusion. AND is driven by the belief that people with disability are social and economic contributors with skills and capabilities who are entitled to share in the economic, social, cultural and political wealth of Australia.

For further information about the Australian Network on Disability (AND) see: [www.and.org.au](http://www.and.org.au)