



22 February 2022

Media Release

The experiences of people with disability within the Disability Employment Services (DES) will be the focus of the Disability Royal Commission hearing this week.

Inclusion Australia is the peak representative body for people with an intellectual disability and their families. We welcome this public hearing as a unique opportunity to examine why a system originally set up to support people with an intellectual disability is failing this community so badly: **just 3.1% of DES participants have an intellectual disability.**

Inclusion Australia believes all people with an intellectual disability have the right to work with support, and to be paid fairly for that work. Unfortunately, this is not the case for many people.

There are too many barriers in the way of people with an intellectual disability who want to get and keep a job. These include the **low expectations** of businesses, the community, and others about people with an intellectual disability, and not having the same kinds of choices in life. Big systems, like the National Disability Insurance Scheme and DES do not work together.

Often people with an intellectual disability are given limited choice of a day service or end up on a 'polished pathway' to working in an Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE) – previously known as sheltered workshops. This means people never get the chance to earn a real wage, and live in poverty. **We want change that to change.**

About the public hearing

[Public hearing 21.1](#) will look at a single DES provider and the experiences of people with disability that use that service but will also talk about some of the wider issues regarding employment for people with a disability. Commissioners will hear evidence from a DES participant, DES provider, advocacy organisation and an Australian Government representative among others.

What people with an intellectual disability want

We have written to the Australian Government to ask for big changes to the way that DES works to help people with an intellectual disability. [Our submission](#) makes many detailed recommendations for new employment pathways that work better for our community. Our ideas are based on feedback from people and families, as well as the evidence about what works.

They include:

- A Centre of Excellence in open and self-employment of people with an intellectual disability
- Specialist DES providers with expertise across the country

- Support and information for people with an intellectual disability and families to navigate complex systems
- A whole of life approach, from school to retirement, that better supports people to meet their potential.
- Better coordination between DES and the NDIS
- Incentives for people to work without it affecting their disability support pension

Quotes attributable to Inclusion Australia’s Our Voice Committee, who are all people with an intellectual disability, “People with disabilities have the right to work in the open market like anyone else and get the training and support they need; this means no more sheltered workshops.”

Quotes attributable to Catherine McAlpine, CEO, Inclusion Australia:

“People with an intellectual disability have told us very clearly; DES is not working. Only 3.1% of people in DES have an intellectual disability. This means too many people end up on the ‘polished pathway’ to day services and segregated employment. Everyone deserves an opportunity to find out their potential and to be paid a decent wage. Right now, DES is not delivering for the people that need support the most and face the biggest barriers to work.”

Catherine McAlpine, CEO, Inclusion Australia, is available for media comment on catherine.mcalpine@inclusionaustralia.org.au or 0419 530 524

Inclusion Australia is the national voice for people with intellectual disability and their families.

Supporting evidence for the statements made:

Inclusion Australia submission to the Australian Government

<https://www.inclusionaustralia.org.au/submission/disability-employment-system-reform-submission/>

Fostering employment for people with intellectual disability: the evidence to date -

<https://www.everyonecanwork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Fostering-employment-for-people-with-intellectual-disability-Accessible.pdf>

Supported Employment: Evidence of Success for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities - [Supported-Employment-Supplemental-Review-1-1.pdf](#)