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Media Release

Equal Pay, Equal Respect: time to end discriminatory wages for people with an intellectual disability

The experiences of people with disability working in Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs), also known as sheltered workshops, will be the focus of the Disability Royal Commission this week.

As the peak representative body for people with an intellectual disability and their families, we welcome this public hearing as an opportunity to talk about the impact of extremely low wages on people with an intellectual disability who work in ADEs, and ways to increase opportunities to work in open and self-employment.

People with disability who work in ADEs, who are mostly people with an intellectual disability, earn as little as \$2.50 per hour. This is unfair and needs to change now.

The work people with an intellectual disability do is useful and valuable. People care about their jobs and do them with pride; in their workplace, in working hours, with their workmates. People are often working for large businesses that carry out profitable contracts which benefit local communities and consumers.

However, in most cases, ADE workers with disabilities are the only employees not receiving at least minimum wage. A person with disability working full time will earn \$9,000 less than a person on minimum wage. **No Australian should earn this little for their work.**

The Australian Government can fix this injustice today. We want the Australian Government to act now to ensure that all people with disability who work in ADEs are paid at least the minimum wage.

Fair pay should also be the first step away from the segregated model that underpins most ADEs.

Inclusion Australia is calling for a fully resourced **five-year transition plan for workers in ADEs to move to open and self-employment.**

The plan, co-designed with people with an intellectual disability and their families, will mean people with an intellectual disability can have more choices and options about the kinds of work they could do, with the right support. It should include services, specialist DES providers, the NDIA and the government.

No one currently working at an ADE should lose their jobs during this transition. Each ADE will transition differently, and a tailored transition plan will be needed for each service.

There is knowledge and expertise about supporting people with an intellectual disability at work in the existing ADE system that is important to keep. We believe that many ADEs could transition into open employers of people with an intellectual disability. Some may be able to act as a community hub to support broader inclusive employment across their communities.

There is also work that needs to be done during this transition to make sure there are more jobs in open and self-employment for people with an intellectual disability, as well as the right kinds of support. The polished pathway into ADEs from school must be addressed, with clearer, easier pathways and more options for people to explore open and self-employment.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme and the Disability Employment Services providers all have a role to play in making sure more people with an intellectual disability can work in open and self-employment.

Inclusion Australia's Our Voice Committee, who are all people with an intellectual disability from across Australia are clear "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."

We call on the government to start this transition process now by addressing the wage gap of ADE workers and ending discriminatory wages for people with an intellectual disability.

#EqualPayEqualRespect

Ends

About the public hearing

Public hearing 22: The experience of people with disability working in Australian Disability Enterprises will run from 11-13 April 2022.

Inclusion Australia's CEO Catherine McAlpine will tell the Disability Royal Commission that people with an intellectual disability need fair pay and clearer pathways into open and self-employment, with all barriers removed. The polished pathway into ADEs must be removed.

The Royal Commission will examine the experiences of people with disability working in ADEs, including:

- whether there is choice and control in relation to employment, including opportunities for progression, training and transition to open employment
- the payment of supported wages
- social and financial inclusion
- oversight of ADEs
- any related matters.

For more details visit: <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/public-hearings/public-hearing-22>

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."

"People with disabilities have the right to be respected like anyone else in society. We know when we are respected and we are not respected – we feel it."

Quotes attributable to Catherine McAlpine, CEO, Inclusion Australia:

“Being paid \$2.50 per hour is unfair, unjust and needs to change right now. People with an intellectual disability should be paid at least the minimum wage, and we want the Australian Government to cover the wage gap for ADEs as the first step. Then we want a transition plan for the 20,000 workers in ADEs to open and self-employment.”

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 and People with Disability Australia research brief about ADEs and open employment <https://www.inclusionaustralia.org.au/submission/wage-equity-and-more-choices-in-employment-for-people-with-an-intellectual-disability/>

Everyone Can Work project website: <https://www.everyonecanwork.org.au/resources/evidence/>