



11 May 2023

Budget offers employment hope for people with an intellectual disability and families but concerns remain over NDIS budget targets

There was good news from the Australian Government budget this week with the announcement of funding for a range of measures on supported employment.

Supported employment for people with disability is typically provided in Australian Disability Enterprises, also known as sheltered workshops. Providers can legally pay employees as little as \$2.75 per hour under the current system, with many people with an intellectual disability having no pathway to explore open employment.

The Government has now committed \$54m over 4 years, which includes

- \$35m over 3 years to establish a fund for supported employment providers to evolve business models
- \$11.7m over 4 years for a targeted disability employment advocacy service and information program for supported employees
- \$6m for evaluation of existing and new initiatives and trials, including the new Structural Adjustment grants, to build a robust evidence base to inform ongoing policy development
- \$1.1m for research to establish a Disability Employment Centre of Excellence.

People with an intellectual disability are clear that support to access to more employment opportunities is urgently needed. However, many are unclear about their rights and the options open to them.

Together with our state and territory members, Inclusion Australia has worked tirelessly with our community to articulate the complex barriers to employment that people face.

We also worked together to identify practical solutions, grounded in evidence. [This work](#) was shared with the Government and the Disability Royal Commission as part of broader conversations on employment.

Catherine McAlpine, CEO of Inclusion Australia said “It’s great to see signs that people with an intellectual disability are being heard by the Government. This investment is an important first step in changing the conversation about employment for people with an intellectual disability.”

“We are particularly pleased to see the \$11.7 million investment in advocacy and information services. This much needed support will help people with an intellectual disability and families navigate the complex employment pathways they face. We also hope it will mean that people with an intellectual disability will have more opportunities to be part of the reform process and codesign a way forward with Government,” said Ms McAlpine.

Inclusion Australia also welcomes the announcement of plans to establish the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence.

“There is plenty of evidence about what works for people with an intellectual disability when it comes to finding and keeping a job. Sadly, this evidence is not widely known or used. The Centre of Excellence will be an important first step to bring this knowledge together to help inform future approaches.”

Ms McAlpine said, “we look forward to working closely with the Department of Social Services and the National Disability Insurance Agency to continue this work and make sure people with an intellectual disability have more, properly paid, employment options.”

Concerns remain over NDIS growth targets

Elsewhere in the Budget it was good to see government commitment to the NDIS feature so prominently in the Treasurer’s speech. However, we share the community concern about the proposed limits on growth for the Scheme. The forward estimates suggest the fourth year budget for the NDIS will be tight as the growth targets hit.

Catherine McAlpine noted “The Government’s commitment to the Scheme is important. Funding for the Scheme is an investment in the future. It supports people with disabilities to build their independence and be part of the workforce and the broader community. It also supports families to continue in the workforce.

When the NDIS Review was announced last year, the Government made clear that it would work with the disability community to unpack the challenges and co-design the solutions. We urge the Government to continue on this path to build trust and meet the underlying principles of the scheme.”

ENDS

Links:

- Inclusion Australia submission to the Disability Royal Commission on Inclusive Employment: www.inclusionaustralia.org.au/submission/equal-pay-equal-rights/

- [Improving Support for People with Disability: Key measures in Australia's 2023–24 May Budget](#) [Department of Social Services]
- Media release from Minister Rishworth: [More opportunities and investment to support people with disability](#)
- [Media Release from Minister Shorten: Getting the NDIS back on track](#)

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

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