



Towards full wages for people with an intellectual disability

Our platform for the 2025 Federal Election

Establishing a Ministerial Implementation Working Group for raising sub-minimum wages: Implementing recommendation 7.31 from the Disability Royal Commission

Summary

We are calling for an election commitment to establish a **Ministerial Implementation Working Group** that would provide evidence-based policy advice and options relating to Disability Royal Commission (DRC) Recommendation 7.31.

This recommendation calls for the Australian Government to address the sub-minimum wages paid to individuals with an intellectual disability, with the goal of transitioning people to at least 50% of the minimum wage by 2027 and 100% by 2034.

The Working Group will bring together different stakeholders, including people with an intellectual disability, peak organisations, government agencies, employers, providers, and unions, to work together to create **a sustainable roadmap for achieving fair wages and ensuring continued employment opportunities.**

What problem are we trying to solve?

In Australia, approximately 20,000 people with an intellectual disability are legally paid less than the adult minimum wage set by the Fair Work Commission—with many earning under \$10 an hour.

The Supported Employment Services Award and the Supported Wage System allow employers to pay workers with an intellectual disability less than other workers. The majority (~16,000) of these people work in segregated settings in Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs).

People with an intellectual disability say the low wages they get are unfair and are a barrier to being equal and to being properly included in our community.

They see low wages as a clear form of disrespect. **People tell us when they earn a decent income for their work, they feel respected and valued.**

The impacts are financial, social, and emotional. Sub-minimum wages contribute to poverty and devalue the contributions of people with disability to Australian society.

This is not just unfair—it is also a human rights violation.

Australia is failing to meet its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which guarantees the right to work on an equal basis with others, including fair pay and protection from discrimination.

The relevant UN Committee's 2019 report on Australia called for reform to end these discriminatory employment practices, recommending that Australia "provide services to transition of persons with disabilities from sheltered employment into open inclusive and accessible forms of employment, ensuring equal remuneration for work for equal value".

The Australian Government will be required to report on its progress towards implementing these recommendations in 2026.

What did the Disability Royal Commission say?

The DRC recognised the urgent need to improve wages for people with an intellectual disability.

Recommendation 7.31 calls for the Australian Government to introduce a scheme to ensure that employees with disability are paid at least half the minimum wage. This would involve revising the productivity-based wages calculation as well as a subsidy from the Government to address the pay gap between the relevant award and the minimum wage. The longer-term recommendation was to develop a model and pathway to lift wages to 100% of the minimum wage by 2034.

In its response to the DRC, the Australian Government did not commit to action, instead saying that the recommendation was "subject to further consideration."

The government raised concerns that wage increases could lead to job losses and said more consultation with stakeholders is needed before any reform. The government has outlined a plan for consultation, but a dedicated, funded approach bringing together key stakeholders to work collaboratively with government on these issues is urgently needed.



What is our idea?

Inclusion Australia is seeking an election commitment to take immediate action on this recommendation.

Specifically, we are calling for a Ministerial Implementation Working Group to be set up to provide evidence-based policy advice and options relating to Recommendation 7.31.

A working group like this, bringing together different stakeholders, offers a solution for the government to address the Royal Commission's recommendation, respond to the UN Committee's call for action, and align with the government's commitment to disability employment.

The Ministerial Implementation Working Group will be made up of senior representatives from peak organisations, government agencies, employers, unions, and people with an intellectual disability and will have Ministerial involvement and support.

The Working Group will work collaboratively with government to develop sustainable solutions and a detailed implementation roadmap for transitioning to fair wages while ensuring that employment opportunities, especially for people with high support needs, are maintained.

The involvement of the range of stakeholders with a diverse range of views and experiences will ensure a collaborative and inclusive process that will lead to an outcome that is practical, supported and beneficial to all stakeholders, and avoids any unintended consequences.

The Implementation Working Group will be guided by the following overarching objectives:

1. **Fairness:** All people with disability have the right to receive at least the minimum wage for their work. The Working Group is committed to developing a roadmap to achieve this goal.
2. **Opportunities for everyone:** Policy solutions must be designed to ensure that all people with an intellectual disability, including those with high support needs, will continue to have access to employment opportunities.
3. **Sustainability:** Policy solutions must ensure the sustainability of specialist employment supports for people with an intellectual disability, including people with high support needs.
4. **Codesign:** People with an intellectual disability and their families, including people who are currently working in ADEs, will be involved in testing and designing policy solutions.

The Implementation Working Group will codesign a sustainable implementation roadmap with government to identify a staged process to achieve these goals. This will include conducting consultations, considering different policy options, providing government with different evidenced-based options, and overseeing the piloting of different approaches.

After the implementation roadmap is developed, the working group will have a critical role in supporting the implementation process. This includes monitoring progress against milestones, ensuring accountability across all stakeholders, and providing regular updates to government and the public. The group will evaluate the effectiveness of reforms, address emerging challenges, and make recommendations for continuous improvement to ensure the transition is both effective and sustainable.

How long will this take?

The Implementation Working Group will operate within a 4-year timeframe, with clear milestones to ensure progress:

- Year 1: Establish the working group, engage stakeholders, and conduct consultation, research, and testing. This will include reviewing existing evidence, identifying barriers, and exploring potential options for reform.
- Year 2: In collaboration with government, further develop sustainable options for reform. This would include the creation of an implementation roadmap, outlining legislative and policy changes needed and setting a clear pathway for transitioning to fair wages. This will be a phased approach with clear steps for change and appropriate check points for review of potential unintended consequences.
- Year 3-4: Work in collaboration with government to support the transition to at least 50% of minimum wage payments for all workers with disability. The working group will oversee the implementation, evaluate the overall impact, and support the development of a longer-term plan to raise wages to 100% of minimum wage.

How is our idea different?

The Albanese Government made commitments on disability employment, including the Disability Employment Strategy, reforms to the Disability Employment Services program, and establishing a new Centre for Inclusive Employment.

These programs focus on increasing job opportunities, support and retention, but they do not address the specific issue of sub-minimum wages or provide a mechanism for dealing with it.

How much will it cost?

We believe it will cost less than \$5 million over 4 years to set up and run this working group.

This includes:

Operations	Administrative support, coordination, and stakeholder engagement	~ \$2 million
Pilot program	Design, implementation, and evaluation	~ \$2 million
Capacity building	Training and resources for employers and workers, to support the transition	~ \$1 million



We want to make this work.

Inclusion Australia and our member organisations would be prepared to promote a public announcement of an election commitment to the Ministerial Implementation Working Group.

We are happy to work with any of the major parties that commit to this approach.

Learn more about our work on employment here:

- everyonecanwork.org.au
- inclusionaustralia.org.au/submission/equal-pay-equal-rights