



Research and Policy Centre

10 strategies for improving employment outcomes for people with disability

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Brotherhood of St Laurence
Working for an Australia free of poverty

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL) is a social justice organisation working to prevent and alleviate poverty across Australia. Our mission is to pursue lasting change, to create a more compassionate and just society where everyone can thrive. Our approach is informed directly by the people experiencing disadvantage and uses evidence drawn from our research, together with insights from our programs and services, to develop practical solutions that work. For more information visit <www.bsl.org.au>.

Acknowledgement of Country

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and waterways on which our organisation operates. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and emerging.

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Summary

This report presents 10 strategies for increasing the participation of people with disability in employment. It builds on available evidence examined by the Brotherhood St. Laurence (BSL) in collaboration with the Disability and Health Unit at the University of Melbourne and BSL's long experience in developing, delivering and evaluating labour market programs for people vulnerable to economic and social exclusion. The strategies identify policies and practices for driving systemic change. They should be understood as a web of coordinated and interacting initiatives and activities.

The 10 strategies are:

- 1 **Shift community attitudes towards people with disability**
- 2 **Create agile funding structures and mechanisms that support person-centred employment policy**
- 3 **Adopt a place-centred approach to employment while enabling wider opportunities**
- 4 **Integrate complementary social supports into employment programs for young people with disability**
- 5 **Support interagency collaboration**
- 6 **Develop national goals and evaluation mechanisms to track progress**
- 7 **Implement an expansive stewardship role for government**
- 8 **Design policies that promote mainstream employment**
- 9 **Use customised approaches to employment placement and support for both employers and employees**
- 10 **Promote the sustainability of the disability support workforce through ongoing training and enhancing job security**

These are not intended to be exhaustive of strategies that could support people with disability to participate and thrive in employment. In mapping these 10 strategies, we identify associated enabling conditions and policy and practice interventions for realising their aims.

Why improve participation in employment for people with disability?

Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disability recognises ‘the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others’ (UN General Assembly 2006). In addition to upholding the human rights of people with disability, promoting participation in employment is associated with the benefits of work as a usual part of life. These include economic and social inclusion, contributing to a positive sense of identity and self-worth, and improved health and wellbeing (Milner et al. 2014; Saunders & Nedelec 2014; Meltzer, Robinson & Fisher 2018).

There are also benefits for employers, who gain access to diverse talent pools. Other benefits accrue from inclusive workplaces. These include improved morale and productivity among employees and enhanced reputation among customers and the community (AHRC 2016). From a government point of view, improving employment outcomes for people with disability lowers spending on social services, and results in a higher tax base as a larger proportion of the available labour pool is in work.

Despite these benefits, people with disability continue to face many barriers in accessing and sustaining employment. Their ambitions are hampered by low expectations of their capacities among parents and carers, teachers, trainers and employers (Fisher & Purcal 2017; Pearce 2017). Other factors include inflexible support systems, conditions for the disability support workforce (Judd, Dorozenko & Breen 2016) and workplace-related issues (Fisher & Purcal 2017; Wilson & Campain 2020). Specific challenges lie in building pathways from school to training and employment, as well as transition support

for older adults. These circumstances and attitudes can be shifted; and there is evidence that when efforts, actors and systems are integrated, increasing the participation of people with disability in employment is achievable (Wilson & Campain 2020).

Following organisations such as People with Disability Australia (2018) and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2020), this report defines ‘disability’ as living with impairments associated with congenital and other conditions, injuries, illnesses and ageing that restrict the kinds of activities that individuals can take part in. A social model of disability emphasises that disability is the outcome of interactions between people living with these impairments and barriers encountered in physical and social environments. In this report, we draw from research, reports and policy documents that use a broad definition of disability, as well as some more specialist studies.

We define 'employment' as involvement in part or full-time paid work, while noting the importance of unpaid work that is performed in volunteering and caring roles, and opportunities for gaining work experience and 'on-the-job' training.

Employment types

In Australia, people with disability are currently largely involved in four modes of employment: 'open' (also referred to as mainstream or competitive employment); microenterprises and self-employment; employment related to lived experience (such as mental health support workers, peer supporters, consultants and in disability advocacy organisations); and Australian Disability Enterprises or ADEs (National Disability Insurance Agency 2021). The last group are not-for-profit organisations providing supporting employment.

Internationally and in Australia, there is a push to increase involvement in open employment settings because they offer better scope than ADEs to promote economic and social inclusion for people with disability (Lysaght et al. 2017; AFDO 2018; Wehman et al. 2018). Mainstream employment offers award wages and potential for wider social contact than 'closed' workplaces such as ADEs. Analysis conducted by the Centre for International Economics suggests that supporting people with disability to participate in open employment can be cost-effective and that, with some adjustments to work roles and with appropriate support, around 95% of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Australia could participate in open employment (Pearce 2017).

Nonetheless, people with disability report being satisfied with working in each of the four settings (NDIA 2021). This emphasises the importance of access to 'decent work' that is remunerated fairly, is secure and provides opportunities for personal and career development and to speak up about issues of concern (Lysaght et al. 2017; ILO 2014).

However, at the end of 2020 only 17% of NDIS participants were involved in paid work and, among this group, only 48% were involved in mainstream employment (NDIA 2021, pp. 16-17).

This report distils 10 key and interconnecting strategies for increasing the participation of people with disabilities in employment. These strategies are supported by promising evidence of their value and effectiveness, although it should be kept in mind that the evidence remains patchy and many employment initiatives for people with disability are not rigorously evaluated. It remains a priority to build a reliable evidence base to guide policies, programs and practices.

Further, putting the 10 strategies into practice requires an overarching approach in which policies, initiatives, programs and evaluations are co-designed and co-produced with education and training specialists, staff of employment programs, researchers, government, employers, community-based workers and people with disability themselves. Collaboration that honours the guiding principle of disability activism, 'Nothing about us, without us', and combines diverse professional and lived experience perspectives is essential to achieving meaningful, sustainable and transformative outcomes. The processes for working together should encourage innovation and respect the contributions of all stakeholders.

Economic and policy contexts

Strategies to increase the participation of people with disability in employment must navigate overlapping social and economic contexts. These include structural labour market issues, competition for jobs in segments of the market where many people with disability would seek to enter, and fragmented services systems that make it difficult to coordinate support. There is also an urgent need to reform training systems to better serve people with disability; and there is much to learn from ongoing efforts to increase employment rates among other vulnerable jobseekers, including young and mature age people.

Australian labour markets are undergoing significant change



Growing competition for jobs

Structural labour market issues can undermine efforts to improve employment outcomes for people with disability. Some are associated with the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, while others have been unfolding for several decades. There is increased competition among jobseekers for entry-level and low-skill jobs. Many jobs now require a vocational or university qualification, not necessarily because the work is more complex or requires new skill sets, but through 'crowding out' effects where employers prefer candidates with more credentials (Australian Industry Group 2018). As the economy recovers from the pandemic, the competition for entry-level and low-skill jobs is expected to intensify and could negatively impact the opportunities for jobseekers with disability.



Declining real wages

Stagnating wage growth in Australia contributes to income inequality and does not help people with disability. From 2007 to 2017 workers in the lowest quintile of income earnings had much lower growth in wages (at just 0.4% per year) than middle and high-income earners (ACOSS 2020). Wage stagnation is attributed to various factors including high rates of underemployment and the growth in insecure work where employees are reluctant to join unions and ask employers to increase wages (Gilfillan 2019). At a time of growing commitment to supporting people with disability to be involved in open employment, these trends jeopardise expectations that paid work provides a liveable wage.



Increasing precarity in employment conditions

While it lacks a legal definition, precarious employment is associated with work that is poorly paid, unprotected by employment standards and insecure in tenure. One type of insecure work is 'on-demand work' in the 'gig economy', where workers are classified as independent contractors, labour-hire workers, casual employees or under fixed-term contracts. While some workers prefer the flexibility this offers, it can come at a cost of lost labour protections, including leave entitlements, minimum rates of pay and set hours of work. Low-skilled workers are in the most precarious positions and people with disability seeking jobs are increasingly finding themselves competing in the gig economy (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2020).



Training systems are leaving people with disability behind

Training is an important pathway into employment, and training systems need to cater for the diverse situations of people with disability. Australians with disability are less likely than other Australians to complete Year 12 of secondary schooling or gain university qualifications, and struggle to attain vocational education and training (VET) qualifications (Economy and Infrastructure Committee 2021). While university is not appropriate for all, there are limited vocational pathways assisting young people with disability to transition into post-school training and work opportunities (Children and Young People with Disability Australia 2015).

The TAFE system is a major provider of vocational training, yet a recent inquiry conducted by the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee in the Victorian Parliament found that people with disability are hindered in accessing TAFE courses through poor career advice, inaccessible buildings and generally low expectations of their abilities. TAFEs themselves lack access to funding to support students with disability (EIC 2021), and students with disability who manage to enrol can struggle with curriculum that is not designed to suit different learning styles and staff unfamiliar with their needs.

What works for other disadvantaged jobseekers?

Insights can be gleaned from what works well to increase employment rates among other jobseekers who face low expectations and limited opportunities for training and work experience. These include strategies to improve employment rates among young people and mature age jobseekers, both groups disproportionately affected by the compounding effects of COVID-19 (Clarke et al. 2020; Mills et al. 2020).



Working in place to develop skills required by local employers

The uneven spatial distribution of low-income households means that vulnerable jobseekers tend to cluster in regions that have been impacted by previous waves of de-industrialisation. This places high demands on available services in those regions and crowds out pathways into available jobs. This is being addressed through cross-sectoral collaboration to provide local training and build tailored pathways into growth industries and emerging occupations. This is particularly helpful for young people to acquire future-oriented work skills and experience. BSL adopts this approach in convening the Transition to Work Community of Practice, and evaluations suggest that place-based, multisectoral efforts are effective in increasing young people's participation in work (Bond & Keys 2020).



Combining training and work

Employment-based training can be effective in responding to skill shortages in the available workforce. This approach enables people to work and train at the same time; however, employees need a clear and achievable pathway to gain accredited qualifications. This gives them portable skills and potential to do further training.



Promoting inclusive employment

Efforts to increase employment among skilled and experienced mature-aged workers are focusing on encouraging employers to consider the benefits of flexible employment arrangements to retain valued employees. Initiatives such as the [Collaborative Partnership on Mature Age Employment](#) (DESE 2021) aim to demonstrate leadership and the feasibility of inclusive employment strategies in the public service.



Improving employment conditions for care work

Increasing employment opportunities can also require reforming employment sectors. Examples of this are in the aged care and disability care sectors where, despite strong and expanding demand for labour, there are ongoing challenges in attracting and retaining skilled workers. This is attributed to a mixture of low wages and status, poor working conditions and limited opportunities for career progression. Think tanks such as the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) have reported concerns that the demand for care services is outstripping the supply of workers. Attracting new workers will require professionalising the provision of care. Staff in care services should have well-remunerated, skilled roles with ongoing opportunities for professional development and other training (CEDA 2021).

Care services should have well remunerated, skilled roles with ongoing opportunities for professional development and other training.

Policy context

Increasing employment for people with disability requires navigating a complex policy and program landscape involving multiple systems including social services, employment, education and training and the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA). In addition to the efforts of people with disability and social service organisations, state and Commonwealth governments have invested heavily in trying to improve employment rates. Key initiatives include:

- **Increased emphasis by the NDIA on employment.** New data from the NDIS shows that at December 2020, 17% of NDIS participants were employed (NDIA 2021), suggesting a decline from 24% in 2019 (DSC 2019). These figures are lifting awareness that employment goals should routinely be discussed in developing annual plans with NDIS participants. To address these issues, the NDIA released their first-ever NDIS Participant Employment Strategy, which outlines a multifaceted approach.
- **Program renewal of Disability Employment Services (DES).** A key issue is rising DES provider caseloads (by 46% from 2018 to 2020), with the number of employment outcomes achieved for participants only increasing by 8% over the same period (Boston Consulting Group 2020). Government expenditure also increased by 48%, to \$1.25 billion in 2019–20. With no changes to program design, expenditure is projected to reach \$1.6 billion by 2022–23. A DES Taskforce within the Department of Social Services was established in March 2021 to identify and assess options for reforming DES services when the current DES Agreement expires in July 2023.
- **Rolling out the New Employment Services Model and re-tendering Transition to Work.** The Australian Government is also undertaking the largest reform to employment services since 1998. The New Employment Services Model (NESM) will commence in July 2022. There will be increased opportunities to support young people with disability to take up open employment, because Transition to Work (TtW)—the Commonwealth Government's specialist youth employment service, of which BSL is a provider—will be a complementary program in the NESM. Young people with disability make up 8.8% (3183 people) of all TtW participants. The alignment of these two programs represents a critical opportunity to promote mainstream employment services for young people with disability. It will, however, be essential to ensure that the increased reliance of NESM on online services does not effectively exclude people with disability, especially those with intellectual and learning disabilities and those with limited digital access owing to their location or their income.

Encouragingly, growing realisation that policies and investment have not been generating the desired changes is contributing to widespread calls for major and timely reforms.

Distilling evidence of what works

In 2020–21, BSL and the Disability and Health Unit at the University of Melbourne reviewed national and international evidence to identify effective interventions and policy initiatives for increasing participation in employment for people with cognitive disability (also referred to as ‘intellectual’ or ‘learning’ disability). Insights from this Economic Participation and Employment Project provide an overview of the state of knowledge, and further evidence that driving change requires aligning policy and practices across complex domains including education and training, workplace and community settings (Kavanagh et al. 2021).

The project involved:

- a theoretical review to develop a typology of approaches for interventions to increase employment for people with disability
- a systematic review of Randomised Control Trials of vocational interventions for people with disability
- an environmental scan of Australian interventions since 2015 to increase employment-related outcomes for people with disability
- a round table discussion with 34 key informants across Australia with deep experience and knowledge of disability employment. They included people in senior government and non-government executive roles, representatives of disability peak bodies and people with disability.

The typology conceptualised three broad approaches for increasing labour market participation among people with disability. It is useful for understanding how initiatives target different sets of barriers, and develop associated solutions from different angles.

Supply-side interventions aim to build the skills and capacities of jobseekers to take up employment and of employers to take on people with disability as employees.

Demand-side interventions focus on creating positions for, or incentivising, the employment of people with disability.

Bridging interventions work with both jobseekers and employers to tailor jobs that match the interests, skills and strengths of jobseekers and the needs of employers.

The aim of this report is to translate these insights into ‘doable’ strategies that provide a map to guide policy and practice. In bringing them together, we can perceive how diverse policy, practice and community efforts should be connected to create opportunities for people with disability to participate in meaningful and satisfying work. Along with brief explanations of why these 10 strategies are significant, we identify enabling contexts and promising interventions for achieving change. Two brief case studies illustrate how key ideas are being put into practice.



10 strategies for improving employment outcomes for people with disability

1

Shift community attitudes towards people with disability

The Willing to Work National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination (AHRC 2016) found that Australians with disability are often shut out of work due to assumptions or stereotypes. A national survey of community attitudes towards people with disability in Australia elicited uncommonly high rates of 'neutral' responses, prompting concerns that people might hold views that they are uncomfortable expressing but that might influence their interactions with people with disability (Bollier et al. 2021).

Low community expectations are internalised by families and carers, teachers, employers and others, and influence assumptions about people's capacities, aspirations and pathways from schooling to training and work. Low expectations contribute to a reluctance to employ people with disability, discriminatory behaviours during recruitment, and negative workplace experiences for those who manage to find employment, including being socially isolated and denied opportunities for training and promotion. A significant first step for shifting attitudes is to adopt a 'presumption of work capacity' position for envisaging the potential for people with disability (AFDO 2018, p. 7).

Enabler	Interventions to drive enabler
Promote positive expectations of the capabilities of people with disability	<p>Consider mandatory disability awareness training for employers, service providers and government staff. The Office of the High Commissioner, Human Rights (OHCHR 2019) has highlighted features of best practice disability awareness campaigns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • co-designing campaigns with people with disability • ensuring interpersonal contact with persons with disability in delivering training • presenting people with disability as full community members • developing complementary public education campaigns that involve people with disability in diverse roles.
Involve families and carers in employment program planning and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information, advice and mentoring that assists families and carers to raise their expectations of the capacities of people with disability and assist them in navigating systems. Teachers, disability employment staff and employers rely on families and carers to provide support, including encouragement, reinforcing skills, transport and administrative requirements (Crisp 2021). These efforts should be sensitive to family situations, including cultural and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, and the effects of stigma that attaches to disability (Disability Royal Commission 2020b). • Communicate decisions with parents and carers and provide regular updates of progress so that support can be adapted and adjusted as required.
Invest in community capacity-building initiatives that support employment objectives under the NDIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renew the focus on community capacity-building functions of the NDIS with the objective of increasing employment rates for people with disability. This could include investing in initiatives to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – provide NDIS participants with appropriate career planning information – assist employers to make reasonable adjustments to workplaces.
Create employer champions in workplaces to support people with disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote an ‘equal treatment’ not ‘different treatment’ approach to employees with disability, to remove barriers to achieving equal participation and likelihood of success in the workforce. • Empower senior management to set an example for the workplace by modelling positive attitudes, commitment to inclusion and respect for employees with disability.

Australians with disability are often shut out of work due to assumptions or stereotypes.

2

Create agile funding structures and mechanisms that support person-centred employment policy

Current approaches to commissioning and funding employment services do not facilitate best practice or reward collaboration. For individual jobseekers, there is evidence that onerous activity obligations do not improve employment outcomes, but rather divert efforts away from identifying and applying for jobs where there is a realistic chance of success (Gerards & Welters 2021). DES providers have reported administrative burdens and tension between enforcing

mutual obligations and forming constructive relationships with jobseekers (BCG 2020). Improving employment outcomes requires person-centred rather than system-centred practices and this is better achieved through individualised funding models. Case study 1 describes how the **WorkWell Individual Placement and Support (IPS)** model has improved employment outcomes for young people with serious mental illness.

Enabler	Interventions to drive enabler
<p>Increase individualised funding options for jobseekers with disability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow flexibility in individual support packages that are person-centred and address individual employment goals. Tailoring funding to provide customised support could overcome some of the risks of working across multiple systems. It also could combine demand and supply-side interventions that create good employment outcomes for both employers and employees (MDI 2020). • Continue to fund Individual Placement and Support models of supported employment, which is recognised in Australia as effective for generating positive employment outcomes, particularly for jobseekers with serious mental health conditions. IPS models are useful in crafting a good fit between a jobseeker’s talents and capabilities, the job and their employer. Mechanisms that have been proven effective include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – job carving (working with an employer to create a job that aligns with someone’s skills and abilities, or ‘carving’ a full-time job into multiple part-time positions or functions) and customising jobs in response to jobseekers’ abilities and limitations – ensuring on-site support is available during job placements. • Broaden Disability Employment Services (DES) funding to work with students to support transition pathways into employment. As it stands, DES does not fund students who have post-secondary and vocational employment training as components in their pathways from school to work.
<p>Commission smarter public services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand social procurement obligations attached to government work, including partnering with organisations such as BuyAbility. Government can embed social value in purchasing decisions across every stage of the procurement cycle to create employment opportunities for people with disability (Mupanemunda 2019, 2020a, 2020b) • Commission for person-centred support by adopting an expansive understanding of participant agency and choice. This empowers jobseekers to choose their own tailored pathway instead of selecting employment service providers with ‘off the shelf’ approaches. In tenders for employment services such as DES, government should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ensure each provider can demonstrate how they will provide individualised support, quality job matches, participant control and agency – ensure each provider can demonstrate how they will work effectively with employers, including their understanding of the corporate environment and specialist industry knowledge, which employers engaged by DES providers have indicated as lacking (BCG 2020).

Enabler	Interventions to drive enabler
Increase funding for social/micro enterprises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in growing work-integrated social enterprises as an alternative to ADEs by increasing education and ongoing support for employees to transition out of ADEs. ADEs could also be supported to restructure into social enterprises. Benefits of employment in social enterprises include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increased focus on employees' vocational aspirations through structured training programs - opportunities to move to higher skilled and better paid work - emphasis on social inclusion through links to the wider community. • Create support schemes for entrepreneurs with disability that include mentoring and funding to establish and run their own business.

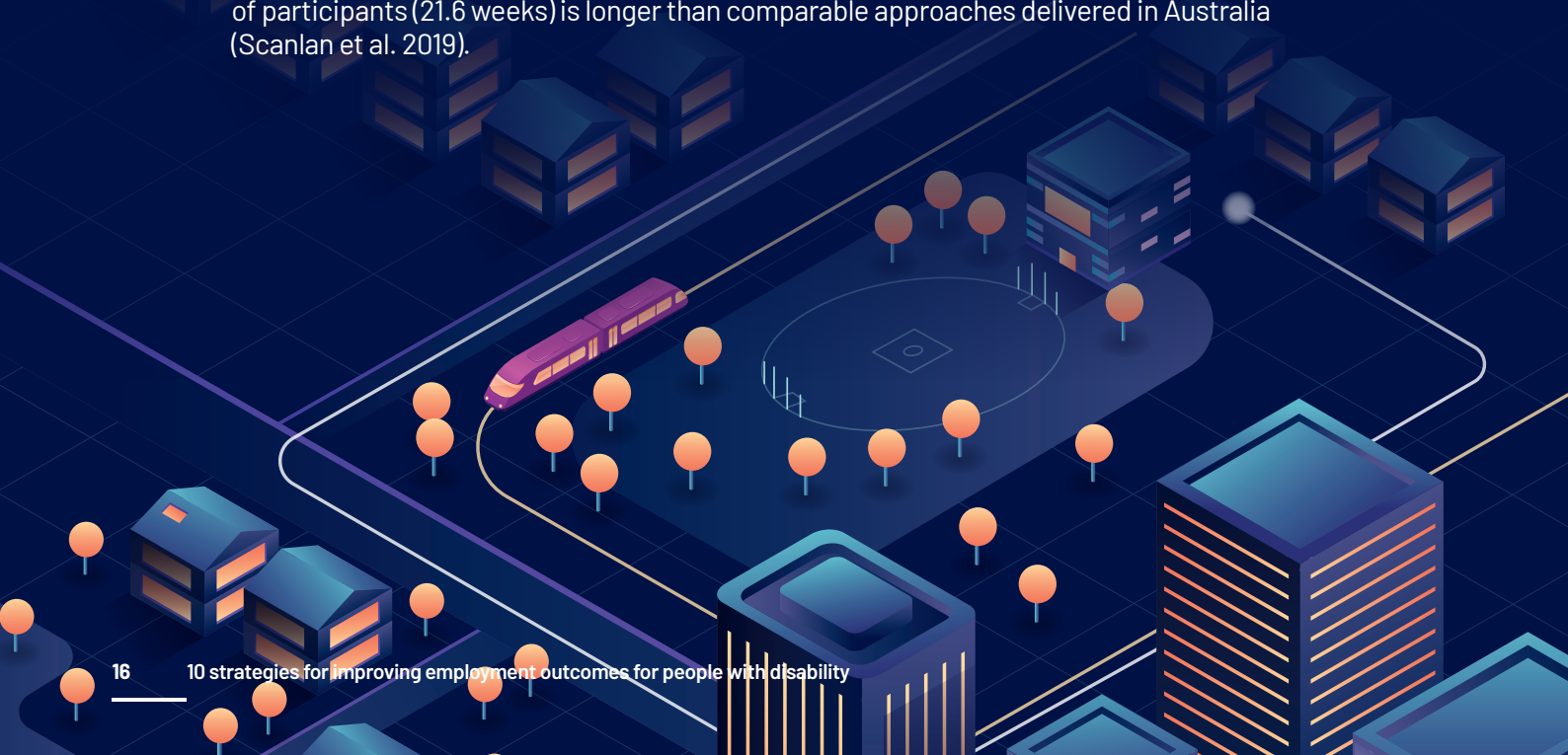
Case study 1: IPS WorkWell

MODEL

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is an employment model for people with serious mental illness (for example, schizophrenia spectrum disorder, bipolar, depression). WorkWell, which was developed by Neami, a social support organisation, blends IPS strategies with the principles of the Collaborative Recovery Model (CRM) which emphasises person-centred approaches for supporting people to lead full lives. It brings together jobseekers, support workers and service providers to explore individual strengths and employment goals, build capacities for job searching and tailor employment support.

OUTCOME

An evaluation of *WorkWell* found that applying CRM tools and resources to a IPS model was effective in aligning individual strengths with employment goals. Of the 97 participants, almost half (49.5%) gained a competitive employment position. Overall, 63.9% were supported to achieve a vocationally relevant outcome. The average employment duration of participants (21.6 weeks) is longer than comparable approaches delivered in Australia (Scanlan et al. 2019).



3

Adopt a place-centred approach for promoting employment while enabling wider opportunities

Employment interventions that are embedded in place can respond to real local opportunities. National employment policies, however, are often disconnected from local populations or labour market needs. Place-centred approaches allow local, intersectoral collaboration that leverages community support and identifies training and work experience that will create pathways into regional growth industries. Local strategies

and interventions can be co-designed with people with disability, their support networks, schools and community organisations and local employers, who are best placed to translate national policy into feasible actions that produce desired outcomes. This kind of place-centred, multisectoral approach in place has proven effective in creating employment opportunities for young people (Bond & Keys 2020).

Enabler	Interventions to drive enabler
Apply a place-centred approach to employment that facilitates collaboration across industry, community and service providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build local capacity to reduce barriers to employment by increasing formal collaboration between schools, employment service providers and post-school education programs. An example of a successful initiative is the <u>Transition to Work Community of Practice</u>. As the enabling organisation, BSL facilitates place-centred collaborations that are in creating real employment opportunities for young people (Bond & Keys 2020). This model should be considered for working with young people with disability.
Harness community support to ensure full inclusion of people with disability into community life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a scalable model of mainstream disability employment that harnesses the <u>Ticket to Work</u> model of networks, which connects a young person's school, career counsellors, support staff, employers, employment services and disability services (BCG 2020; Social Ventures Australia (SVA) 2020). Ticket to Work has achieved job creation, work readiness and sustained placements because stakeholders worked together (Crisp 2021). • Celebrate positive local employment outcomes through communications campaigns that engage the community. Such campaigns must be co-led with people with disability. • Invest in community infrastructure by ensuring workplaces and transport are accessible to people with disability.

4

Integrate social supports into employment programs for young people with disability

Employment programs should be designed to leverage broader support systems, such as post-secondary education and training services, and health and social services. These systems should be designed to work collaboratively to generate the best outcomes for people with disability. The Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into access to TAFE for learners with disability recommended that

the Department of Education and Training develop programs that integrate extra supports for vulnerable students to complete their courses (EIC 2021). Such supports could include flexible courses, peer networks, mental health services and school to work transition support, as highlighted in the WorkWell case study.

Enabler	Interventions to drive enabler
Integrate support services into employment programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate mental health services into vocational and career development programs. Successful models include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - facilitating peer support groups where participants share experiences in a safe space - ensuring access to mental health professionals who work in tandem with career coaches
Provide workplace networks of peer support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and support dedicated mentoring roles for employees to support people with disability during work placements. These roles must be valued by employers and in performance appraisals. Professional development activities would include exchanges of experience and insights about what works best.

Employment programs should be designed to leverage broader support systems, such as post-secondary education and training.

5

Support interagency collaboration

Interagency partnerships and collaborative practice are associated with improved employment outcomes for young people with disability and smoother transition from school to work (ARTD Consultants 2019; Carter, McMillan & Willis 2017). Yet the service systems for people with disability (employment, social services, education and training systems) have struggled to coordinate efforts, contributing to jobseekers and employers experiencing difficulties in accessing information,

services and support. Incentivising collaboration and communication among agencies as well as clarifying roles and accountabilities of different government and non-government actors can assist in navigating system boundaries. Regularly assessing how intersectoral partnerships are working enables continuous improvement. Mechanisms such as the VicHealth Partnership Tool may be useful for diagnosing partnership issues and how they might best be addressed (Riggs et al. 2014).

Enabler	Interventions to drive enabler
Improve collaboration between agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide training to disability employment staff to increase awareness of other agencies' roles in creating positive employment outcomes. Research has shown a lack of awareness and collaboration between Disability Employment Services, NDIA, NDIS and disability employment service providers (MDI 2020). • Co-locate services (e.g. employment specialists placed in schools) to assist effective coordination and sharing of knowledge. • Create interagency taskforces between levels of government, business, community sector and people with disability to diagnose pressure points for individuals navigating the disability employment system. This could look like a 'what works' lab; a hub in an organisation with community links, such as a university; or a national community of practice as exists in the Transition to Work program.

6

Develop ambitious national strategies, goals and evaluation mechanisms

Improving employment outcomes requires national coordination, goal setting and employment target monitoring. National strategies and measures should be ambitious but must include flexibility for local contexts and priorities. The Commonwealth Government is taking steps to facilitate national coordination and strategy-making through the first National Disability Employment Strategy (NDES) and Australia’s

Disability Strategy 2021–2031 (formerly the National Disability Strategy), both set to be released in late 2021. As the NDES is slated to be a 10-year strategy, it is critical to track implementation progress and outcomes. This requires regular reviews of policies and programs and the collection and analysis of relevant data. Without this, the NDES cannot hold actors accountable or evaluate what’s working well and what isn’t.

Enabler	Interventions to drive enabler
Set national employment policy and coordination for people with disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a national strategy to improve disability employment outcomes that drives implementation, an effective enabling environment, coordination of efforts, and measures of progress. BSL’s submission (2021) to the NDES public consultation articulated these outcomes and how the strategy can achieve success. • Integrate disability employment policy with other relevant systems (e.g. training and education). To avoid segregating disability employment efforts and stigmatising participants, mainstream systems should be responsive to specific needs of people with disability. A separate employment system for people with disability should not be the goal. The NDES should include interventions that address this integration.

Improving employment outcomes requires national coordination, goal setting and employment target monitoring.

7

Design policies that promote mainstream employment

The move away from supported employment models (such as ADEs) to mainstream employment has tangible benefits for social and economic inclusion of people with disability. These include award-level pay, opportunities for upskilling and professional development and strong connections to

communities. From improving access to TAFE for learners with disability to redesigning employment programs, the goal of policy efforts should be the inclusion of people with disability in mainstream systems and full participation in community life.

Enabler	Interventions to drive enabler
Design and implement policies to achieve open employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition from sheltered employment to open employment opportunities by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - redesigning work tasks within sheltered employment that enable employees to develop skills and capabilities to compete in open labour markets - stimulating employer interest ('demand-led' approaches) in creating roles for people with disability, including roles that address local labour shortages. • Invest in high-quality, sustainable job placements for people with disability to demonstrate their capabilities and build the expectations of those around them.

The goal of policy efforts should be the inclusion of people with disability in mainstream systems and full participation in community life.

8

Adopt an expansive stewardship role for government

In service systems where there is a mix of government, not-for-profit and, increasingly, private providers, governments have a critical role as system stewards to ensure that service providers are achieving their objectives for the intended beneficiaries. The Productivity Commission (2017) views this kind of stewardship role as spanning policy design, regulation, oversight of service delivery, monitoring provider performance

and fostering processes for continuous improvement. The Commonwealth Government must adopt an expansive stewardship role to ensure that the networks of services delivering jobs training, employment services and disability support are achieving objectives of increasing decent, sustainable work opportunities for people with disability.

Enabler	Interventions to drive enabler
Expand government stewardship of systems to deliver 'smarter' public services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand governments' roles to be more than contract managers. This requires comprehensive reform of the ways employment services are commissioned; how they serve jobseekers, employers and communities; and the scope for collaboration across systems. Principles have been developed by BSL to guide the reform of social service delivery (BSL 2017) and include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Place stronger focus on meeting the needs of service users, particularly high-needs users. - Define clearer expectations of contractors to achieve outcomes for the intended beneficiaries, including requiring potential providers to demonstrate genuine connections to community and the goals of service users. - Commission for collaborative services, to overcome the shortcomings of a marketised social services system. Funding co-location, for example, can foster formal and informal collaboration between providers across service areas.

9

Take a customised approach for developing employment programs and supports

One-size-fits-all employment opportunities do not address the diversity of individual talents, strengths, needs and goals. There is growing evidence that customised employment approaches, with work roles designed to accommodate the needs of jobseekers and employees, lead to sustainable work (Inge et al. 2017). However, more evidence needs to be collected.

Work placements present opportunities to explore how jobs can be customised to meet employee and employer needs, appraise how employees are doing ‘in action’ and make adjustments (Simonsen, Luecking & Fabian 2015). They can alleviate employer concerns and build confidence in their ability to support people with disability in the workplace.

Enabler	Interventions to drive enabler
Customise roles and support needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult with and be guided by jobseekers to identify employment goals, key capabilities and needs before approaching employers. This includes developing realistic timelines for work preparation activities before placements. • Ensure employment programs are responsive to employer requirements and match them with candidates who want to work in relevant sectors.
Ensure pre and post-placement support extends to employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check in regularly with employers to discuss progress and adjustments to arrangements, as well as potential longer work roles. • Establish feedback loops between employers and employment services to ensure employees and employers are sufficiently supported during placements. In the Ticket to Work After School Jobs Project, employers reported that when they recruited students for placements, they also accessed resources for placement support and could work together to resolve arising issues in a timely way (Crisp 2021).
Co-design workplaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disseminate existing practice guides for inclusive workplace planning. Best practice workplace planning includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a dedicated role to manage and support employers and their needs, taking a local approach by providing individual support packages to businesses. See Case study 2 which describes how these ideas have informed the Diversity Field Officer Service. – involving employees with disability in workplace planning and decision-making.
Integrate work experience into training programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ‘work tasters’ for young people with disability transitioning from school to training and work to explore their interests and capabilities and provide exposure to professional networks. Trialling multiple roles allows young people to explore different kinds of work and employers to better understand jobseekers’ capabilities. These workplace trials are preferable to traditional approaches that require a résumé and formal interviews. • Take a ‘place and train’ approach that provides on-the-job training that suits the workplace and organisational requirements, rather than spending too much time on generic ‘pre-employment’ activities. This ensures a better employment fit for both participants and employers.

Case study 2: Diversity Field Officer Service

MODEL

The Diversity Field Officer Service was developed by the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) in collaboration with Deakin University with the aim of building the confidence of small and medium-sized businesses to create employment opportunities for people with disability.

The service offered customised support to 50 businesses to develop disability awareness, promote positive attitudes and increase employee motivation by creating inclusive organisations. Activities focused on workplace culture, policy and procedures; improving physical access to buildings; and identifying practical steps for putting ambitions into practice.

OUTCOME

A 12-month pilot involved 50 workplaces across 15 industries in Geelong, Victoria, in 2015–16; and 36 businesses participated in an evaluation. It showed that at the start of the pilot, 39% employed someone with a disability and 58% believed there might be opportunities to do so in the next 12 months. At the end of the pilot, this had increased to 75% (27) of businesses employing people with disability, and 86% reporting potential opportunities to do so.

Other positive employer activation outcomes included:

- 79% of employers were implementing or planning welcoming wording for people with disability in job advertisements/descriptions
- 42% were considering 'job carving' to create a specific role or sets of tasks that could be performed by a person with disability
- 36% were implementing or planning work experience opportunities for people with disability
- 30% were implementing or planning graduate opportunities or internships for people with disability
- 64% were considering mental health and accessibility initiatives for their workplaces, including physical access and workplace flexibility.

Although businesses reported that challenges of employing people with disability reduced fourfold during the pilot, just over half still reported some challenges such as perceived additional costs and maintaining regular communication with employees with disability to address emerging concerns (Murfitt et al. 2018).

10

Support the sustainability of the disability support workforce through training and job security

A healthy and sustainable workforce supporting people with disability is required to improve employment outcomes for people with disability. Staff frequently experience workplace stress and burnout, which results in a high turnover rate (Judd, Dorozenko & Breen 2016). The health care and social assistance sector is Australia’s largest employing sector (ABS 2021) and demand for entry-level workers such as aged and disability carers will continue to grow; however, it remains difficult to attract and retain experienced staff. Furthermore, the delivery of services changed under the NDIS

from a traditional block-funded agency-based model to a market-based system, which shifted costs and risks to disability service staff. They now experience higher rates of variable hours and income, unpaid work associated with travel and administration, and little institutional support for training and professional development (Baines et al. 2019). Responding to these pressures, the Senate Committee on Job Security (2021) has recommended that the Joint Standing Committee on NDIS consider the adequacy of training and support provided to NDIS workers.

Enabler	Interventions to drive enabler
Provide NDIS staff with employment-related training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource NDIS and DES staff to disseminate information about both programs to jobseekers. Receiving individualised support is key to identifying and securing sustainable employment outcomes for jobseekers. BSL and the Melbourne Disability Institute (MDI) undertook qualitative research on the NDIS and DES policy and practice interface to understand how people with disability navigate the two systems (MDI 2020). Key findings include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - gaps and overlap in the growing number of government and non-government employment initiatives attempting to support people with disability - knowledge gaps in the NDIS and DES workforce about each other’s work and how their work intersects - barriers in the processes by which NDIS participants try to access support from DES. - The ‘Advantaged Thinking’ model, effective in building young people’s aspirations, confidence and job-related ‘soft skills’ in Transitions to Work programs (Bond & Keys 2020) should be adapted for employment programs targeting young people with disability. Focusing on the capabilities and strengths of people with disability, Advantaged Thinking approaches should also be adopted by disability employment service providers and staff.
Invest in the sustainability of the disability workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt the following Senate Committee on Job Security recommendations (2021) about providing employment protection to disability workers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider designing a national scheme that provides portable long service leave, training and other entitlements to all workers delivering services under the NDIS - Consider regulatory options that would ensure support workers engaged to provide services funded through the NDIS have fair pay and conditions.

Concluding remarks

The 10 strategies discussed here are distilled from promising evidence of what works for people with disability and supplemented by insights from initiatives to improve employment outcomes for other disadvantaged jobseekers. Nonetheless, the evidence base is patchy and further rigorous studies are needed to inform policy and practice. This work requires expanding how 'good' employment outcomes are defined and appraised, to embrace job sustainability, the quality of work, opportunities for social inclusion, opportunities for professional and career development and other indicators of success.

There is also potential to maximise learning from current initiatives. The environmental scan conducted as part of the Economic Participation and Employment Project identified over 130 employment-related interventions recently or currently underway in Australia and less than a third are being formally evaluated (Brown & Mallett 2021).

Government should consider mechanisms for sharing good practice, tools and resources emerging from these programs. This could be a 'what works' lab or a national community of practice similar to the one that is promoting positive outcomes for young people in the Transition to Work program.

Driving and sustaining change also requires multidimensional and coordinated approaches. In their report, *The future of supported employment in Australia* (2018), AFDO recommends that people with disability, their families and advocates, government, employers, and community and other stakeholders come together to co-design a five-year plan to drive system, policy and practical changes. The 10 strategies offer guidance to the kinds of collaborative endeavours that are necessary to ensure people with disability share the benefits of meaningful and decent work.

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10 strategies for improving employment outcomes for people with disability

This report presents 10 strategies for increasing the participation of people with disability in employment. It builds on evidence examined by the Brotherhood St. Laurence (BSL) in collaboration with the Disability and Health Unit at the University of Melbourne and BSL's experience in developing, delivering and evaluating labour market programs for people vulnerable to economic and social exclusion. The strategies identify policies and practices for driving systemic change.

