



**Submission to the Future of
Disability Employment Services
in Australia**

January 2009

Carers Australia is the national peak body representing those Australians who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends with a disability, mental illness or disorder, chronic condition, terminal illness or who are frail.

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Title:

CA Submission to the Future of Disability Employment Services in Australia

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On behalf of:

Carers Australia and the Network of Carers Associations

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
About Carers Australia.....	1
About Australia's Carers.....	1
Diversity of carers.....	2
Response to the Discussion Paper.....	2
Ensuring the delivery of quality services.....	2
The impact of DES on carers.....	3
Considering carers in the job-placement process.....	4
Carers as jobseekers.....	4
Employment services for carers.....	4
References... ..	5

A carer's story

"We carers will never be in the same position as non-carers. Carers have a totally different set of responsibilities and considerations to those who are non-carers. And our disabled loved ones will never be on equal footing as their able-bodied counterparts, because of the very nature of disabilities. But there are many things that can be done to make a carers' life easier, and indeed the life of our charges."

--'Mrs Pamela', primary carer to 17 year old son with muscular dystrophy

Introduction

Carers Australia welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Government's Future of Disability Employment Services Discussion Paper. The new model introduces a number of positive changes that will improve the efficiency and fairness of the system.

In response to the paper, Carers Australia requests that the impact of changes to Disability Employment Services (DES) for Australia's carers be recognised and changes be introduced to the model to support this. We suggest several additions to the model to assist carer inclusion and accountability in provider service delivery:

- a carer impact statement in the documentation for the Future of Disability Services in Australia
- a requirement for service providers to involve carers in the process, by enquiring about their client's caring arrangements and speaking with carers directly
- a Code of Conduct for Disability Employment Services
- the establishment of an independent complaints mechanism.

This submission also highlights the need to extend consideration given to disability employment, to the employment of carers. Given the additional barriers to work faced by carers, it is important that the government consider steps to support job-seeking carers to find work.

About Carers Australia

Carers Australia is the national peak body representing those Australians who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends with a disability, mental illness or disorder, chronic condition, terminal illness or who are frail.

Carers Australia's members are the Carers Associations in each state and territory that deliver specialist information, counselling and others services to carers in the community. Carers Australia is informed about carer issues through its member Carers Associations (the Network of Carers Associations) and its participation in national and international forums.

We believe that all carers are entitled to the same rights, choices and opportunities as other Australians in order to enjoy optimum health, social and economic wellbeing and to participate in family, social and community life, employment and education.

About Australia's Carers

Australia has almost 2.6 million carers, and nearly 500,000 of these are primary carers – the people who provide the most care¹. Carers are from all walks of Australian society and come into the caring journey at various stages throughout their life.

Carers are the foundation of our aged and community care system, and the annual replacement value of the vital care they provide is over \$30.5 billion. In 2005 it is estimated that carers provided 1.2 billion hours of unpaid care and the productivity loss of this care is approximately \$4.9 billion.²

According to the ABS 2003 Disability, Ageing and Carers Survey, there are almost 1.25 million people with disabilities that have profound or severe limitations and of those 1.07 million live in private households. 79 per cent of people with a disability living in households received care from relatives and friends, mainly partners, parents or children.³

Diversity of carers

Carers are from all walks of Australian society and come into the caring journey at various stages throughout their life. This diversity is evidenced in ABS data:^{4,5,6}

- 380,000 carers under the age of 26
 - 170,000 carers under the age of 18
- nearly 2 million carers of prime working age (15-64)
- 31,600 Indigenous carers over the age of 15
- 620,000 carers born outside Australia
 - 366,700 of those born in other than main English-speaking countries
- 454,000 carers over 65 – almost 1 in 5 persons.

Response to the Discussion Paper

The ability to engage in meaningful work is vital to the wellbeing of all people and Carers Australia fully supports changes that will enhance the quality of life for people with a disability and their carers. Carers' aspirations are often for the person they support to lead a full and rich life—including employment and all the associated benefits this brings for the person and their family. The new model for DES in Australia supports these aspirations.

We believe that the changes introduced in the Future of Disability Employment Services in Australia go a long way toward helping people with a disability to navigate the complexities of the system. The simplification of procedures will ensure that people accessing these valuable services will gain the most from dedicated service funds.

Ensuring the delivery of quality services

Some complexities remain in the system despite many positive changes. These could not be easily understood by clients without guidance. As a result, the model relies to a large extent on service providers' thorough knowledge of processes and ethical practice.

We believe the **introduction of a code of conduct, or standard guidelines would hold service providers accountable to a reasonable standard**. These should emphasise the need to properly guide the client through this process and to achieve the best possible outcome for them above and beyond other priorities.

The Code of Conduct for Disability Service Providers may include content such as:

- Be courteous, respectful and honest
- Treat clients with dignity
- Treat each client as an individual
- Support clients and, when relevant their carer, through the process
- Encourage clients to be well informed about employment processes
- Listen and work with concerns and preferences.

In developing any service delivery strategies, Carers Australia would also ask that the specific needs of people from rural and remote areas of Australia, Indigenous populations, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds be considered.

The delivery of quality employment services should also take a 'whole of life' approach. Support needs should start with the transition from education to employment and cater for people at any stage of their working career.

The impact of DES on carers

The employment needs of people with a disability and their carers are closely linked, particularly in the case of family relationships or where people cohabit. Often the income and employment arrangements of one party will have a direct effect on the other. In many cases, carers will also play a support role throughout the employment process for people with a disability.

We know that 79 per cent of primary carers care for a person living in the same household.⁷ The close relationship between many people with a disability and their carers may mean that changes to employment results in changes to household financial issues such as eligibility for income payments or increases to the cost of housing.

Where people with a disability are required to attend an employment service, carers may take on the responsibility of ensuring that the person they care for meets their appointments by assisting with arrangements or providing transport. The employment of the person receiving care can also create additional responsibilities for the carer such as organising transport, being available to provide emotional support and assisting with training and mentoring.

In some cases, such support can jeopardise sustainability of the carer's own employment. While the model provides some support for DES clients in the workplace, in many cases the carer will still need to carry out additional support tasks.

To encourage consideration of the direct impact for carers, Carers Australia believes that a carer impact statement should be included in any relevant government policy. Given the probable impact of the changes to employment services for many carers, **a carer impact statement should be included in papers relating to the Future of Disability Employment Services in Australia.**

Considering carers in the job-placement process

The DES provider should enquire about the presence of a carer as part of the client assessment process and subsequently make contact with the carer to ensure that job placements are also appropriate to their circumstances. This process would promote good-will between the DES and carer and may also prevent job placements that become unsustainable for the person with a disability and their carer.

Contacting carers will also ensure that the concerns of the carer are taken into account. Carers need to know that the people they care for will be treated with dignity and respect. **DES providers should also be encouraged to extend an invitation for carers to attend the client's first interview** as part of the Future of Disability Employment Services process.

Where there is a perception that service providers are not meeting the needs of clients, **an independent complaints mechanism should be available and accessible**. People with a disability and their carers should be openly encouraged to use this service without fear of detriment or reprisal. People with a disability and their carers should also have the option of changing providers if they feel their needs are not being met.

Carers as jobseekers

Disadvantaged jobseeker groups are identified by special circumstances that hinder their ability to find suitable work. It is worth noting that the recent announcement of the Employment Innovation Fund (as part of the Inquiry into the Future of Employment Services) neglected to acknowledge carers as a specific jobseeker group requiring support. Carers can be disadvantaged in the sense that they face additional barriers not experienced by other jobseekers.

In reference to the general population, workforce participation for carers is significantly lower and unemployment rates are higher for both men and women and across age groups.⁸ Additionally, carers with intensive caring responsibilities including: parent carers of a child with severe or lifelong disability; adults caring for a parent with dementia; and people caring for a partner with acquired brain injury, appear to be at an elevated risk of long-term unemployment.⁹ This disadvantage is further acknowledged in the government-identified need for carer income support. **Carers should be broadly recognised as a jobseeker group needing support.**

Employment services for carers

Carers Australia recognises the valuable assistance provided to people with a disability by Disability Employment Services and would like to see carers similarly catered for in processes for government-supported employment services.

It would be possible to **include carers under the guidelines for DES or under guidelines for universal employment services**, with an emphasis on assisting them as a disadvantaged group. Some of the framework for the DES process could easily be applied to the many carers who receive Centrelink payments. However, a review of the JSCI as an assessment tool would be required as the JSCI criteria is currently not directly relevant to carers.

The Future of Disability Services discussion paper encourages service providers to identify employers who assist people with a disability to work. If the same approach could be taken for carers this small step would mean a vast improvement in general awareness of the issues for carers entering, and in, the workforce.

Carers Australia welcomes the changes to the system under the Future of Disability Employment. This review should acknowledge the vital role of carers in the DES process and in the lives of people with a disability. We believe that the review of Disability Employment Services should prompt the government to consider employment support services for carers.

References

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