

New Disability Employment Services - notice to all key stakeholders

I am writing to thank you for your sustained and valuable contribution to the Review of Disability Employment Services.

The Review process, which commenced with the release of the first Discussion Paper in September last year, has been a comprehensive examination of the two specialist employment services for people with Disability, Vocational Rehabilitation Services and the Disability Employment Network. The Review has identified key strengths of these programs along with a number of areas where improvements could be made.

As I look over the work undertaken to date, I am struck by the high level of good will, partnership and collaboration demonstrated by all involved in the Review. I am particularly impressed by the commitment current providers, advocates and people with disability have demonstrated. The quality of the outcomes achieved is in no small way the result of the investments you have made to the process.

You will of course be aware that comments on the Exposure Draft of the Request for Tender and the Invitation to Treat consultation paper have closed. These documents represent the third and final round of preparations prior to the formal purchasing process. I appreciate that you will be eager for feedback on the final decision.

While we are still on track for a purchasing process, as the new Minister, I am very keen to take some time to consider the feedback we have received to these two important documents and to ensure that the final decision meets the key objective for the Review – improved services for people with disability.

In the meantime I want to assure you of my commitment that the implementation work continues in close collaboration with key stakeholders. To this end I have asked the Department to establish an Industry Reference Group to contribute to the development of a new performance framework for the new programs. Membership of this group will initially include peak industry associations – ACE, NESAs, NDS, Jobs Australia, the Australia Rehabilitation Providers' Association and the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations.

This Group will focus on the key performance indicators for the new programs including weightings and developing a method for measuring the comparative performance of providers in the new programs.

Once initial work is finalised and tenders have closed the industry peaks will be asked to identify two provider members each to join the group which will then turn its attention to more technical aspects of the framework. This way we can be sure the results will be practical and achieve the objectives set for the framework.

I have also asked that a Transition Advisory Group be established. With similar membership to the Industry Reference Group, the Transition Group will be asked to work closely with the Department on all aspects of the transition to the new services.

I look forward to working closely with you over the coming months.

Mark Arbib