

11 February 2008

The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP
Minister for Employment Participation
Parliament House CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email: MinisterEmploymentParticipation@deewr.gov.au

Dear Minister O'Connor,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment around employment, and employment services, for people with a disability. Vision Australia is committed to assisting people who are blind or have low vision to participate in all aspects of life, including employment. We believe strongly that employment brings many benefits, social and economic, to all people in the community and we are keen to work with you to ensure that our clients, people who are blind or have low vision, are given every opportunity to engage in employment.

Recently Vision Australia undertook significant research to assist with our understanding and future planning to improve employment outcomes for people who are blind or have low vision. The research emphasised that all of us, Government, business, generic and disability specialist employment services need to do more to achieve positive employment outcomes. I have attached an overview of the research report for your consideration.

Below I have addressed the specific areas noted in your request for comment relating to the Government's Social Inclusion and Skills policies.

1. Early interventions minimise the number of long-term welfare dependent Australians of working age (including a review of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument)

Employment Services funding be broadened beyond Employment Placement, to include Career Planning and Tertiary Education Support Services, with direct links to the Secondary Education sector.

2. Employment services are relevant to the circumstances and needs of the job seeker

Specialist DEN providers, e.g. Vision Australia specialising in Vision Impairment, continue to be funded.

Job seekers be allowed to register with 2 DEN providers, under an 'interagency agreement' to allow for the provision of specialist and complementary services (but not duplicate) to the job seeker, where their full range of needs cannot be met by a single provider.

People with a disability already in employment be able to have access to DEN services, to enhance career development opportunities and to assist people with career changes, particularly where their disability is degenerative, e.g. vision impairment, and is likely to impact significantly on their future employment.

People in Supported Employment (Business Services) be able to be simultaneously registered with a DEN service to increase their opportunity for transitioning to open employment.

3. Job seekers with higher levels of disadvantage receive intensive assistance

People with Dual Disabilities be able to receive services from multiple specialist DEN service providers. Also that where a person is in employment and is at risk of losing employment because of acquiring a disability that they be seen as high priority.

4. Incentives for training which will improve the employability of job seekers (including incentives for long term training and education to address labour market needs)

Placement of jobseekers into tertiary study of at least Certificate IV level be recognised as a performance outcome for DEN services.

Employer incentives be given for providing work experience opportunities to DEN clients and that the provision of work experience opportunities is not dependent on the employer offering ongoing, paid employment.

Funding be made available for adaptive equipment to enable jobseekers with a disability equal access to education and training – e.g. Portable notetakers and magnification devices for people who are blind or vision impaired.

5. Job seekers receive appropriate training

DEN service providers be given access to a 'jobseeker account' similar to those available to Job Network providers, to enable increased funding of job seeker training.

6. Performance management principles (including star ratings and business reallocation) that support sustainable outcomes and promote quality service delivery

Performance Ratings should be absolute, based against set criteria, so that services are ranked based on how good they are compared to that criteria, not how good they are compared to other services in their region.

7. The minimisation of time and money spent on administration

People in receipt of DSP (blind) become automatically eligible for DEN services and be able to register directly with service providers, rather than going through the time consuming and overwhelming Job Capacity Assessment process that currently occurs.

Review of pension entitlements become disassociated from registration with a DEN service provider.

DEEWR compliance and Disability Service Standards compliance becomes merged and assessed under the one system.

We congratulate you and your Department for taking this opportunity to explore possible areas which need to be addressed for employment programs. As mentioned earlier, Vision Australia is committed to positive employment outcomes for people who are blind or have low vision. Accordingly we would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you and Department staff to expand on the points above and to discuss the findings of our employment research.

Kind regards

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VISION AUSTRALIA