
Submission: Jobs and Skills Summit – White Paper
Consultation



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About Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN)

Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) is an organisation of, for, and with people with disability. QDN operates a state-wide network of 2,000+ members and supporters who provide information, feedback and views based on their lived experience, which inform the organisation's systemic advocacy activities. We believe people with disability should always be at the table when decisions are made that directly impact their lives.

QDN also currently hosts 32 peer support groups across Queensland, made up of people with a diverse range of disabilities, and convened by people with disability. The groups network socially, share information, life experiences and solutions, to create more inclusive lives and communities. Local groups are a safe space for people with disability to share information on topics that are of interest to them, to extend their social networks, and to build capacity and leadership skills. Groups usually meet on a monthly or bi-monthly basis and meetings can be face-to-face or virtual.

Principles of Co-Design

QDN has articulated a framework and principles of co-design informed by people with disability to provide a best practice guide to ensure people with disability are included in the policy, programs and strategies that impact them. Our five values underpin our co-design work:

Authentic Voice – We are with, and for, all people with disability and ensure those with limited or no voice are heard and valued

Collaborative Action – We work together to learn from the collective experiences, values, and wisdom of people with disability

Rights – We believe in, and model, a human rights approach that recognises disability as a social issue.

Respect – We value human difference and diversity and build mutual respect through openness and fellowship.

Resilience – We are hopeful, even about the most complex challenges and are here for the long term.

These values have been used to inform QDN's principles for co-design and the actions and indicators that demonstrate in practice, quality, and effective codesign that values, empowers, and respects the role and voice of Queenslanders with disability.

Introduction

Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the proposed Jobs and Skills White Paper.

The multifaceted responsibilities of Government for ensuring good outcomes for people with disability are clearly expressed in the 2008 United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD). The CRPD provides the framework for Australia's international obligations across all levels of Government. QDN supports the development of employment strategies for people with disability that is grounded in the CRPD.

Having a job is not only essential to a person’s economic security, but gives people a sense of purpose and achievement, which is central to fostering good mental health and creating an enriched life, free from poverty.

Employment is an important issue for Queenslanders with disability and QDN members who have contributed their experiences regarding employment, reflecting on the importance of access, support and retention, and giving personal accounts of seeking and being in employment.

QDN members have a diversity of disability and this is reflected in their experiences in employment. Many experienced discrimination, some experienced employment services positively and some experienced them very negatively, some supported employment subsidies and some opposed them. Activity to support employment outcomes for people with disability needs to reflect this diversity and individual unique experience.

A prominent theme in our consultation with our members was that community attitudes to people with disability and their potential as workers and contributors to the community needed to change and be challenged.

Engaging with people with disabilities and seeking to co-design strategies and activities will ensure diversity is addressed and inclusive strategies developed.

Ultimately, people with disability are looking for the same opportunities as everyone else – better health care, a quality education, a secure job, a safe place to live, and more time with the people they love.

Policy Governance

Supporting employment outcomes for people with disability is part of a broader and changing policy landscape in which each level of government has a responsibility for delivering on improved employment outcomes for people with disability as do businesses and communities.

At a national level this includes:

- the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) including Information, Linkages and Capacity (ILC);
- Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021 – 2031 and associated Employment Targeted Action Plan and Employ my Ability, Disability Employment Strategy;
- Disability Employment Services and Workforce Australia and associated reviews; and
- Disability Royal Commission.

In Queensland work is underway to develop individual departmental disability service plans that aim to deliver on the Queensland Government’s vision to help build an inclusive Queensland for all Queenslanders, so the one in five Queenslanders with disability can reach their full potential as equal citizens. Other states and territories will likewise have a range of strategies and frameworks to support employment for people with disability.

Within this changing legislative and policy landscape, it is critical that regulatory frameworks deliver governance, accountability mechanisms and ways of measuring outputs and outcomes that are informed by people with disability.

QDN identifies one of the risks associated with a broad policy strategy is its focus on aspirational outcomes, without clear articulation of each of the governments' roles and responsibilities in achieving tangible outcomes and meaningful change within a combined agreement/strategy document.

Australia's Disability Strategy outlines the roles of actors in the system as well as provides a clearly articulated outcomes framework for the key policy priorities including employment. This provides a solid foundation from which to build an effective monitoring, evaluation and learning framework to support employment outcomes for people with disability.

The proposed Disability Employment Centre of Excellence provides an opportunity to bring together all these pieces into a coherent whole. Development of the centre must be developed with people with disability and the ongoing work must be co-designed and include:

- Collaborative governance across jurisdictions;
- Clear goals, targets and indicators for measuring success in employment for people with disability;
- Framework for innovation and testing new approaches
- Clear connection to jurisdictional and community led activities

Recommendation 1: That the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence be led by people with disability and bring together the policies, strategies, activities and stakeholders to support a holistic approach to improving employment outcomes for people with a disability.

Place Governance

Labour markets are spatial in nature, and as such, a place-based approach to workforce planning and development is important to ensure that the work considers the strengths and opportunities as well as the needs of local communities.

Place based approaches provide opportunities for local leadership, for innovation and importantly for bringing together the diverse voices of communities to develop local solutions. They are particularly effective in driving local workforce development activities and progressing social and economic wellbeing.

Connecting place-based approaches to a strategic policy governance structure provides additional opportunities for learning from place to drive structural and systemic change.

Recommendation 2: That place based approaches be facilitated through the Disability Employment Centre for Excellence to bring together diverse voices to develop innovation solutions at the local level.

Jobs and Skills Summit: Response to Outcomes and Issues Paper

A better skilled, better trained workforce

The proposed **Jobs and Skills Australia** is supported as a tripartite governance structure that can bring together the critical actors in labour market policy and programs. It will be important that Jobs and Skills Australia works closely with the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence, including place-based governance to centre the needs and aspirations of people with disability in broader skills and employment policy and strategy development.

In addition to the articulated focus on workforce shortage and priority sectors, Jobs and Skills Australia must also prioritise **strategies for priority population groups** to close the gap in employment outcomes, understanding the diversity of approaches needed to address the intersectionality of disadvantage. Strong and foundational connection to the work of the Disability Centre of Excellence will be critical to ensure that the needs of people with disability are incorporated into the work of Jobs and Skills Australia.

Foundation skills programs are important to supporting those that are most marginalised by the labour market. Support for these people must be flexible and able to respond to vocational and non-vocational barriers to employment. Ensuring people with disability can participate economically through employment is contingent on access to affordable and accessible housing, health services, education, transport and specialist disability services.

Developing a **quality VET workforce** is critical to rebuilding this important element of our jobs and skills system. Targeted strategy for employment of people with disability in the VET workforce will not only create immediate employment opportunities but will also support effective delivery of VET training for people with disability and support improved access and inclusion of people with disability in the VET system.

Addressing skills shortages and strengthening the migration system

QDN supports the inclusion of housing strategies as key actions resulting from the Jobs and Skills Summit and considers the **provision of accessible, social and affordable housing** as a critical step to improving employment outcomes for all that are vulnerable in the labour market. It is critical that housing is accessible for people with disability. Studies have shown that 73% of people with disability live in housing that does not meet, or only partly meets their accessibility needs and that inaccessible housing harms the 'dignity, freedom, social inclusion, economic productivity, health and wellbeing of people with disability.'¹

Recommendation 3: That accessibility standards under the National Construction Code is fully implemented across all jurisdictions and in the development of social and affordable housing to ensure future housing stock is accessible to all Australians.

While migration is an important element of labour market supply, it is important that protections are in place for the **employment of local people** and that support is provided to **assist people vulnerable in the labour market** to access employment opportunities and help address skills shortages. It is important that where migration is used to address shortages of workforce for disability support sector that a strategy is developed to ensure that targeted skills training is delivered to this sector of the labour market so quality services and supports can be delivered for people with disability.

¹ University of Melbourne: Living with disability in accessible housing: social health and economic impacts, October 2020
https://disability.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/3522007/Accessible-Housing-FINAL-REPORT.pdf

Boosting job security and wages, and creating safe, fair and productive workplaces

A strong social dialogue in workplace relations is critical to the social safety net, particularly for people with disability and others made vulnerable by the labour market. Collective bargaining is a critical plank of this including good faith negotiations, particularly where there is a power imbalance. As reported by Dr Ben Gauntlett, Disability Discrimination Commissioner, in his speech to the Jobs and Skills Summit, 50% of all complaints made to the Australian Human Rights Commission concern disability discrimination, many of which are in employment.² This is a clear indication of the difficulty experienced by people with disability when they participate in the workforce.

When you have economic stability then you can kick your own goals - economic and social success. For me it was a 30-year journey, I really hope the next generation can do it in 5 – 10 years. (QDN Member, November 2022)

Critical to economic stability is having adequate income. The commitment to initiate **detailed consultation and research on a living wage is welcome**. However, for far too long, many people with disability have been forced into poverty as recipients of JobSeeker or Youth Allowance. With reports of almost half of JobSeeker recipients unable to work full-time due to sickness or disability³, QDN calls on the Australian Government to raise the rate of jobseeker to at least \$73 a day so that everyone has enough to cover the basics while going through tough times.

Recommendation 4: That the Australian Government commit to an increase in working age payments of at least \$73 a day.

Many QDN members have expressed their dissatisfaction that unjustifiable hardship can be used to justify inaccessibility or processes which could ordinarily be viewed as discriminatory. QDN has previously supported assertions made in the Queensland Collective Unions submission to the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Review, that “the focus of equality or discrimination law should be on effecting positive changes and removing systemic practices and conditions that limit the achievement of substantive equality, for example, between women and men, or for people with an impairment/disability. The introduction of a positive duty for both workers with family and caring responsibilities, and for workers with an impairment or disability with new regulatory powers and functions is consistent with positive measures to achieve substantive equality and are therefore supported.”⁴

² Gauntlett, Dr B, Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission,

<https://humanrights.gov.au/about/news/speeches/disability-discrimination-commissioners-speech-2022-jobs-and-skills-summit>

³ Almost half of jobseeker recipients unable to work full-time due to sickness or disability, Guardian Australia, 19 September 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/sep/19/almost-half-of-jobseeker-recipients-unable-to-work-full-time-due-to-sickness-or-disability>

⁴ Queensland Unions, Submission to the Review of the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (Qld),

https://www.qhrc.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/38602/Sub.111-Queensland-Council-of-Unions-QCU_Redacted.pdf

Promoting equal opportunities and reducing barriers to employment

Lack of inclusive skilling opportunities and workplaces contribute significantly to lower employment participation for people with disability in Australia. Barriers to developing employees with disability include:

- Inaccessible development programs
- Lack of opportunity to participate in skills enhancement programs
- A punitive approach to participation in labour market programs

QDN Members have reinforced the need for **work to occur with employers** that creates a better understanding and awareness of the positives of employing people with disability. This includes employers promoting a welcoming, accessible workplace inclusive of diversity and the understanding of the needs of people with disability. Resources to help improve the accessibility of workplaces need to be deployed across workplaces with a 'whatever it takes' attitude to underpin campaigns and information dissemination.

Greater and clearer **information and support**, on-the-job support, role models, mentoring, storytelling and case studies are all supported particularly if they are integrated into a cohesive campaign that incorporates different mediums and media. Campaigns should be co-designed with people with disability.

Direct support to employers to assist people with newly acquired disabilities to return to work is supported and would ideally be linked in with Workcover organisations across the States.

Reviewing the design of the Government disability employment programs is supported. A review should seek to align and link disability employment programs more closely to mainstream employment programs so that people with disability have access to the full range of available jobs and employment opportunities. It is important that employment programs are **person centred and focussed on individual needs**. This will require targeted and strategic approaches which currently are not in place. It is important that individual can **choose their provider** and to change their provider if unsatisfied. In order for people to have genuine choice some **universal access requirements** need to be met to ensure accessibility for people with disability including physical, intellectual, cognitive, neurological and sensory disability. For example, Auslan interpreter availability at all DES providers to allow deaf and hard of hearing people the same choice as other participants. **Transparent information on outcomes** is critical for participants to make informed decisions when choosing a DES provider.

As outlined earlier in this submission, **place-based approaches** to drive co-ordination at the local level are an important element of effective labour market strategies. It is critical that place-based approaches are connected to a strategic policy framework and mechanism – in this case, the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence and/or Jobs and Skills Australia to support learning and systems change.

This must support the development of a targeted strategy for employment of people with disability including, but not limited to:

- Inclusive and non-biased recruitment strategies and services including training and awareness raising for employers and recruitment agencies;
- Employer incentives

- Innovative options that deliver choice, open, inclusive, and accessible forms of employment
- Employment services that meet individual needs; and
- Mentor and development opportunities for people with disability as small business owners.

Recommendation 5: Through the Disability Centre of Excellence, develop a national strategy for employment of people with disability across labour supply and demand activities.

Maximising jobs and opportunities in our industries and communities

The fastest growing jobs market is the **community services sector** including NDIS market and workforce. People with disability need to be recognised as part of this growing workforce as employees and targeted strategies are needed that provide pathways to employment. Workforce shortages are a significant constraint on the delivery of quality services under the NDIS and therefore the achievement of outcomes for people with disability. A thriving, quality community service sector is critical for people with disability to achieve a good life.

The **digital and technology industries** have the potential to provide significant opportunities for employment of people with a disability. The implementation of a Digital and Tech Skills Compact and the creation of 1,000 digital traineeships in the public sector should focus on people with disability as a key component of meeting skills shortages and increasing employment opportunities.

Place based approaches provide effective mechanisms for supporting the development of employment opportunities across these growing industries and others. Bringing together people with disability with employers to learn from each other and develop effective, tailored strategies to improve employment outcomes across industries and communities.

The **public sector has an important role** to play as a large and important employer and as a instrument of public good. QDN supports the Commonwealth Government's effort in employing people with disabilities via the *Australian Public Service (APS) and professional development programs Disability Employment Strategy 2020-2025*. The APS should enhance targeted accessible recruitment, leadership and professional development programs focussed on students at TAFE and University colleges and accessible to APS staff with disability. These programs should train potential candidates about working in the APS environment and offer opportunities for internships, student placements and project work for students and emerging leaders with disability. These opportunities should be available across the APS not just those specific to disability.