



**Physical Disability Council of Australia Ltd (PDCA)**

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## **Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission**

### **Request for comments**

**on**

### **Possible public inquiry on employment and disability issues**

The Physical Disability Council of Australia ltd (PDCA) is the national peak body representing the interests and views of people with physical disability across Australia.

As a national peak we wish to provide comment on a Possible Public Inquiry on employment and disability issues, and thank HREOC for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Should you require any further information or wish to discuss this matter, please do not hesitate to call us on 07 3267 1057 or contact us by email on [pdca@pdca.org.au](mailto:pdca@pdca.org.au).

Yours Sincerely

Sue Egan  
Executive Officer  
Physical Disability Council of Australia Ltd (PDCA)

## PHYSICAL DISABILITY ISSUES

In 1998, 3.6 million people in Australia had a disability (19% of the total population). A further 3.1 million had an impairment or long-term condition that did not restrict their everyday activities. Of those with a disability, 87% (3.2 million) experienced specific restrictions in core activities, schooling or employment.

Self care, mobility and communication are fundamentally important activities underlying all aspects of everyday life. Most people with a disability (78%, or 15% of the total population) were restricted in one or more of these core activities. Depending on the level of assistance needed or difficulty experienced, restriction in core activities was profound (3% of the total population), severe (3%), moderate (4%) or mild (6%) (Table 2).

Participation in education and the labour force contributes to personal development and independence. Of those with a core activity restriction, 47% (1.3 million) people were also restricted in schooling or employment. A further 327,900 people without a core activity restriction were restricted in schooling or employment.<sup>2</sup>

In 2003, People with disability had a lower labour force participation rate (53%) than those without a disability (81%) and those with a profound or severe core-activity limitation had an even lower participation rate (15%).<sup>3</sup>

Regardless of individual differences in disability, it can be said with confidence that people with physical disability, particularly those with significant mobility handicaps:

- have great difficulty gaining access to public and private buildings because of physical barriers such as steps, steepness of site and lack of parking
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- face greater costs than other people because of their disability such as specific and essential equipment, modifications to vehicles, household appliances, modifications to housing including internal and external, home maintenance including gardening and lawns, transport, personal and health care including pharmaceutical's and items not included on the PBS, and managing a household and family in many cases generally
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<sup>2</sup> 1998 ABS Disability and Ageing)

<sup>3</sup> [Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings, Australia, 2003](#) (cat. no. 4430.0).

cannot access public transport and are reliant on taxis, with varying levels of subsidy throughout Australia, or on private vehicles

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- face significant discrimination in finding a job and obtaining promotional opportunities, despite the avenues for redress through disability discrimination legislation. The Australian Public Service does not employ people with disability in the same numbers as it once did.
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- have lower incomes than their age/education peers due to greater difficulties in getting employment and in achieving promotion
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- have fluctuating income if their impairment is associated with medical conditions  
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- have fluctuating income if their impairment is associated with medical conditions leading to episodic periods of hospitalisation and/or absence from work. (Such people include people with spinal cord injury, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, polio, cerebral palsy, arthritis etc).

## ISSUES AND INQUIRY PROCESS

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1. **Would a public inquiry in this area by HREOC, ADVANCE EMPLOYMENT opportunities FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY?**

PDCA believes that for people with disabilities, employment encompasses more than securing a position in employment and that governments and community need to be aware that support mechanisms must be in place before employment and equality in employment can happen. We therefore support an inquiry into the area of employment including the issues surrounding employment, which can involve:

**Access** – addressing the barriers that prevent employment of people with disability, such as physical access, communication access, information access,

**Attitudes** of potential employers and staff, including discrimination to reflect the day to day reality for people with disability in Australia.

**Employment** must be included as a whole of government priority by the Commonwealth Government. The issue of employment and economic participation has been a priority in some areas of government such as Family and Community Services, and DETYA and significant resources have been poured into Welfare Reform and other initiatives designed to increase the participation of people with disability in paid employment. Unfortunately, these initiatives are failing and both the Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement or the *Disability Discrimination Act* are unable to rectify this situation.

**Evaluation of existing programmes.** The evaluation needs to look at how and why efforts to address this issue through millions of dollars in programmes, have failed.

**Investigate** the option for a whole-of-government approach with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet engaged as a key partner.

**Diversity** is not covered when addressing employment issues and it is an important aspect that would help to ensure that people with disability from all backgrounds are equal to other members of society. This includes indigenous Australians and those from Non English Speaking Countries, whose English and customs are different to those of Australians.

2 **What are the issues requiring specific attention or research as part of an inquiry?**

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PDCA suggests the following:

- The Australian Bureau of Statistics, shows that people with disability employed by Australian Public Service has decreased by 20% since 1997. This is a disturbing decline in employment support for people with disability who are being encouraged to go out or return to work on the one hand, but discouraged from working in the one place that purports to be an Equal Opportunity Employer - government public service.
- Awareness raising of the benefits of employing people with a disability should be investigated resulting in the development of a public awareness raising campaign.
- Consider the issue of Cost of Disability and cost of working and whether people with disability consider it is financially not viable to be in employment as opposed to an Disability Support Pension. Such issues to include the cost of transport, clothing, equipment, etc.
- Consider whether support programmes such as Attendant Care or Personal Lifestyle support packages meet the extended needs of people working (for instance are these hours transferable to the workplace or for the home area only)
- Consider the programmes Work Based Personal Assistance and the Workplace Modifications and Subsidised Wages actually reflect the reality. Also consider what mechanisms are used to decide on eligibility for these programmes.
- Consider the issue of colleagues providing personal care to co-workers and what this does to the relationship of colleagues. One dependent on the other for vital support in the workplace is not equity.
- Investigate the low paid positions often offered to people with disability with no provision for promotion or increased wages
- Invite community organisations to provide case studies of problems encountered so that these can used to inform others.
- Seek information on what pre vocational training is available to people with disabilities throughout the community

**3. What other processes of review or policy development which ought to be taken into account in considering and or conducting an inquiry in this area, including any issues where examination by an inquiry should be limited or excluded to avoid duplicating existing work?**

- Currently there is an evaluation of the Commonwealth Disability Strategy conducted on behalf of the Department of Family and Community Services by the following:

Justin McNab & Karen Fisher,

Social Policy Research Centre  
University of NSW  
Sydney NSW 2052

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PDCA believes it would be strategic to contact this organisation to ascertain what they are promoting/recommending in the area of employment in the public service?

PDCA has for some time, recommended setting up a national advisory committee to work on a national strategy in much the same way as the Bridging Pathways National Strategy. This advisory committee could also at other aspects of the employment of people with disabilities in a non political group of people who are focused on assisting people to become employed, by practically and creatively looking at all of the issues surrounding employment , such as:

- Disability Awareness campaigns to potential employers
- Advertising for staff with a disability and EEO Practices
- Apprenticeships and other opportunities for people with disabilities
- Human Resources (hiring a person with a disability)
- Guidelines for the interview process
- Equipment, where and how to get it.
- Wages (supported and non supported)
- Recommended conditions of employment.
- promotion and training within the organisation
- problem solving
- training shortfalls in the community
- more.....

Partners in the national advisory committee could include:

HREOC

Employers Making a Difference (EMAD)

Disability Peak Organisations

Australian Competitive Employment (ACE)

ACROD

FaCS

DETYA

Diversity @ work

ANTA representative

more.....

**4. Other relevant research and information which ought to be taken into account in considering and/or conducting an inquiry into this area?**

None

5. Issues affecting participation and opportunity for people with disabilities in employment in Australia which might appropriately be examined by a public inquiry process?

PDCA believes that some of these are:

- Inadequate personal care hours to assist with rising, showering, dressing for work etc, this is an unmet need in many instances across Australia
- Transport not accessible or consistent across Australia, causing increased costs,
- Limit of transport subsidies in states and no consistency with subsidy between states
- Lack of awareness in the benefits of employing people with disabilities
- lack of knowledge of subsidies available such as workplace modifications and subsidised wages
- lack of knowledge of the real needs of people with disabilities by employment officers or human resource personnel
- Lack of flexibility in work practices and work hours
- No promotion of working from home which is a good option for people with physical disabilities
- discrimination by employers
- discrimination in the workplace
- no consideration for the cost of disability and the additional cost of working either mentally or physically
- Lack of diversity and EEO policies
- Access to buildings and public spaces
- Lack of community based vocational training
- Inaccessible facilities at TAFE (or ) lack of transport to TAFE

- Losing Health Care Cards and the ability to have Dr bulk bill in some cases.
  - Responsibility and accountability issues
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