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Submission

to

The National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy

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The Physical Disability Council of Australia would like to thank the Australian Government, Department of Employment, Education Workplace Relations (DEEWR) for the opportunity to provide input into the consultation on Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy.

The Physical Disability Council of Australia Ltd (PDCA) is the national disability organisation, funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FAHCSIA) to represent the interests and views of people with physical disability across Australia. PDCA represents the largest sector of disability in Australia.

Physical Disability in Australia:

Physical disability affects the person's mobility or dexterity, often requiring mobility devices or equipment to assist in mobility.. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates that at least 6% of Australians over the age of 5 years have mobility disabilities.

Physical disabilities can be permanent, episodic or temporary. Physical disabilities can be caused by:

- congenital factors
- trauma including accidents
- infection
- degeneration
- disease
- chronic medical conditions.

Physical impairments differ from one person to another. These differences can range from difficulties with balance, gait and co-ordination; dizziness and weakness; pain or paralysis. Mobility equipment used to assist moving can include crutches, a walking stick or frame, a wheelchair either powered or manual. However some people with physical disability may not use any equipment at all, but are still considered to have a physical disability.

The most common physical disabilities are partial or total paralysis, amputation, spinal cord injury, various forms of arthritis, cerebral palsy, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, polio and post-polio syndrome, spina bifida, to name only a few. Additionally, some respiratory and cardiac diseases and cancer or diabetes may affect mobility. Any of these conditions may also impair strength, speed, endurance, coordination and dexterity.

PDCA operates from Guiding Philosophies, which includes our position on employment of people with physical disability:

PDCA supports the employment of people with physical disability in open employment. This includes ensuring that all people with physical disability have award-based wages and conditions consistent with Australian work practices, that offer opportunity for growth and promotion.

PDCA does not support people with physical disability being employed in Business Services (Sheltered Workshops) of any kind, regardless of level of disability.

PDCA believes that people with disability have the right to work, in the same way and

with the same opportunities and conditions as all other Australians.

People with disability experience discrimination in employment on a regular basis, whether it is resistance to employing people with disability through ignorance or lack of knowledge about disability, little or no knowledge about support that is available to people with disability in employment, or the belief that it is all too hard!

1. 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%).
2. 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 accessible parking, lack of lifts to 2nd floor and above, lack of accessible toilets, etc.,
 - 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, lawns and window cleaning, transport, personal and health care including pharmaceuticals and items not included on the PBS
 - often manage a household and family and who in many cases generally cannot access public transport and are reliant on accessible taxis, with varying levels of subsidy throughout Australia, or on private vehicles, which have been purchased to be able to carry a person using a wheelchair, therefore is often more costly
 - 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.
 - Job centres or networks are rarely accessible with accessible toilets and other staff/student facilities.
 - Many of the staff in job centres or networks have not been sufficiently exposed to people with disability, or understand the DDA or had any disability awareness training
 - have lower incomes/education than their age peers due to greater difficulties in getting employment and in achieving promotion This is borne out by the decline in Australian Public Service employees who have a disability.

It is within this framework that we offer the following input into this consultation, with the overarching belief that all people with disability experience the additional Cost of Disability which is directly attributable to the costs incurred because of their disability. These costs are over and above the ordinary cost of living experienced by non disabled people in their everyday lives and can be directly linked but not confined only to:

- Cost of medications (including holistic health medication)
- Cost of medical treatment (including holistic health treatment)
- Rent
- Transport (taxis instead of public transport or personal vehicles)
- Equipment and aids, not already subsidised by governments
- Additional food for health
- Heating and cooling costs
- Additional clothing
- Modifications to home and work situations
- Home maintenance (require outside assistance)
- and more...

Structured submission to the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy

1. Barrier

- What is the issue or problem that you think can make it more difficult for a person with disability and/or mental illness to find and keep work and to develop their career?

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.

Many people with disabilities do work, and many more want to work, either full time or part time, and any efforts to address this complex issue are welcomed. Despite numerous opportunities for input and comments from people with disabilities across Australia on the issue of employment, people with disabilities and their say has been largely ignored by previous governments.

The stated objective of moving people from welfare to work as stated by the previous government particularly in 'Welfare to Work' policy. represented a triumph of rhetoric over reality. This relied on a simplistic analysis of the operation of the labour market, rather than determining what is needed in order to get people into meaningful work with meaningful wages and futures.

PDCA believes that there has been many missed opportunities for innovative and flexible employment options and partnerships to address the issue of employment of people with disabilities.

We also argue that the rhetoric is often so different from the reality that it can be near

impossible to expect many people with disabilities to work unless there are sufficient changes within our society as we have stated elsewhere in this document.

We therefore welcome the Rudd Government initiative in attempting to address some of the inequalities in employment including addressing the barriers and issues which impact on the employment of people with disabilities in Australia. These can and do involve the following:

Access – addressing the barriers that prevent employment of people with disability, such as physical access, communication access, information access, access to staff facilities, access to appropriate

Attitudes of Job Centre, Job Network, and general Employment Service staff, potential employers and staff, which includes discrimination and reflects the day to day ignorance and of and reality for people with disability in Australia.

Employment programmes.

Many of the former programmes that provided such support are no longer in place such as local training organisations such as the old Skillshare or small TAFE training opportunities.

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.

Employment must be included as a whole of government priority by any Commonwealth Government. The issue of employment and economic participation has been a priority in some areas of government such as Families, Housing, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs, and DEEWR, with significant resources being poured into Welfare Reform in past years as well as other initiatives designed to increase the participation of people with disability in paid employment. Unfortunately, these initiatives are failing and neither the Commonwealth Government nor the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) have been able to rectify this situation.

Evaluation of existing programmes. Any evaluation needs to look at how and why efforts to address this issue through millions of dollars in programmes, have failed consistently over the past 11 years.

Lack of disability awareness. Many people think they know all about disability, when in actual fact they know very little. Disability awareness training not only demonstrates the abilities of people with disability, but also some of the easier solutions to perceived large problems can be overcome this way.

Self Employment. How to support people who run their own small/micro businesses or in other ways of being self-employed is an issue that also needs to be addressed as often this is a missed opportunity. So too is the option of working from home, which is one way of addressing some of the barriers to inaccessible employment places and the need for large workplace modifications

Tertiary and Vocational education.

Any discussion of employment opportunities must include not only training but education/retraining/information etc. Often people with disabilities miss out on their early education for a number of reasons, but this can be rectified by mature age studies, distance education and part time studies. However many people with disabilities do not know or have access to distance education, mature age studies or the support available within the university or TAFE environments.

Using the latest technology for work purposes, and access to work related support and equipment;

2. Goal

- What is the goal or goals that you would like the Strategy to achieve—these can be aspirational and high level, but should also be within the Strategy's Terms of Reference.
- If you have more than one goal which fits under a barrier, list the one that you consider the most important first.

First goal

National Advisory Group

PDCA has for some time, recommended setting up a National Advisory Group to work with a national strategy in much the same way as the Education document 'Bridging Pathways - A National Strategy' was developed. We therefore support an Advisory Group be set up to oversee this important issue.

This advisory group could investigate all aspects of the employment process for people with disabilities within a non political Advisory group.

The focus of the Advisory Group should be to investigate and recommend (amongst other issues) innovative practices of employment, existing employment services and supports as well as researching what practical and active assistance is needed to assist people with disabilities to become employed. Vocational Education and Tertiary Opportunities should be included in this brief.

The Advisory Group would also oversee:

- Disability Awareness campaigns directed specifically at potential employers
- Human Resources and Advertising processes used to secure staff with disabilities including Guidelines for the whole recruitment process
- EEO Practices within Australia and overseas
- Apprenticeships and cadetships and other opportunities for people with disabilities
- Education and training opportunities and shortfalls in the community

- Equipment, where and how to get it and who is eligible to obtain it (the individual with a disability or the employer).
- Supervise provision and maintenance of Supported Wages Programme and ensure equitable wages for people with disabilities in open employment
- Recommend appropriate conditions of employment (such as removing any inappropriate Industrial Reforms currently in place)
- Promotion and training opportunities of employers

Partners in a National Advisory Committee should include:

1. Physical Disability Council of Australia Ltd (PDCA)
2. HREOC
3. Employers Making a Difference (EMAD)
4. Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO)
5. Australian Competitive Employment (ACE)
6. NRS (formerly ACROD)
7. ACE
8. Diversity @ work
9. Australian National Training Authority (or equivalent) representative
10. Government representatives - as Secretariat with input
 - FaHCSIA
 - DETYA
 - Centrelink
 - Human Services

Second goal

Disability Employment Services

PDCA believes that Disability Employment Services need additional expectations and outcomes placed on them when receiving public monies, including assurance of equity and inclusion of all people with disabilities, not just Quality Assurance which regulates the organisation but not the provision of service.

For instance:

- The support for retention of jobs is not enough, instead many services focus on short term outcomes to fulfill contract requirements for that period, often resulting in a 13 week outcome or at most a 26 week outcome which then fails.,
- contracts and tenders are often awarded without checking that services comply with the DDA in basic access to premises requirements, resulting in many services not being physically accessible to some
- There are not enough clear assessments and expectations of services, even with the DEN Star ratings
- Not enough training opportunities organised by employment services, which are piecemeal at best
- no clear opportunities or promotion of what could be achieved
- too much picking the cream of clients for easy outcomes
- too much spent on administration and staff resources and not enough on the clients

themselves and their needs

- too much staff training and incentives and none for clients, such as conferences
- not enough say from clients in their placement and clients often being coerced into inappropriate positions such as enclaves because there is little else on offer
- not enough consistency across services

PDCA supports Case Based and/or Individual Funding which is targeted at individual people with disabilities and their needs rather than block funding which has not worked to the benefit of people with disabilities, but has ensured that many of the employment services have become very large and powerful organisations.

Third goal

PDCA believes the overarching goal of any government should be to see that all of its citizens are included in the most appropriate and meaningful way, and when speaking and writing on social inclusion, this includes people with disability their inclusion is demonstrated in actions rather than words.

3. Recommended ideas and solutions (actions, examples or guidelines)

- What are some ideas about how this goal or goals could be achieved?
- What are some specific actions that can be taken to implement this idea?
- The more specific you are in listing recommended actions, the easier it is to see exactly how you think the barrier can be overcome and the goal or goals achieved.

First idea

Social Inclusion:

Enhance the DDA so that it has strength and conviction and allows people with disability to complain and have their complaint addressed in the most affordable, timely and confident way.

Ensure that all contracts awarded in the name of the Australian Government require adherence to the DDA in Access to Premises and all other aspects that will affect people with disability.

Recommended solutions (actions, examples or guidelines) (numbered)

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A Minimum set of Standards for employment, that ensure the rights of all people but most especially those who are society's most vulnerable people.

Second idea

Australian Public Service

More people with disability should be employed in the Australian Public Service and in positions of influence in decision making roles.

For employees with disability, representation declined again this year to 3.3%, down from 3.6% at June 2006. The number of ongoing employees with disability fell from 4,818 at June 2006 to 4,717 at June 2007.

- State of the Service Report, APSC, 2006-07

In June 1998, 5.2% of Australian public servants identified as having a disability. Since then, this has declined steadily to 3.3% in 2007. Clearly, the total rate of employment in the public service is a significant concern. Also concerning is the rate of retention in the public service. In 2005, the Australian Public Service Commission found that employees with disability were 60% more likely than other staff to be retrenched (MAC 2006: 54).

Recommended solutions (actions, examples or guidelines) (numbered)

Australian Public Service

Advertise, attract and entice people with disability to become involved in the Public Service at the national level in order to be seen to 'practice what is preached' rather than the piecemeal approach to Public Service employment witnessed today, where the employment of people with disabilities is declining rather than increasing despite the launch of their strategy to increase their employment several years ago.

People with disability who are seen in everyday life in positions of authority and importance create more positive pictures than any advertising campaign or policy, and this picture goes a long way to showing all of Australia and overseas visitors that Australia is truly an inclusive and just society.

The time for talking is over, it is now time to act!

Third idea

Recruitment

The Australian Government would be well placed to 'head hunt' people with disabilities for specific roles in public profile, especially in the employment and education areas.

Recommended solutions (actions, examples or guidelines) (numbered)

Recruit graduates with disabilities directly from Universities and TAFE's so that the opportunity to be employed is encouraged and created.

All universities have records of students with disabilities, their areas of study and their graduation status and it would be easy to set up a direct graduate recruitment system.

4. Measurement

- How would you know that these ideas and actions were successful in achieving the goal?
- How would you measure the success of these ideas and actions in achieving the goal?
- What key performance indicators or milestones could be used to measure the success of these ideas and actions in achieving the goal?
- Are there benchmarks that you would like to see put in place? If so, what are they?

Measurement for first idea

That the DDA is stronger and more supportive to people with disability and is used as a tool to address discrimination and wrongful dismissals rather than people with disability not using the system to address discriminatory practices.

ALL Government contracts have clauses that ensure the inclusion of people with disability in all areas of life including access to premises and inclusive employment practices.

Measurement for second idea

Set a target for the minimum number of people with disability employed in the public service and this to be included in the National Disability Strategy as a target or Goal.

Increased numbers of people with disability in public service employment (for instance how many people with disability are at the coalface of Centrelink, FaHCSIA, DEEWR etc and are seen as role models for others?)

People with disability seen in high profile positions of authority and importance. (Advisors to Ministers and other parliamentary staff etc).

Measurement for third idea

Employment service staff undergo compulsory audits of disability compliance, with access to premises, recruitment policies and practices, attitudes to inclusion, boards or committees with people with disability, etc.

5. Other

- Is there anything else you would like to say about this proposal that is not covered under any of the previous headings?

The barriers:

1 The Cost of Disability

The issue of Cost of Disability and costs of working need to be addressed in the near future. Whether people with disability consider it is financially viable (or not) to be in employment, as opposed to being a recipient of a Disability Support Pension or Newstart is another contentious issue. Such issues related to costs should include the cost of transport, clothing, equipment, medical costs without a Health Care Card etc.

The cost of having a disability is recognised by many governments in the western world with a Disability Allowance paid in many instances to people with disabilities in recognition of these costs, which are outside of the usual lifestyle costs. Australia does not.

PDCA believes that there is a significant cost as a result of having a disability and this is evidenced in research undertaken by Dr. Jack Frisch in 2000 entitled 'Cost Analysis: Towards a Disability Allowance', on behalf of PDCA. This research is about to be updated this year and we will be happy to share the findings with government when completed.

In addition those who are moved from DSP to Newstart are at an even greater disadvantage due to the cost of their disability and therefore may never get out of the Poverty Trap.

PDCA recommends that an inclusive Disability Allowance needs to be initiated using a whole of life approach to the cost of disability. This should not be means tested but based on meeting some of the costs associated with a disability. This Allowance should be available to those not in employment and to those who are currently employed.

PDCA also recommends that the Mobility Allowance of \$100 be paid to all people with disabilities who cannot travel on public transport or who are in rural and remote areas of Australia. This should also be available to those who undertake significant training or volunteer work. There should be no distinction between those under Welfare Reform and those who are already in employment as costs are just as significant.

PDCA recommends that the Newstart Payment be equivalent to all other benefits,

distinguished only by whether the person is single, part of a couple, and/or has children. Allowances should be paid on top of the base rate of benefit.

2 Personal and Work Support

Addressing employment barriers needs to consider whether support programmes such as Personal Support Programmes or 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?)

Often people who wish to enter or return to the workforce have inadequate personal care hours which assist with rising from bed showering, dressing for work, making lunches, travelling to work, (many people with physical disability cannot do these tasks unaided), This shortfall is an unmet need in many instances across Australia and should be significantly addressed under any CSTDA Agreement so that both Federal and State Governments work co-operatively together to address the needs.

PDCA recommends that any future CSTDA address the shortfall in support hours and whether support hours are complimentary to employment. PDCA recommends any equipment allocated for support reasons should always go with the individual if changing employment and not remain with the previous employer.

3 Transport

Current Public Transport is not completely accessible or consistent across Australia, resulting in significant taxi or car costs for travel to employment. This is increased in rural and remote areas or areas where taxis and public transport is at a minimum.

PDCA recommends that the government have significant input into DDA Public Transport, in order to ensure that public transport in Australia becomes fully accessible to all citizens.

PDCA recommends that the government undertake to address the limitations of disability transport subsidies in states and territories (Within State and Territory Agreements) to encourage consistency in subsidies between states.

4 Access to Premises

PDCA believes that the Federal Government needs to address the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) - specifically the Access to Premises Standard Draft connected to the DDA (1992) which has been before government for over 4 years and is a vital element that will affect businesses and their capacity to employ people with physical disability in the future.

This piece of legislation is vital to the successful employment of people with disabilities as lift access to 2nd and 3rd stories in small businesses is essential for employment opportunities and is a double advantage in the provision of access to an Ageing Australia as well as benefitting parents with small children and prams, and of OH&S in deliveries of supplies and equipment.

In addition any future government should adopt Universal Access design principles in order to include all of its citizens, including parents with prams, those with temporary or permanent disabilities and the ageing sector. Many good examples of Universal Design are

available (especially in the UK) but without government support this will never happen.

It is therefore recommend that Federal Government encourage and support an Access to Premises Standard that is fully inclusive to people with disabilities in all aspects and ensure its implementation in the very near future.

5 Taxation

PDCA recommends that Taxation laws be amended to allow those who have essential equipment needs in and for employment to offset the costs of their equipment such as wheelchairs, walking equipment, home modifications, and vehicles etc to assist with some of these costs, similar to that of the UK policy on this same issue.

6 Childcare

Many people with disabilities are parents too, and we support the position on childcare in the discussion paper provided by Senator Wong in 2007 -p 74, including:

Childcare cost increases have risen more than 3 times, which add to the cost of disability as many people require respite from their child with a disability or children from parents with a disability.

Childcare is good for children, particularly from a social and education perspective and children with disabilities are no exception. We believe that good childcare is an economic investment in children of the future

We support wage increases for childcare workers in order to pay equitable wages to ensure the right people are available for our children and to entice people to train as child care workers

Parents who stay at home should also be entitled to childcare places and subsidies

PDCA supports the recommendation that childcare places be located within the public school environments in order to prevent trauma associated with transitions from childcare to school. This will provide a much more interactive process and the transition would be understood and smooth especially for children with disabilities

7 Disability Employment Services

PDCA believes that Disability Employment Services need additional expectations and outcomes placed on them when receiving public monies, including assurance of equity and inclusion of all people with disabilities, not just Quality Assurance which regulates the organisation but not the provision of service.

For instance:

The support for retention of jobs is not enough, instead many services focus on short term outcomes to fulfill contract requirements for that period, often resulting in a 13 week outcome or at most a 26 week outcome which then fails.,

contracts and tenders are often awarded without checking that services comply with the DDA and access to premises requirements, resulting in many services not being physically

accessible to some

1. There are not enough clear assessments and expectations of services, even with the DEN Star ratings
2. Not enough training opportunities organised by employment services, which are piecemeal at best
3. No clear opportunities or promotion of what could be achieved
3. Selective working with the cream of clients for quick and easy outcomes
4. too much spent on administration and staff resources and enhancing organisations and not enough on the clients and their needs
5. too much staff training and incentives and none for clients, such as conferences
6. not enough say from clients in their placement and
6. clients often being coerced into inappropriate positions such as enclaves because there is little else on offer
7. not enough consistency across services

8 Health Issues

Many people with a disability suffer ongoing health issues that need constant medication and treatment, which can be costly and prohibit working without a Health Care Card to defray some of the costs. As part of a working nation, people who experience such costs should be able to keep a Health Care Card in order to defray these costs.

PDCA recommends that a review be undertaken to look at Health Care Cards programme and how best to support people with disabilities in the long term workforce who have significant medical costs.

PDCA also recommends the review of Bulk Billing by Doctors so that people on low wages and/or who have high medical costs are treated fairly and equitably and not disadvantaged by their medical costs.

9 Public Awareness

Awareness raising campaigns should be implemented, showing the benefits of employing people with a disability. The UK has significant information on these benefits including the impact of contributing to communities (also by volunteer efforts) by people with disabilities

PDCA recommends using the information and experience of other countries in order to highlight the benefits of employment people with disabilities, in particular the United Kingdom and to highlight the spending capacity and lifestyle changes from being employed.

PDCA recommends the initiation of a collective public awareness campaign using all levels

of media and resources, using people with disabilities as trainers (paid) to deliver the message across Australia including government departments (as part of their Action Plans) that people with disabilities are part of society too.

10. EEO in Australia

PDCA believes that the knowledge about the real needs of people with disabilities by employment officers and/or human resource personnel in training institutions such as Universities, TAFE's and other Management Training institutions is insufficient, and that discriminatory policies and actions are happening because of this lack of knowledge. In addition, there are far too few people with disability taking up these roles as a career opportunity.

What is required is to:

1. Promote flexibility in work practices and work hours such as working from home, working part time, flexibility during school holidays, working on weekends
2. Discuss and advertise discrimination in the workplace and the DDA in any Awareness campaigns
3. Promote Equal Opportunity throughout Australia to build a nation of inclusion rather than exclusion.
4. Invite tenders to provide Awareness Training to government departments (as part of Action Plans under the DDA) and to be available (at a cost) for employer organisations such as Chamber of Commerce and other business associations. This training should be undertaken by collectives of people with disabilities who are experienced trainers and NOT by private providers.

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