



Candella's response to the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence Options Paper

November 2023

Who we are

Candella is a Melbourne-based not-for-profit organisation supporting NDIS participants with psychosocial disability to live a life of their design.

One of our programs, [Employment Pathways](#), uses a flexible person-centred approach to supporting people with psychosocial disability into mainstream employment.

We believe the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence is a promising initiative, and we thank the Department for the opportunity to respond to the issues laid out in the Options Paper.

What we call for: psychosocial disability perspectives in the Centre

We wish to emphasise the critical need for representation and consideration of people with psychosocial disabilities in the design and operation of the proposed Disability Employment Centre of Excellence. This may include

- inclusion of people with psychosocial disability in advisory or leadership roles
- targeted research and data collection
- co-design of solutions
- specialised training for staff
- partnerships with organisations that have psychosocial disability expertise.

Lower employment rate for people with psychosocial disabilities

When it comes to employment, people with psychosocial disability are among the most marginalised, excluded groups in our society. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018), only 26% of people with psychosocial disability are in part-time or full-time employment, compared to 58% of people with other types of disabilities and 81% of people with no disability.

This disparity highlights a significant and ongoing challenge in ensuring equitable employment opportunities. The Disability Employment Centre of Excellence, by actively including psychosocial disability perspectives, can play a pivotal role in addressing this disparity and fostering a more inclusive employment landscape.



Unique needs and barriers in employment

People with psychosocial disabilities face a range of distinct barriers to employment, including stigma and discrimination as well as the need for flexible, accommodating, and supportive workplaces (Mellifont & Smith-Merry, 2023). These unique barriers necessitate tailored solutions. Such solutions are most likely to be achieved if the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence is designed from the outset to draw from psychosocial disability perspectives.

Issues in the current Disability Employment Services (DES) system

We wish to highlight a specific example of how psychosocial disability perspectives in the Centre could make a difference. The Options Paper identifies Disability Employment Service (DES) providers as one group that the Centre could assist. It is well known that people with psychosocial disabilities often find it difficult to get the support they need from the DES system. The Centre could therefore leverage psychosocial disability perspectives to make headway into this issue, thereby improving employment outcomes.

Learning from the NDIS experience

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was initially designed without sufficient focus on psychosocial disability, leading to ongoing challenges for participants with such disabilities. As we move forward with the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence, it is crucial to avoid repeating this oversight. Involving individuals with psychosocial disabilities and experts in the field from the outset will ensure that the Centre is well-equipped to address barriers specific to this cohort, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and effective employment system.

Conclusion

The incorporation of psychosocial disability perspectives in the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence is not just a matter of equity; it is a necessity for creating a system that truly serves all Australians with disabilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important initiative.

Inclusive employment is something we are deeply passionate about and committed to, so we would welcome any further opportunities to be involved.

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References

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2018). Psychosocial Disability. Retrieved from <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/psychosocial-disability>.

Mellifont, D & Smith-Merry, J. (2023). Examining employment barriers and enablers for people with psychosocial disability – A scoping review. Retrieved from <https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/31749>.