

NDIS Participant employment strategy – 2021 to 22 Action plan

Update on 2021 progress

Introduction

Despite the challenges of 2021, the Agency made significant progress against our Strategy commitments. Highlights of our work include:

1. Completion of the transition to the new “supports in employment” pricing arrangements;
2. Commencement of the review of the supports for young people leaving school;
3. Establishment of strong partnerships with national employers to begin improving employment opportunities for people with a disability; and
4. Increasing the number of participants with employment goals in their plans.

Priority 1 - Stimulate innovative, evidence based participant centric employment supports.

Action

1. **Work with Australian Disability Enterprises providers to finalise transition to the new pricing model for supports in employment by December 2021 and encourage diversified support models**
2. **Focus the NDIS provider market on using their expertise and local connections to deliver the most effective and efficient supports to achieve participant outcomes in an increased range of employment setting.**
3. **Encourage sector-led communities of practice to promote evidence-based best practice and ideas exchange among providers**

Transition to Supports in Employment for ADE Employees

The Department of Social Services (DSS) Disability Employment Assistance program, which funded Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) to support people with disability in their

employment, ended on 31 March 2021. All National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) eligible employees working in ADEs were required to transition to NDIS to ensure continuity of support for their employment.

National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) undertook extensive engagement with ADEs to assist remaining employees to access the NDIS. All but twelve of approximately 16,000 eligible ADE employees successfully gained access to the Scheme before 30 June 2021. The six ADEs employing the remaining twelve employees continue to support them in their employment and will assist them to gain NDIS access should they indicate their willingness to join the Scheme.

Transition to the new “supports in employment” pricing framework for NDIS eligible ADE employees commenced on 1 July 2020 with finalisation due prior to 31 December 2021. Information sessions for providers were delivered to more than 200 attendees in 2020 and continued throughout 2021.

NDIA, with the support of National Disability Services (NDS) continued the education of providers about the funding changes and worked with the Agency to resolve issues as they arose.

Participants who had not had a plan review before November 2021 had an automated transfer of remaining funds from Capacity Building to Core budgets.

As a result of this work the 161 registered ADE providers were able to utilise the new pricing framework by the due date of 31 December 2021.

Sector-led communities of practice

The NDIA is collaborating with NDS to deliver sector-led communities of practice that will facilitate change in the employment provider market will contribute to transforming the traditional model of ADEs by sharing good practice, research findings and innovation.

The first Community of Practice was held on 29 September 2021 with monthly webinars thereafter for providers of supports in employment. Their purpose is to operationalise NDS' initiative *Industry Vision for Supported Employment*.

Subjects covered in the webinars in 2021 were:

- *Making the Vision a Reality* – setting the scene for the Communities of Practice and sharing provider experiences in transitioning to the new NDIS Supports in Employment pricing
- *Social Scaffolding Introductory Presentation* – a session to explore “How to investigate and implement new business opportunities”

- *Employment pathways for people with a disability* – examining how providers of NDIS funded Supports in Employment can support their employees to consider mainstream employment opportunities.

Priority 2 – Strengthen the link between education and employment.

Action

4. **Review current NDIS capacity building supports for young people leaving school (including School Leaver Employment Supports) to ensure effectiveness**
5. **Influence increase in uptake of access to quality work experience for NDIS participants**

Review of school leaver employment supports

A review of School Leaver Employment Supports was initiated during 2021 to examine ways to improve employment outcomes for young people. Multiple stakeholders including participants, parents and carers, Disability Representative Organisations, providers, state and territory education sectors and internal stakeholders contributed to the review.

A focus group of participants’ parents/carers who had direct experience of School Leaver Employment Supports was facilitated, thus giving a direct voice to those with experience of the support. This was supplemented by a survey conducted in November 2021 of over 5,500 participants funded for School Leaver Employment Supports in 2018/2019. Valuable insights were gained from the 651 responses the Agency received with a summary report being prepared.

The Agency commissioned and undertook research to learn what works and doesn’t work to help people with a disability find and keep a job.

The research consisted of two phases:

1. An evidence review of 161 published articles, reports and data by 34 experts (academics and senior government and non-government executives who have disability-related expertise).
2. A mixed methods research study that explored the barrier and enablers to employment and included interviews with participants, focus groups, and an online survey with NDIS frontline staff.

The research findings are available at [Employment - our research | NDIS](#).

The findings of the research together with feedback from the stakeholder consultations will form the basis of the relaunch of employment supports for young people.

Provider Reporting on School Leaver Employment

During all the consultations and the qualitative research, participants and their representatives expressed the need to have better guidance on selection of providers and information on their effectiveness.

NDIA introduced regular reporting by providers on the delivery of school leaver employment supports commencing in January 2021. All providers report details of participants receiving supports, their progress towards milestones, and the outcomes achieved using the [standardised reporting tool available from the NDIS website](#).

Influence an increase in the take-up of quality work experience

Research conducted by the NDIA indicates that schools play an important role in developing an individual's skills and interests and helping them to identify relevant employment options. School based work experience is an important precursor to success in future employment for participants.

Work continues with education in each state and territory to establish effective communication and interface cooperation to facilitate smoothing the way for young people leaving from school and contemplating work. An area of focus is to increase opportunities for students with disability to participate in meaningful work experience whilst at school and to make use of this experience to access appropriate supports and achieve their employment goals after leaving school.

In addition to work experience whilst still at school, there is a much wider need for NDIS participants to be offered opportunities for on-the-job experience to learn the norms of workplaces, develop the technical skills associated with different occupations and to test their suitability for different industries. This topic will be further explored by the NDIS led Communities of Practice to ascertain the constraints that prevent work experience becoming a regular and valued path to paid employment for participants wishing to increase their economic participation.

Priority 3 – Build new partnerships that lead to jobs.

Action

- 6. Partner with national employers, to build their capability to employ NDIS participants and set an example**
- 7. Influence government disability employment initiatives (federal and state/territory) to expand employment opportunities for NDIS participants**

Partnering with national employers

During 2021, the Agency engaged with a variety of employers including the Australian Electoral Commission and Austrade, to explore employment opportunities for people with a disability.

The Agency presented to NDS members on promoting employment opportunities in the disability sector for people with disability or others with lived experience. Subsequently, discussions commenced with a group of providers in NSW, with a representative of the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) also participating in the discussion. As a result, employers gained a greater appreciation of the range of assistance, including that available for recruitment and work preparation for job seekers new to the sector.

These initiatives will continue through 2022 when they are expected to gain greater momentum and result in measurable outcomes.

Influence government disability employment initiatives

NDIA continued active membership of the **Collaborative Partnership** led by Comcare along with DSS, DESE, National Insurer EML, Insurance Council Australia, National Mental Health Council, Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (AFOEM) and Attorney Generals Department to contribute to research and projects focussing on promoting the health benefits of good work. This partnership offers a unique opportunity for agencies responsible for income support and health and disability management to collaborate on areas of common concern. The intention is to achieve higher levels of employment retention of people with injuries and health conditions and to increase access to employment for people with disability. Projects completed during 2021 include:

- Swinburne University's study of system requirements for return to work identified 160 employment services operating across Australia all of which intersect with employers. All Schemes employing these employment services have a common purpose - increasing employment access or retention, but each Scheme employs different processes and different terminology.
- Monash University building a model of people's journey between income systems and other systems of support such as the NDIS
- Conduct of workshops with employers, unions, general practitioners (GPs), and system administrators to examine ways to implement the principles underpinning the role of the GP in supporting work participation.
- Testing the efficacy of case management support for long term injured workers when transitioning from a compensation scheme to return to work and/or ongoing income support. The project resulted in 26% employment for workers who had been away from work for three years.

The current program of work is due to be completed by June 2022.

Further information is available at [Collaborative Partnership Newsletter December 2021 \(comcare.gov.au\)](https://www.comcare.gov.au/newsletters/collaborative-partnership-newsletter-december-2021)

In mid-2018, the Commonwealth Government introduced a series of reforms designed to improve outcomes for **Disability Employment Services** (DES) participants by allowing them to choose their service providers, expanding access to education supports, and adjusting how provider payments are structured.

Since these reforms were introduced, the number of participants in the program has grown significantly. The Department brought forward the scheduled Mid-term Review of the DES program to assess its efficacy and efficiency, and to evaluate the impact of the 2018 reforms.

NDIA is an active contributor to the review of the Disability Employment Service Program led by DSS.

NDIA representation in these initiatives enhances our ability to influence expanded employment opportunities for NDIS participants.

Priority 4 – Promote disability employment by the use of the Agency’s purchasing power

Action

- 8. Introduce and monitor NDIS participant employment targets in procurement arrangements with contracted partners where feasible.**

Procurement contracts for **LAC and EC Partners** were modified and confirmed during 2021 to increase targets for employment of people with disability from 15% to 20% in each organisation and in keeping with the target set for the NDIA.

The NDIA has, and will, continue to engage with LAC and Early Childhood partners to facilitate meeting the increased targets for employment of people with disability.

Partners were required to commence quarterly reporting on their progress towards achievement of these targets for financial year 2022.

Priority 5 – Equip participants to navigate a complex disability employment system

Action

- 9. Implement a range of targeted resources to support NDIS participants to navigate their employment pathway
- 10. Design and implement innovative employment initiatives for specific cohorts

Implement a range of targeted resources

A review of all employment resources is currently underway and will be published in mid-2022.

This will include refreshed website content for participants, families and carers as well as a dedicated site for providers.

NDIA is developing a series of **Guides for Understanding Supports**. The Guides are designed to provide participants, their families and carers with accessible information garnered from the research about the evidence for different types of assistance so that they can be better informed consumers. The Guides for employment intervention are due for publication in 2022.

Innovative employment initiatives

The two cohorts of focus during the last year have been **participants in ADEs and young people**.

We have focussed on ADE reform to give participants greater choice and control about where and how they work, who provides their supports, and to create new opportunities for providers.

At this stage, “supports in employment” are primarily delivered in Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) with about 16,000 NDIS participants working in ADEs. During the last year, effort has concentrated on ensuring that participants received the correct funding in their plans in accordance with the new pricing framework and that providers are able to claim for services delivered.

However, the focus of efforts can change in 2022 because the introduction of the new pricing framework for “supports in employment” means that participants can use these supports in a wider range of employment settings, not just in ADEs.

The changes also mean that other employment providers will be able to support participants in employment settings and that ADEs can transform their business models to offer a range of

different employment opportunities to NDIS participants. Current employees will continue to receive the support they need whilst working in an ADE, but they too can start to consider different forms of employment and be confident that they will be supported in their endeavours.

We are reviewing the current structure of School Leaver Employment Supports to ensure the transition from school to work is smooth for NDIS participants who require significant investment to gain the level of competency needed for paid employment. The revised framework will encourage greater choice and control in line with individualised support.

These cohorts will be a continued focus during 2022, together with employment opportunities for older participants and others with different challenges in attaining sustainable employment. Much of this work will rely on building partnerships with providers and employers and influencing government disability employment initiatives to the advantage of NDIS participants.

Priority 6 – Ensure the right employment goals and supports are in plans

Action

- 11. Equip Local Area Coordinators and NDIA planning staff with guidance to promote employment discussions and effective utilisation of supports**
- 12. Educate participants on how to use flexible plan funding to enhance their achievement of work goals**

Guidance for NDIA planning and LAC staff

Over 500 new planners at the Agency received training on how to assist participants to think about work and set goals for economic participation. Multiple presentations were facilitated, upon request, for internal teams throughout the Agency and with Partners to increase learning opportunities for internal stakeholders across the Agency.

The **National Employment Network** was established in September 2021. The Network includes NDIA staff and our LAC partners along with Community and Provider Engagement representatives. The aim is to increase the awareness and capability of staff and partners in understanding employment supports and how best to ensure that participants are guided in establishing employment goals and selecting employment supports.

The results of this work can be seen in the increased number of participants with an employment-related goal in their plan to 113,750 or 41% of all working age participants (up from 34% in 2020). View the [latest quarterly report](#) for more information.

Emerging issues to be considered in relation to the Action Plan during 2022

- **Fair Work Commission (FWC) published the final evaluation report of the FWC New Wage Assessment Structure Trial on 31 January 2022. NDIA is collaborating with NDS and DSS to understand the potential impact on participants and providers and any implications for the employees in supported business enterprises.**
- **Complementary strategies will be required to align with the implementation of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031, the National Disability Employment Strategy, and the Australian Public Service Disability Employment Strategy 2020-25.**
- **Reforms to employment programs by both DSS and DESE need to be considered in executing the Action Plan in 2022. The intersection with programs such as Disability Employment Services, Workforce Australia and DESE's Transition to Work program for young people are the most critical vis a vis the NDIS Employment Action Plan.**
- **Enquiry into the Disability Support Pension: the complex interaction of DSP rules with wages and hours of employment is reported to discourage participants from exploring employment due to the perceived risk of losing access to income support, if an employment outcome is not achieved or sustained.**