

# NDIS Participant Employment Strategy

## Final Update on Action Plan for 2021-22

### Introduction

In the final year of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Participant Employment Strategy 2019-2022, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) made substantial progress against our [Action Plan for 2021-22](#).

- Participants have more choice in the way they are supported at work.
- More participants are aspiring to work, reflected in greater numbers of people choosing an employment goal in their plans.
- All providers delivering day to day employment support are now using pricing arrangements that facilitate new support models.
- We reviewed the experience and outcomes for participants receiving school leaver employment supports, and surveyed participants using this support. Results of this survey were published - [School leaver participant survey report](#)
- We published the first School leaver employment provider quarterly report, providing insights into factors leading to employment outcomes for young participants.
- We released new guidance for NDIS planners and Local Area Coordinators (LACs) to ensure a strong focus on employment in planning processes.
- In response to [research](#) published in 2021, we developed the [Guide to understanding employment support](#) as a resource for participants and staff to help with conversations on supports to find and keep a job.

The Agency's commitment to participant employment continues, reflected in our [Corporate Plan](#) aspirations. In 2023, we will release a refreshed Strategy and Action Plan for 2023-2026, building on the foundations of the 2019-22 Strategy.

# Our progress

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

### Action

1. **Work with Australian Disability Enterprises (ADE) 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 support to achieve participant outcomes in an increased range of employment settings.**
3. **Encourage sector-led communities of practice to promote evidence-based best practice and ideas exchange among providers.**

### 1. **Work with Australian Disability Enterprises (ADE) providers to finalise transition to the new pricing model for Supports in Employment**

Transition to the new pricing arrangements commenced on 1 July 2020 and was successfully finalised on 31 December 2021. This change embeds opportunities for innovative service delivery and increases choice for participants in where they work and how they are supported. This is demonstrated by the growth in participants using funding in settings outside of the traditional ADE setting.

### 2. **Focus the NDIS provider market on using their expertise and local connections to deliver the most effective and efficient support to achieve participant outcomes in an increased range of employment settings.**

The Agency commenced targeted consultation with providers of employment services for young people to share the outcomes of the review of school leaver employment support and seek feedback on proposed improvements. This included a model for service based on best practice, identified through [research](#) conducted by the Agency in 2021.

Feedback from these consultations informed the recommendations for improvements to service models and pricing for employment preparation for young participants. Progressing improvements awaits the outcome of the NDIS Review.

In January 2021 the NDIA introduced regular reporting by providers on the delivery of school leaver employment supports; to understand the supports provided, the

outcomes participants achieve and the factors that lead to positive employment outcomes for young participants.

In 2022 the NDIA released the first [Provider quarterly report - school leaver employment](#), analysing the aggregated data submitted by providers for the period January to December 2021. Subsequent reporting can be found on the [NDIS website](#) as it is published every 6 months.

The report gives visibility of the outcomes achieved through school leaver employment funding and allows providers to benchmark results against the sector.

While the data is currently de-identified the Agency intends to move to provider identification, enabling participants to consider provider performance when choosing a provider.

The Agency has commenced a new research project called “Supporting participants in open employment.” The research has two main goals:

- Better understand what it is like to change from Australian Disability Enterprises (ADE) employment to open employment for NDIS participants and their employers.
- Learn how ADEs have adapted to new funding in participant plans and to helping participants move into a job of their choice.

The Agency maintains its focus on supporting providers to consider their service offering to increase participant choice in where they work and how they are supported.

### **3. Encourage sector-led communities of practice to promote evidence-based best practice and ideas exchange among providers.**

The NDIA is collaborating with National Disability Services (NDS) to create communities of practice that encourage innovation in the employment provider market. Through sharing good practice, research findings and participant outcomes, the Community of Practice is facilitating change.

Although change will be gradual, an increasing number of providers are sharing examples of supported employees being assisted to take advantage of the increasingly diverse employment options now available to them.

## 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**

#### **4. Review current NDIS capacity building supports for young people leaving school (including school leaver employment supports) to ensure effectiveness.**

A comprehensive review of school leaver employment support was finalised in 2022. Participants told us about their experience of support, the outcomes they achieved and ways they believe support could be improved.

We analysed the factors leading to employment outcomes through provider quarterly reporting and the insights showed the following all contributed to, and increased likelihood of, successful employment:

- developing work skills
- employer engagement
- job customisation
- work experience
- one-to-one support levels
- a greater number of hours receiving support.

Key findings from the review included:

- Early intervention is key and supports need to start as a young person reaches working age.
- Supports must be tailored and based on good practice principles.
- Pricing, funding, and claiming for support needs to be clearly communicated.
- Participants need guidance to understand the expected outcomes of support, select suitable providers and change providers where necessary.
- Provider accountability is important.
- Planners and LACs must be better equipped to hold employment focussed conversations, consider reasonable and necessary support in plans, and assist participant connection with both NDIS and mainstream employment supports.

You can view the full [School Leaver Participant Survey Report](#) on the NDIS website.

The NDIS Review will consider the findings from the survey report and Agency consultation and are expected to make recommendations for improvements to capacity building employment supports for young people to focus on achieving outcomes.

## **5. Influence increase in uptake of access to quality work experience for NDIS participants**

Schools play a significant role in identifying an individual's skills and interests, helping them explore employment options and facilitating and supporting work experience.

Our [research](#) and reporting highlight work experience is a key factor for future employment and outcomes. However, there is a lack of clarity about using NDIS funding to enhance work experience during school years.

The NDIA Co-Design and Engagement teams have worked in partnership with the education system to deliver 41 'Pathways to Post School Life' information sessions nationally for young people in years 9 to 12 and their supporters. These sessions provide information about the NDIS and mainstream supports available to help participants build skills for independence, gain work experience and transition from school to work.

## **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**

## **6. Partner with national employers, to build their capability to employ NDIS participants and set an example.**

Late 2021 the Department of Social Services (DSS) published the [Disability Employment Strategy - Employ My Ability](#). The Strategy lists four priority areas for change, including lifting employer engagement, capability, and demand through providing employers with the tools and abilities to confidently hire, support, develop and retain more people with disability.

The NDIS welcomes this investment and is working closely with DSS to support the priority areas and ensure the needs of NDIS participants are considered in any initiatives.

The NDIA has been recognised as the Top Performer in the 2021 Australian Network on Disability (AND) Access and Inclusion Index.

In July 2022, the NDIA released a [Disability Inclusion Plan 2022-25](#). The plan aims to establish the Agency as an employer of choice through industry leading inclusion and diversity practices co-designed with our staff.

The Agency released an Inclusion and Diversity Survey to engage with our workforce as part of consultation to inform the development of the plan. The survey measured the outcomes of the [Inclusion and Diversity Framework](#) and inform future work. 26% of NDIA staff who responded identified as having a disability, with the most common disability type being physical or psychosocial.

In 2021, NDIA coordinated a local information session for providers about the assistance available to the sector if they wished to expand the number of employees with disability in their workforce. This session was well received, and a few providers availed themselves of the services of the local Jobs Program Coordinator

Following the Jobs and Skills Summit in September 2022, the Hon Bill Shorten MP, Minister for the NDIS and Government Services announced the commencement of a consultation process with the disability sector to co-design how workforce targets might be adopted to enable more job seekers with disability to be employed in the sector.

## **7. Influence government disability employment initiatives (federal and state/territory) to expand employment opportunities for NDIS participants.**

The NDIA continues to actively engage in employment policy across multiple Commonwealth and State government departments including DSS and Comcare.

At the Jobs and Skills Summit, the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, Minister for Department of Social Services and Senator the Hon Don Farrell, Minister for Trade and Tourism announced funding to establish a [Disability Employment - Tourism Local Navigators Pilot \(the pilot\)](#).

The pilot will operate over a 12-month period, providing place-based Local Navigators to assist small and medium sized businesses in the tourism sector to be more confident to engage with and offer employment to people with disability.

The NDIA is a key stakeholder in the pilot and on the interdepartmental steering committee, ensuring NDIS participants have access to the opportunities that may arise through the rollout.

The NDIA continued active membership of the Collaborative Partnership led by Comcare. This partnership offers an opportunity for agencies to collaborate to achieve higher levels of employment retention of people with injuries and health conditions and to increase access to employment for people with disability.

Further information is available at [Collaborative Partnership Newsletter December 2022 \(comcare.gov.au\)](https://www.comcare.gov.au/newsletter/2022).

## **Priority 4 – Promote disability employment using the Agency’s purchasing power.**

### **Action**

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

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Agreements with Partner in the Community (PITC) organisations delivering LAC and Early Childhood (EC) services to people with disability have been updated to increase the target for employment of people with disability from 15% to 20%. This target aligns the agreements with the NDIA target.

The NDIA monitor LAC and Early Childhood partners disability targets for employment via quarterly data submitted by the Partners.

During 2022 we have seen a slight increase in the target achieved by Partners overall from 12.1% to 12.3%. (LAC from 15.4% to 15.7% and EC from 5.1% to 5.7%).

The NDIA continues to engage with PITC organisations to discuss strategies to meet and increase targets for employment of people with disability.

The NDIA procurement policy also specifies that wherever possible, Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) should be considered for procurements where they have the capability and capacity to deliver. The Agency will continue to work with ADEs to understand this opportunity to diversify or expand their business offering.

## 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.

#### 9. Implement a range of targeted resources to support NDIS participants to navigate their employment pathway.

A series of [Guides for Understanding supports](#) were published on the NDIS website. The Guides 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 are specifically designed for people on the autism spectrum, an intellectual disability or a psychosocial disability, however other people may also find them helpful.

Each Guide focuses on a specific part of a person's journey towards employment and what support could help including:

- Thinking about work and developing a pathway towards achieving employment.
- Moving from school to work and getting a job.
- Thinking about self-employment.
- Keeping a job or changing jobs.

#### 10. Design and implement innovative employment initiatives for specific cohorts.

##### DES/NDIS Pathways Pilot

In the October 2022-23 Budget, Minister Rishworth announced a new Disability Employment Service (DES) pathways pilot program to support NDIS participants who want to work explore their employment options through connection with DES providers.

Consultation on the design of the pilot has commenced and the NDIS will continue to work with DSS to finalise the design and implementation of the pilot.



Participants working in ADEs and employment outcomes for young people continues to be a focus for the NDIA with the aim to provide participants greater choice and control about where and how they work, who provides their supports, and to create new opportunities for providers.

During 2022 the Agency focussed on embedding the [Supports in employment](#) pricing framework to enable participants to use NDIS supports in a wider range of employment settings, not just in ADEs.

We are seeing an increase in the number of providers who are supporting participants to work in settings other than ADEs. We are also observing traditional ADE providers working with participants to assist them in exploring more diverse environments. This focus is being supported by National Disability Services through the facilitation of a National Community of Practice.

The Agency has maintained its focus on improving employment outcomes for young people and is committed to understanding and sharing the key drivers for successful employment identified through research and the review of school leaver employment support for young people.

School leaver provider quarterly reporting continues to give visibility of the outcomes being achieved through school leaver employment funding. The published reports allow providers to benchmark their own results and provide greater visibility for participants on the expected outcomes of support.

## **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.**

### **11. Equip Local Area Coordinators and NDIA planning staff with guidance to promote employment discussions and effective utilisation of supports.**

In 2022 more than 1,000 Agency staff and partners received training focussed on supporting participants to think about work and achieve their employment goals. This included updated guidance on how employment supports can be used in a variety of employment settings (not just ADEs), and how capacity building supports can help participants achieve employment both prior to, and after leaving school.

The design of the new NDIS client record management system (PACE) will improve how the system prompts and records data related to employment. The system will embed discussions about employment at key transition points and “check ins,” as well as better capture data on employment outcomes and the supports that work.

During 2022, the Agency collaborated with planners and LACs to seek feedback on the proposed design and features of the new system that would enhance planning processes and enable meaningful conversations about employment at each point of contact with participants.

The **National Employment Network** continued its work in 2022. The network is an internal NDIA group established to promote and support staff capability in planning for employment.

The results of this work can be seen in the increased number of working age participants with an employment-related goal in their plan. Year on year the percentage of participants including a work goal in their plan has increased settling at 38% in December 2022. This increases for young people aged 19 – 24 years, with 58% of participants in this age bracket have an employment goal in their plan.

## **12. Educate participants on how to use flexible plan funding to enhance their achievement of work goals.**

The [Guides for Understanding supports](#) mentioned above provide a tool for participants and their families to think about how to use their funding flexibly to achieve their work goals.

Resources and information sessions such as *Pathways to Post School Life* are being refreshed for delivery in 2023 to support participants to think about work and explore how all NDIS supports can assist to build capacity for employment.