



**The Hon Kate Ellis MP**  
Minister for Employment Participation  
Minister for Early Childhood and Child Care

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The Hon John Murphy MP  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Petitions  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

14 FEB 2013

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 29 October 2012 to the Hon Bill Shorten MP, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations regarding the petition concerning Employment Support Services that was submitted to the Standing Committee on Petitions. As the matter you have raised falls within my portfolio responsibilities as Minister for Employment Participation, your letter was referred to me for a reply. I apologise for the delay in responding.

The Australian Government believes that all Australians deserve to be included in the economic and social life of the community and one of the best ways of achieving this is through employment. Everyone who can work should have the opportunity to do so and those who are unable to work should be adequately supported.

I note the concerns raised in the petition about people with disability and their access to Employment Support Services. As you may be aware, Disability Employment Services play a key role in assisting people with disability, injury or health condition to secure and maintain sustainable employment. Specialist Disability Employment Service providers deliver services to participants in a wide range of specialty areas. Since its implementation in March 2010, Disability Employment Services have successfully placed over 140,000 Australians in jobs.

To be eligible to commence in Disability Employment Services, most job seekers are required to have an Employment Services Assessment or a Job Capacity Assessment. An Employment Services Assessment is used to identify a job seeker's vocational and non-vocational barriers to finding and maintaining employment, their work capacity, the nature of a person's disability, injury or health condition and their need for ongoing support. An Employment Services Assessment determines which program a job seeker is referred to, and job seekers can be re-assessed when their circumstances change to ensure they are receiving the appropriate level of services.

Assessors use available information about the job seeker, including current and past medical and disability status, and prior participation and employment history to assess work capacity and barriers. Assessors liaise with treating doctors and other relevant health professionals as required to determine work capacity and the most appropriate service for each person.

To be eligible for Disability Employment Services, a participant must have a capacity for work within 2 years, with intervention, of at least 8 hours per week. This reflects the essential purpose of Disability Employment Services, which is to secure and maintain sustainable employment for job seekers in the open employment market.

If a person is assessed, at a certain point in time, as having a work capacity of less than 8 hours per week in the open employment market, alternative job opportunities are available through Australian Disability Enterprises.

Australian Disability Enterprises are commercial operations enabling people with disability to engage in a wide variety of work such as packaging, assembly, production, recycling, screen printing, plant nursery, garden maintenance and landscaping, cleaning services, laundry services, and food services. Employees of Australian Disability Enterprises enjoy the same working conditions as those in the general workforce.

Section 8 of the *Disability Services Act 1986* (Cth) defines the target group for Australian Disability Enterprises as people with a disability which:

- is attributable to an intellectual, psychiatric, sensory or physical impairment or a combination of such impairments;
- is permanent or likely to be permanent; and
- results in a substantially reduced capacity for communication, learning or mobility and therefore the person needs ongoing support services.

There are 325 Australian Disability Enterprise outlets across Australia, providing supported employment assistance to approximately 20,000 people with moderate to severe disability who need substantial ongoing support to maintain their employment.

The Government has worked hard to raise awareness of the contributions people with disability make to our economy and community. The National Disability Strategy sets out a ten year plan from 2010, with six priority areas for improving life for Australians with disability, their families and carers. It represents a commitment by all levels of government, industry and the community to a unified, national approach to policy and program development.

Labor is absolutely committed to improving services and opportunities for people with a disability. In addition to the life-changing National Disability Insurance Scheme, we have made revolutionary changes to employment services for people with a disability. Within Disability Employment Services, we have removed the cruel caps on services that existed under the Howard Government, resulting in a 43 per cent increase in the number of people receiving services and a 100 per cent increase in the number of people securing jobs. In addition, we are investing a record \$3.2 billion over 4 years on helping people with a disability to secure work. The decision to conduct the first full competitive tender for Disability Employment Services was a continuation of the Government's commitment to improving services for people with a disability.

As a result of the Disability Employment Services tender, job seekers with a disability will benefit from a 50 per cent increase in the number of service sites across the country; bringing the total number of sites to more than 1650. In addition, new specialist providers and an increased number of mental health specialists will more closely meet the needs of the community. From March, Job seekers will have access to better services than ever before, through greater access to high performing employment service providers. On average, a job seeker moving from a 1 star to a 5 star provider will be more than twice as likely to get a job and around seven times as likely to have kept that job after 26 weeks.

Labor has also committed \$1 billion to support the first stage of a National Disability Insurance Scheme. The National Disability Insurance Scheme is aimed at those who are most in need, providing long term, high quality support people who have a permanent disability that significantly affects their communication, mobility, self-care or self-management. It is a lifetime approach that gives people choice and control over how they get support and when, where and how they receive it. The National Disability Insurance Scheme supports people with disability to live a life in their community to their full potential. The first stage of the National Disability Insurance Scheme starts from July in South Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory, the Hunter in New South Wales and the Barwon area of Victoria.

I hope this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

**Kate Ellis**