

Physical Disability Council of Australia Ltd



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EMP Inquiry
Submission No. 76

Recommendations:

1. Government to promote the inclusion of people with physical disabilities in Australia's workforce by every means possible including advertisements of the benefits.
2. Government to strengthen the obligations regarding employment of people with disability under the Commonwealth Disability Strategy including an emphasis of obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992)
3. Government to investigate the drop in employment of people with disabilities in the Australian Public Service with the view to changing the criteria in order to attract more people with disability.
4. Government to look into the resources available in Pre Employment Training for people with disabilities with the view to increasing the availability.
5. Investigate and increase the resources available in Vocational Training for people with disabilities.
6. Explore the interrelationship between disability, poverty, the cost of disability and employment and
7. Support the initiatives for a Cost of Disability Allowance that is not means tested and is designed to meet the cost of having a disability whether the person is employed or not.
8. Government to ensure that Centrelink is an assistive mechanism to employment for people with disability and not a barrier.
9. Government to look at the incentives offered in employing a person with disability, for instance subsidized wages for a period of time, case management in conjunction with an organization (independent of government)
10. Training in Disability Awareness to all staff in all departments that assist people with disabilities into employment, eg Centrelink, DETYA, FACS,
11. Consult with relevant disability organisations on issues relating to employment of people with disabilities.

Employment in the Public Service

The Australian Bureau of Statistics, shows that people with disability employed by Australian Public Service has decreased by 20% since 1997. This is a disturbing decline in employment support for people with disability who are being encouraged to go out or return to work on the one hand, but discouraged from working in the one place that purports to be an Equal Opportunity Employer - government public service. (Source ABS 2003)

Pre Employment Training

People with physical disabilities have a right to appropriate legislative initiatives and support programs to enable them to take advantage of employment opportunities and achieve equal participation in the labour market.

These include pre employment training through TAFE, and other programmes, which assists persons who are unemployed to gain employment through up to date skills. This includes people with disabilities, who traditionally were large users of programmes such as Skillshare, Job Clubs, and other training opportunities offered in the community. Unfortunately these programmes no longer exist and many others that do exist are not naturally accessible to people with disabilities.

Vocational Training

Many vocational training centre's have ceased operation in the past two years due to Commonwealth funding cuts. Skillshare stands out particularly as a program where many people with disabilities were able to access training. Very few, if any vocational training centre's exist with the experience or expertise for development and delivery of tailored training courses for people with disabilities.

Barriers to Workforce Participation

People with physical disabilities are amongst the most under-represented groups in Australia's labour market both in terms of actual employment and those seeking employment. The employment participation rate of people with disabilities is one-third to half that of the general population.

Factors such as ignorance, discrimination, lack of awareness and lack of real jobs all impact on these figures as well as inaccessible work places and employers who are unaware of the advantages of employing people with disabilities as well as the programmes offered by the Federal Government to assist employers such as;

- Work Based personal assistance
- Supported Wages
- Workplace Modification Scheme

Additionally, A joint research project, Stephen Ziguras, Gavin Dufty and Mark Considine 'Much Obligated', conducted by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the St Vincent de Paul Society and the Centre for Public Policy, University of Melbourne, "...has found the more barriers to employment a person has, the less helpful they experience the system to be.

The study reveals that some Centrelink requirements actually hinder people from finding work. It calls for the Federal Government to provide more resources for programs targeting disadvantaged jobseekers and placing less emphasis on funding CETP employment services which fail to place people who are in the 'too hard basket'

Equitable Income

Levels of income for people with a physical disability are substantially lower than those of the general population due to a wide range of discriminatory factors as well as the hostile physical and social infrastructure that prevents or inhibits people with physical disabilities from gaining suitable employment. Such as:

1. Having to get a taxi to and from work, because of the inadequate public transport system. Although this is changing with the introduction of a DDA Transport Standard, it falls far short of providing an accessible transport system for people with disabilities to use with reliability.
2. The additional clothing needed through wear and tear of wheelchairs, crutches, calipers and walking sticks or frames.
3. The additional heating and cooling needed for health and comfort (many people with disability use their own fans or heaters for comfort in the workplace).
4. The lack of equipment ergonomically designed and available to people with disabilities in order to perform to their maximum potential.

As a result, many people with disabilities are forced to accept lower paid positions, are overlooked for promotion and paid below award wages often working in sheltered workshops or are reliant on the Disability Support Pension.

The additional costs of participating in the workforce are a further major factor preventing people with physical disabilities from seeking employment. Thus:

- inaccessible public transport forces many people to rely on expensive and unreliable accessible taxis;
- overly restrictive means testing of the PADP scheme and other benefit entitlements act as a disincentive for many people who wish to enter the workforce (see Aids and Equipment and Cost of Disability/Income Support);
- essential work-based personal care is unfunded.

Employment Assistance

The abolition of the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) has resulted in many people with physical disabilities being unable to access structured employment assistance programs which previously provided funding for an employer to provide equipment or to modify the work place. People with disabilities must now convince employers to fund such equipment and modifications or go through the rigorous system of applying for funding and all this before they hire a person with a disability. Recent changes entrench people with physical disabilities into an indefinite welfare cycle.

Many people are also unable to obtain employment because there is no assistance provided for a minimal amount of personal care in the workplace. As well as

1. 7 to 8 applicants for each advertised job in Australia. If you are a person with a disability you will be last on this list.
2. Employers riddled with prejudice and pre conceived ideas of employing a person with a disability
3. No job creation programmes that encompass and embrace the real issues for people with disabilities
4. No longer any Job Search programmes that are utilized by people with disability

Sheltered Workshops

People with physical disabilities also continue to be inappropriately employed in sheltered workshops. Some of the most productive employees who should be in open employment are held back due to a lack of appropriate information on alternative services.

Various consultancy reports have revealed a large percentage of inappropriate placements, with people with physical disabilities working in workshops funded for people with intellectual disabilities and vice-versa.

Supported employment Services (CETP's)

Although many people with disabilities have found suitable and rewarding employment positions through placement by a funded employment service for people with disabilities, many of these placements fail through lack of planning and work carried out before the person with disability is placed in the position. This sets the individual up with false expectations, which can result in loss of self esteem and the willingness to pursue the employment market again.

People with physical disabilities are often fearful of change due to the perceptions of the "real world", a lack of understanding by employers, and safety conditions which are often used as a signal for the inability to assist a person with a disability. These fears are also exacerbated by society's lack of understanding and persistent discrimination.

Recent events that impact on people with disability

- Increased discussion on the participation rates of people with a disability via Welfare Reform; Australians Working Together and Mutual Obligation;
- Department of Family Services Case Based Funding Trials;

- Enterprise/Certified Agreements being lodged which, in a number of situations, are not being discussed properly nor understood by many individual employees with disabilities;
- Australian National Training Authorities' (ANTA) Blueprint report for increasing the participation rates for people with a disability in Vocation Education and Training (VET).

Questions

Changes outlined in the 2002–2003 Commonwealth Budget mean that continued access to income support for many people with a disability will be based on their undertaking activities such as rehabilitation, training, part-time work, and job search. Rather than apply pressure to these people without changing their financial position, the changes will lower their take-home income. Further, as they enter the labour market these people will keep less of the income they earn because of a harsher income test

The success of this policy change depends on a number of factors.

- Will it reduce long-term reliance on income support?
- Do we have the right employment services and are there enough of them?
- Are there jobs available?
- At what cost to some of the most disadvantaged Australians? ¹

PDCA recommends reading 'The Drawing Board - Disabling Employment Policy' reference below

Attachments:

1. Physical Disability Council of Australia Ltd Submission to Senate Inquiry into Poverty
2. Physical Disability Council of Australia Cost Benefit Analysis – Cost of Disability

¹ *The Drawing Board: An Australian Review of Public Affairs*