



**Australian Government**

**Australian Government Response to the House of  
Representatives Standing Committee on Education and  
Employment report:**

**Work Wanted: Mental health and workforce participation**

**February 2013**

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## Foreword

The Australian Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment report: *Work Wanted – Mental health and workforce participation*, which was released on 28 June 2012, and acknowledges the Committee's recommendations in examining ways to enhance education, training and employment opportunities for people with mental illness through improved collaboration between government, employers, consumers, employment services and other services. The Government believes that everyone who can work should be able to contribute to the economy, to the community and to their own personal development.

The Government is committed to assisting people with mental illness to overcome barriers to employment, education and training and provides a range of assistance and supports to meet their needs. While not all those with mental illness require a full suite of such assistance, it is important that such support is available to those who need it, especially those with severe and persistent mental illness and complex needs. The Government's response to this Inquiry acknowledges that supports for people with mental illness are provided by a range of governments and departments across Australia. Six Commonwealth agencies have contributed to this response as the recommendations relate to multiple portfolios. Agencies included the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, the Department of Health and Ageing, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education and the Australian Public Service Commission.

Many key initiatives are already underway that support the recommendations made throughout this Inquiry. For example, the Government recognises the need for greater collaboration and integration across different sectors in order to provide appropriate care and support to those with severe and persistent mental illness. The 2011-12 Federal Budget provided funding of \$549.8 million for the *Partners in Recovery: Coordinated Support and Flexible Funding for People with Severe and Persistent Mental Illness with Complex Needs* initiative. This initiative aims to facilitate better coordination of both clinical and non-clinical supports and services. It also aims to strengthen partnerships between clinical and community support organisations responsible for delivering services for the target group.

The 2011-12 Budget also included \$154 million for the *Personal Helpers and Mentors* program to employ 425 additional personal helpers and mentors, to work one-on-one with people with mental illness across Australia. This includes \$50 million for additional personal helpers and mentors to provide extra support to people with mental illness on, or claiming, income support or the Disability Support Pension to help them find and keep a job. This intensive support will assist job-seekers with a mental illness to stabilise those aspects of their lives that are inhibiting their capacity to take advantage of employment and training opportunities.

The Government recognises the importance of timely, consistent and accurate assessments of people claiming income support payments and/or requiring employment services. Significant improvements to assessment processes have been introduced over the last 12-18 months to better engage and assess the cohort of job seekers with mental illness. An evaluation of the new assessment arrangements will take place in 2013-14. The Government will continue to refine assessment processes in line with the outcomes of the evaluation.

A range of other key initiatives are outlined in the response, including strategies to promote the business case for employing people with mental illness, activities to reduce stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness, and measures to ensure that education and employment support is provided by personnel with expertise in mental illness.

The Australian Government's Social Inclusion Agenda aspires to a fully inclusive society where people have the resources, opportunities and capabilities to work through employment, voluntary work and in family and caring. One of the Government's priorities is to improve employment outcomes for people with disability or mental illness and their carers by reducing discrimination, creating employment opportunities, and building community support. Improving employment and social inclusion for people with mental illness and disability requires us to continue our work to change community perceptions, reduce discrimination and improve public attitudes.

In addition, the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy was released on 14 September 2009 and outlines a number of priority actions to assist Australians with disability, including mental illness, into work. It recognises the importance of education and training as a pathway to sustainable employment, and the role of employers in increasing employment opportunities for people with disability, including mental illness. One of the key actions outlined in the Strategy was the implementation of Disability Employment Services to give job seekers immediate access to personalised employment services better suited to their needs, with stronger links to skills development and training. New measures to improve the employment of people with disability in the Australian Public Service (APS) have been introduced under this Strategy. For example, the Australian Public Service Commission has amended the APS employment framework to make it easier to employ people with disability – particularly those people with disability who find it difficult to enter the APS because they are unable to succeed in an open merit selection process.

There has been a focus by Government on improving services for people with mental illness by improving the skill and understanding of service providers supporting people with mental illness as they seek and maintain employment. For example, the Government has recently rolled out, as part of its mental health reform agenda, Mental Health Capacity Building training to employment services providers and front line staff in the Department of Human Services. The Government is also working to support and educate employers and workers about mental illness – in order to build more supportive and effective workplaces for those with mental illness.

Disability Employment Services – Employment Support Service has just been through its first full competitive tender process to ensure that the best employment services are delivered to people with disability in every region of Australia, with all service providers focused on placing people with disability caused by their mental illness into permanent work, as well as specialist mental health recruitment experts.

The National Disability Strategy sets out a 10 year national policy framework for improving life for Australians with disability (including those with mental illness), their families and carers and provides leadership for a community-wide shift in attitudes. While not all mental illness is related to disability, our disability policies and services must be responsive to psychosocial and mental health-related forms of disability. The National Disability Strategy represents a commitment by all levels of government to a unified, national approach. It will guide public policy in order to bring about changes in all mainstream services and programs that address the challenges faced by people with disability, both now and into the future. The Commonwealth, State and Territory and Local Governments developed the Strategy in partnership under the auspices of the Council of Australian Governments.

Finally, the Australian Government is committed, across-the-board, to delivering more choice and better services for people with all types of disability, including those with mental illness. Through initiatives like the National Disability Insurance Scheme and a range of policies and programs aimed at getting people with disability into sustainable work, the Government aspires for all people with disability to reach their full potential in the workforce. All Australians stand to benefit from their valuable contribution.

## Responses

### Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government coordinate a comprehensive and multi-faceted national education campaign to target stigma and reduce discrimination against people with a mental illness in Australian schools, workplaces and communities. The campaign should:

- include involvement from the public, private and community sectors, educational institutions, employers and a range of other stakeholders, including individuals with mental illnesses, families and carers, and
- complement existing government-funded education and awareness campaigns on depression and mood disorders, with an inclusion of psychotic illnesses.

### AGREE IN PART

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The Government currently funds a broad range of activities that raise community awareness, reduce the stigma associated with mental illness, and provide support for Australians experiencing mental health issues. Stakeholders have been involved in the development of these communication campaigns. While many of these initiatives address mental illness generally, the present focus of these initiatives is on high prevalence conditions, such as anxiety and depression. Consideration will be given to how best to combat stigma and reduce discrimination concerning other conditions (such as psychosis) as these activities are reviewed and amended in the future.

Examples of these include the following activities:

- The Australian and all State and Territory Governments fund *beyondblue* to raise community awareness and reduce stigma of high prevalence disorders of anxiety and depression.
- The Government funds a number of organisations to undertake specific stigma reduction activities. This includes SANE StigmaWatch and the Community Broadcasting Suicide Prevention Project, in addition to programs such as headspace and the school based programs MindMatters, KidsMatter and ResponseAbility Education.
- The Government funds and supports initiatives such as RUOK? Day, which aims to promote awareness of mental health and suicide and encourages Australians to reach out to those at risk in their community.
- The Government also funds *beyondblue* to conduct the National Workplace Program, which assists workplaces to identify and support workers with depression, anxiety and other related disorders and increase the knowledge and skills of employers and employees to address mental health issues in the workplace. There have been a total of 69,000 participants and 2,657 workshops delivered as at 31 May 2012.
- The *beyondblue* Workplace Mental Health Awareness e-learning Program is a stand-alone resource specifically for workplaces. It is the first in a number of e-learning programs that *beyondblue* is developing. In the 2011-12 financial year, over 2,000 unique workplaces used the e-learning program. An iPad version was released in mid-2012.

Furthermore, a parliamentary inquiry into workplace bullying is currently underway which has a focus on the prevalence of workplace bullying in Australia and the experience of victims of workplace bullying. The Government will look to use the findings from both inquiries in the development of its policy and strategy responses.

## **Recommendation 2**

**The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government establish a Kidsmatter High School program pilot based on similar principles to the Kidsmatter Australian Primary Schools Mental Health Initiative.**

### **AGREE IN PRINCIPLE**

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The Australian Government, through the Department of Health and Ageing, currently funds the Principals Australia Institute to deliver MindMatters, which is similar to KidsMatter Primary.

MindMatters is an existing national mental health initiative for Australian secondary schools. Like KidsMatter Primary, MindMatters aims to increase a school's capacity to implement a 'whole-school' approach to mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention.

MindMatters provides hardcopy resource materials, a website, professional development and implementation support for teachers and school personnel.

The MindMatters initiative has been accessed by many secondary schools throughout Australia, across all school sectors: Government, Catholic and Independent.

As at mid-2012, MindMatters professional development has been accessed by over 80 per cent of schools with secondary enrolment across Australia.

The Australian Government will continue its work to increase the coverage and improve the effectiveness of this program in the future.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government work with peak bodies such as Universities Australia and TAFE Directors Australia to coordinate a national approach to ensure that teaching and other relevant staff at universities and vocational education institutions be educated about ways to support students with mental ill health, with access to staff professional development on mental health issues. Disability liaison officers and student services staff should be appropriately skilled to assist students with a mental illness and have access to ongoing professional development in this area.**

#### **AGREE**

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Through the Council of Australian Governments and in partnership with the peak bodies in the vocational and tertiary education sectors, we will work to improve current programs to ensure that the staff of educational institutions are well trained to meet the needs of students with mental illness.

All higher education providers are subject to national regulation by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) in which they are required to comply with the Higher Education Standards Framework. This framework includes a number of standards including the Provider Registration Standards. These standards require that all registered higher education providers provide a range of personal support services adequate to meet the needs of the student body, such as counselling and health and welfare, provided by appropriately qualified personnel. In undertaking its regulatory functions, TEQSA will assess higher education providers against the framework.

The Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) commissions work and provides grants and fellowships to academics and professional staff to enhance learning and teaching in higher education. OLT funding is available for higher education providers in receipt of Commonwealth supported places which includes universities as well as a number of private higher education providers and TAFEs. The OLT has funded two ongoing projects to improve support and assistance for students with mental illness. The OLT will consider commissioning further work in this area and work with peak bodies to disseminate the outcomes of these projects.

There are also additional requirements on all higher education providers that require students to pay a Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF). Under the Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy Guidelines, all higher education providers must ensure that where they provide health and welfare services, trained and qualified staff are engaged to deliver those services and to meet the needs of all enrolled students.

The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) is responsible for the regulation of registered training organisations (RTOs) in New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania, South Australia, the Northern Territory and the ACT. RTOs in Victoria and Western Australia that offer courses in multiple jurisdictions or offer courses to overseas students are also regulated by ASQA. ASQA monitors compliance with the VET Quality Framework, which requires all RTOs to have processes and mechanisms in place to ensure students receive support services that meet their individual needs.

State and Territory Governments are responsible for all aspects of vocational education and training (VET) in their jurisdictions, including professional development of the workforce in the public TAFE training system. This arrangement means that the Australian Government has no direct role in VET workforce development.

All registered training providers, such as TAFEs, are required to ensure that learners have access to relevant learning support services, such as disability support, that meet their individual needs. They are



also required to continuously improve client services by collecting, analysing and acting on relevant data such as student feedback and/or complaints.

Under a new National Partnership Agreement agreed by the Council of Australian Governments in April 2012, States and Territories signed up to a set of reforms to the national training system. As part of these reforms, States and Territories will implement strategies to improve the quality of VET teaching. Specific measures are determined by each jurisdiction in accordance with their particular needs and priorities. These could include implementing professional development activities for teaching and support staff to deal with the needs of a more diverse range of learners, particularly students with a mental illness. Through the COAG process, the Australian Government will continue to progress the needs of VET students with mental illness.

In addition, the Australian Government and all State and Territory Governments fund *beyondblue* to raise community awareness and reduce stigma of high prevalence disorders of anxiety and depression. *beyondblue's* SenseAbility program targets TAFE teachers and provides information and teaching resources to support student mental health. It focuses on developing the strengths of students and includes content on how they can support someone they are worried about. *Beyondblue* is also releasing an e-learning module in August 2012 to support teachers delivering programs.

## **Recommendation 4**

**The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government encourage more peer support programs on Australian university and TAFE campuses, including those that specifically support students with a mental illness.**

### **AGREE**

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The Australian Government provides approximately \$6 million each year through the Disability Support Program to universities to implement strategies to attract and support students with disability in higher education. Under the performance based component of the program, universities may choose to use these funds to offer peer support programs to students with a mental illness. In 2011, \$1 million was allocated to Table A universities. Discussions will be held with universities as part of ongoing program management arrangements associated with existing Government programs that assist universities to develop and implement strategies to support disadvantaged students and students with disability.

All higher education providers that charge a Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) must, as part of the program guidelines, ensure that enrolled students are provided with information on how to access health services, including mental health services. Higher education providers can also choose to use SSAF revenue on initiatives to promote the health and welfare of students which, depending on identified student needs, may include peer support programs that support students with a mental illness.

The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) encourages peer workers to participate in the Targeted Community Care program because people who have, or are recovering from mental illness have valuable knowledge about recovery and can help others who are recovering. This reinforces the principle that recovery and meaningful outcomes are possible. There were over 210 peer support workers employed during January to June 2012 in over 60 FaHCSIA funded organisations. Peers with a lived experience of a mental illness can provide essential support to assist mental health consumers to participate in work, education and community.

Peer support workers are key members of the FaHCSIA Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs) teams. PHaMs assist people aged 16 years and over whose ability to manage their daily activities and to live independently in the community is severely impacted as a result of mental illness. Under the PHaMs Program, peer support workers play a critical role in assisting people with a mental illness in their recovery journey. The promotion and adoption of a recovery oriented culture within Australian mental health services is one of the key actions identified by the Council of Australian Governments under the Fourth National Mental Health Plan. Personal recovery is defined as being able to live well and to build and live the life one chooses in the presence or absence of mental ill health.

## **Recommendation 5**

**The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government examine ways to further support social enterprises that effectively transition people with mental ill health into the open employment market.**

### **AGREE**

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In recent times, the Australian Government has made significant reforms aimed at transitioning people with mental illness to open employment. Government remains committed to the implementation, evaluation and improvement of these programs.

The Australian Government supports increasing opportunities for people with a mental illness to transition to open employment and acknowledges that social enterprises have potential to provide a pathway to open employment.

As part of the 2011-12 Budget, the Government announced a \$50 million investment for the PHaMs employment measure, to build individuals' capacity to stay in employment or education that meets their needs and sustains their recovery. To assist people to achieve their employment goals, PHaMs workers will partner with local employment providers, employers and other key stakeholders, which may include social enterprises.

The Australian Government also provides supported employment to people with mental illness through disability employment assistance. During 2011-12, there were around 22,000 people with disability assisted by Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) and, of these, 16 per cent have mental illness as a stated condition.

The *Building Australia's Future Workforce* package, which was also announced by the Government in the 2011-12 Budget, assists people with disability, including people with mental illness, into the open employment market. Since 1 July 2012, new wage subsidies have been available, providing incentives to encourage employers to offer jobs to the long-term unemployed and people with disability.

Recently, the Government has implemented Disability Employment Broker projects which are designed to create new jobs for people with disability. These projects will increase employers' confidence in working with people with disability and assist employers to increase their knowledge of the services and Government programs that are available to help employees in the workplace. Projects will achieve these aims through employer forums, information sessions and targeted on the job training for employers. In addition, Brokers will link employers with their local Disability Employment Services (DES) providers who will deliver additional support and assist employers in designing jobs that are suitable for people with disability.

The Australian Government released *Inclusive Employment 2012-2022: A Vision for Supported Employment* in May 2012 and has committed to 'allow people with disability to make choices about where they want to work, about who supports them in employment, and how'. 'Inclusive Employment' articulates that ADEs will transition to more of a social enterprise model over the coming years. 'Inclusive Employment' is also focused on breaking down the barriers between 'supported' and 'open' employment and encouraging people with disability to work in 'open' employment whenever possible.

Both of the Australian Government funded employment service programs, Job Services Australia (JSA) and DES, support the use of social enterprises as a work experience tool to assist people with disability to transition into open employment.

The Australian Government has recently completed the first full open competitive tender for Disability Employment Services – Employment Support Service (DES-ESS). This is the first time these services have ever gone out to full tender to get the best result for people with a disability and the single biggest reform to the disabilities employment sector in decades.

From 4 March 2013, the best available providers will be assisting people with permanent disability to achieve and maintain sustainable employment in the open labour market. Putting DES-ESS out to tender was an open and transparent way to ensure the Government and the public can have confidence that the best possible providers are delivering the most effective services.

The providers that will be contracted to deliver DES-ESS from 4 March 2013 to 2018 have demonstrated their ability to support participants and employers to achieve high quality, sustainable employment outcomes.

There will be over 400 generalist and approximately 100 specialist contracts operating from 4 March 2013. A wider range of specialist services will be available, including specialisations for people with mental illness. People with mental illness will be able to receive services from these specialists even if they are from outside the local area.

The DES model allows DES providers to offer participants exposure to a range of short-term job opportunities to build their skills and confidence in order to eventually reach the main objective of securing sustainable, quality employment in the open labour market. This means that participants, including people with mental health conditions, can try a range of jobs including the valuable transitional employment opportunities that are available through various social enterprise models. DES providers are funded to provide this support during the Employment Assistance phase of the program.

DES contracts – which will run for a period of 5 years from 4 March 2013 – will facilitate strong links between social enterprises and disability employment service providers. Within this context, the Government is committed to working with the disability employment sector to get the best possible outcomes for job seekers, including through social enterprises. As ADEs move toward the Government's vision for supported employment, they too will form an integral element of the pathways to open employment.

## **Recommendation 6**

**The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government ensure that the Supported Wage System is sufficiently flexible to accommodate employees with a mental illness by taking into account the episodic and fluctuating nature of their condition.**

### **AGREE**

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Ensuring that people with mental illness are able to join and remain in the workforce, despite the episodic nature of many conditions, is a priority for Government. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) will implement training and guidance materials to assist Supported Wage System assessors to assess people with mental health conditions. The Department will review existing Supported Wage System guidelines to provide greater detail about flexible assessment arrangements for people with mental illness and episodic conditions.

The DES program, which commenced in March 2010, includes flexible service provision tailored to individual needs. The service model includes three levels of ongoing support for people who need assistance to maintain their employment, enabling short periods of intensive assistance when it is needed to better support people with episodic conditions. More regular ongoing support is also available for people who need regular support.

## Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government work with employer associations and employers to promote the business case for employing people with a mental illness. This should include:

- showcasing employers' broader workplace strategies for employing and retaining employees with a mental health condition and proactively promoting the mental health and well-being of all their employees as good human resource practice
- discussion of the range of Commonwealth Government assistance available to employers
- having employers share stories of successful placements of employees with mental ill health in their workplaces with others in their industry and the broader business community, including having 'business champions' speak about the business case for greater inclusivity, and
- jointly developing national standards for best employer awards that endorse recruiting and retaining employees with a mental illness, and promoting the mental health and wellbeing of all employees.

## AGREE

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The Australian Government supports the principle of working with employer associations and employers to promote the business case for employing people with a mental illness. The business case for employing and retaining people with mental health conditions is already documented, together with training and support materials for managers. The Government supports using existing services including the DES program, the JSA program, the JobAccess service, and the National Disability Recruitment Coordinator to better communicate the case for employment.

As noted in the response to Recommendation 1, the Government funds *beyondblue* to conduct the National Workplace Program, which assists workplaces to identify and support workers with depression, anxiety and other related disorders and increase the knowledge and skills of employers and employees to address mental health issues in the workplace. There have been a total of 69,000 participants and 2,657 workshops delivered as at 31 May 2012. The *beyondblue* Workplace Mental Health Awareness e-learning Program is a stand-alone resource specifically for workplaces. It is the first in a number of e-learning programs that *beyondblue* is developing. In the 2011-12 financial year, over 2,000 unique workplaces used the e-learning program, and an iPad version was released in mid-2012.

The Government will continue to engage with employer groups and employers more broadly to increase their knowledge of programs and services to support the employment of people with mental illness. Feedback received from employers indicates they, and their recruitment managers, want to hear more stories from other employers who have successfully implemented strategies to employ people with a range of disabilities. In keeping with feedback from employers, DEEWR will develop a series of success stories from the employers' perspective. DEEWR, through existing services including JSA, DES and JobAccess, will support and encourage employers and employer groups to champion their own successful employment strategies to other employers.

In addition, DEEWR will engage with employers, employer associations and business groups to promote the employment of people with mental illness. The Department is working with the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) to disseminate materials including 'Employ Outside the Box – the Business Case for Employing People with Disability' to employers through workshops and websites. ACCI will also support the state and territory chambers to co-brand the material and disseminate its key messages through their electronic newsletters. ACCI is encouraging its members to include people with mental illness and other disabilities in their pool of candidates for future jobs.

DEEWR will also engage more broadly with employer groups including Council of Small Business of Australia, Business Council of Australia, Australian Industry Group and the Australian Human Resources Institute to improve members' awareness of the range of government programs and services available to support people with mental illness at work. The aim of this is to build capacity of employers to support employees who experience mental health conditions to stay in employment, and to employ people with mental illness in the future. The National Disability Recruitment Coordinator will assist employers to build their capacity to manage, recruit and support people with mental illness.

The Australian Government's JobAccess website will continue to provide a platform for employers to share their stories of successful employment of people with mental illness. The JobAccess website has been enhanced to make information about employment supports aimed at improving employment of people with mental illness more accessible to employers.

FaHCSIA also support efforts to reduce barriers to employing people with a mental illness by eliminating stigma associated with mental illness through education and awareness and through specific support for employers and employees to maintain employment. As noted under Recommendations 4 and 5, the new PHaMs employment measure will provide clients with help to manage their mental illness and stabilise those aspects of their lives that are a barrier to getting and keeping a job.

The Government supports the development of best practice guidelines including check lists and self-assessment tools to assist employers to recruit and retain people with mental illness: to this end, DEEWR will work with employers, employment services and other agencies. A staged approach will be adopted, commencing with further promotion of successful employment of people with mental illness and leading to suitable recognition schemes for successful employers; taking into account strategies that promoted mental health and wellbeing. DEEWR will work with employers, ACCI and other employer bodies, the JobAccess service, DES and JSA providers to implement better recognition and promotion of best employer practice.

## **Recommendation 8**

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government support and, where necessary, amend the JobAccess, Employment Assistance Fund and Jobs in Jeopardy initiatives to ensure that:

- the scope of eligibility requirements does not prohibit employees and employers who require support, and
- ways of accessing and information about the JobAccess, Employment Assistance Fund and Jobs in Jeopardy programs and their benefits, including for employment of people with a mental illness, be clarified and readily available to employees and employers.

All these programs need to be promoted more widely and their websites kept updated.

## **AGREE**

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The Australian Government is committed to continual improvement of programs and services to ensure they are providing effective and efficient assistance to the community. DEEWR has processes in place to continually review and improve the JobAccess service, Employment Assistance Fund and Job-in-Jeopardy assistance to ensure that they deliver effective services to those people who need them. Improvements to the services were made in March 2010, in response to feedback and findings of a review of DES. Enhancements included broadening eligibility and expanding available assistance. Further enhancements to the JobAccess service were implemented in July 2011 to increase access to mental health information. Future improvements will be considered in response to this Inquiry, new evidence from research, feedback and evaluations.

The JobAccess website has been redeveloped in response to feedback to improve access to the information which is available on the site. The new website provides a better navigation structure making it easier to locate information about workplace solutions for different disabilities and the range of government assistance. Information about mental illness is more prominently displayed on the new website.

At 1 July 2011, the JobAccess advisory service was expanded to provide information and advice about workplace strategies for employees with mental illness. The 2011-12 Budget provided \$1.02 million through the National Mental Health Reform package over three years for the JobAccess telephone service to include professionals in the mental health area to provide information and to promote the employment services to employers.

DEEWR regularly reviews the effectiveness of the JobAccess enquiry service. Responses to customer satisfaction surveys and the online feedback mechanism suggest that there is a high level of satisfaction with the information and advice provided. The Department has increased its promotion of the JobAccess service, including the Employment Assistance Fund to employers, recruiters and human resource workers, in particular. The use of the JobAccess service has increased steadily since it commenced in 2006. It responds to approximately 2,500 enquiries each month.

The Employment Assistance Fund commenced on 1 March 2010. Its use is significantly higher than the Workplace Modifications Scheme and Auslan for Employment, which it replaced. Information about the Employment Assistance Fund is disseminated to all employment service providers, employer groups, private recruitment agencies, disability advocacy bodies, community groups and through other DEEWR funded services, programs and websites. DEEWR acknowledges awareness of JobAccess, the Employment Assistance Fund and Jobs in Jeopardy could be improved, and agrees to review and continuously improve the way it promotes awareness of the JobAccess, Employment Assistance Fund and the DES Job-in-Jeopardy assistance to the full range of users or potential users.



## **Recommendation 9**

**The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government take a lead role in implementing best practice as an employer that looks after the mental health and wellbeing of employees, including the employment and retention of people with a mental illness.**

### **AGREE**

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The *As One – APS Disability Employment Strategy*, launched on 14 May 2012, delivers a framework for improving the long-term decline in the representation of people with disability employed in the Australian Public Service (APS). Its primary objectives are to strengthen the APS as a progressive and sustainable employer of people with disability, and to improve the experience of people with disability in APS employment.

The strategy defines 19 initiatives under the integrating themes of Fostering Inclusive Cultures; Improving Leadership across the APS; Increasing Agency Demand for Candidates with Disability; and Improving Recruitment Processes to Enable More Candidates with Disability to Enter the APS.

A key initiative under the Fostering Inclusive Cultures theme is the review and enhancement of the Australian Public Service Commission's policy advice and products and services on mental health. This project will produce a best practice publication 'Mental Health in the APS: Guidelines for Managers', for human resources personnel and line managers on the management of mental health across the employment continuum.

Four core principles underpin the APS' commitment to best practice in the area of organisational mental health and psychological wellbeing.

1. **Prevention:** workplaces foster a culture that promotes good psychological health and wellbeing and minimises the development of mental health conditions.
2. **Early recognition and support:** processes and training are in place to recognise and manage psychosocial risks when they arise, tailored to the specific needs of the workplace(s), and managers proactively manage workplace behavioural issues.
3. **People management:** supervisors and managers understand how to recognise and manage potential mental health conditions especially as they relate to performance management.
4. **Rehabilitation and return to work:** when mental health conditions are identified, pathways and processes are in place to provide support to the person including timely access to effective rehabilitation.

The four principles are broadly based around the commonly adopted model of primary (focus on prevention), secondary (focus on early recognition and intervention) tertiary (focus on management of established conditions) and strategic approaches.

It is anticipated that the Australian Public Service Commission will seek endorsement from the APS Diversity Council on the newly developed mental health guidelines by mid-2013.

## **Recommendation 10**

**The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government work with employment service providers to streamline assessment processes for job seekers with a mental illness and ensure that the assessment criteria for and requirements of job seekers with a mental illness are compatible and consistent across the services.**

### **AGREE**

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The Australian Government recognises the importance of timely and consistent assessments of people claiming income support payments (including the Disability Support Pension (DSP)) and/or requiring employment services.

Assessment service arrangements currently accommodate vulnerable customers, including those with undiagnosed mental health conditions, where a person has little or no insight or capacity to engage with appropriate medical services and medical evidence is not available or is scant. All assessments are undertaken by appropriately qualified medical and allied health staff at the Department of Human Services (DHS) who are trained to assist the most vulnerable in society. These arrangements are in accordance with current policy requirements set by DEEWR and FaHCSIA.

Significant improvements to assessment processes have been introduced over the last 12-18 months. From 1 July 2011, assessment processes were streamlined by introducing faster and simpler assessments for some employment service referrals (Employment Services Assessments (ESAt)) and retaining more thorough assessments for DSP claimants (Job Capacity Assessments (JCA)). As noted above, all assessments for DSP claimants are now completed by medical and allied health professionals. The assessment process now provides greater consistency in determining people's employment service needs. DHS and DEEWR are working together to ensure the national network of assessors is deployed more flexibly to provide timely assessments in response to local customer needs.

An ESAt recommends the most appropriate employment service assistance based on an assessment of the job seeker's barriers to finding and maintaining employment and work capacity (in hour bandwidths). Assessors use available information about the job seeker, including current and past medical/disability status, and prior participation and employment history to assess work capacity and barriers. Assessors can also liaise with treating doctors and other relevant health professionals as required.

There are two types of ESAts. These are:

- Medical condition ESAt – An assessment of the job seeker's circumstances to determine work capacity and the most appropriate employment service, where one or more medical conditions are identified. ESAts are similar to the previous JCAs for potentially highly disadvantaged job seekers with disability, injury or illness. In a medical condition ESAt, the assessor must rely on the available medical evidence.
- Non-medical condition ESAt – An assessment of the job seeker's circumstances that determines the most appropriate employment service, where no medical condition is identified — for example, a young person at serious risk of homelessness. A non-medical condition ESAt is usually less complex than an ESAt for a job seeker with disability, injury or illness, and will be streamlined to meet the individual's needs.

DHS and DEEWR are working closely together to improve the delivery of ESAts in order to increase consistency and quality, ensuring that they meet customer needs.

Furthermore, from 3 September 2011, JCAs for DSP claimants were refined to have a greater focus on a person's potential to work with appropriate capacity building and rehabilitation. The assessments also have greater consideration of the person's transferrable skills, suitability for alternative employment with reasonable adjustment and capacity to benefit from vocational training and rehabilitation.

Like an ESAt, JCAs identify a person's barriers to finding and maintaining employment and work capacity (in hour bandwidths). In addition, JCAs identify a person's level of functional impairment resulting from any permanent medical conditions the person may have. Under the revised DSP Impairment Tables, the introduction to Table 5 (Mental Health) contains specific instructions about how to assess mental health conditions, including their episodic and fluctuating presentation. Assessment of functional impairment is required to inform DSP eligibility, and is also used to inform eligibility for the Supported Wage System, Special Disability Trusts and for Special Benefit claims from people with disability.

Wherever possible, a Job Capacity Assessor's qualification is aligned to the Impairment Table(s) relevant to an individual's primary medical condition (for example, a mental illness). The revised Impairment Table 5 – Mental Health Function requires that the diagnosis of a mental health condition is made by an appropriately qualified medical practitioner, with evidence from a clinical psychologist (where the diagnosis has not been made by a psychiatrist). In situations where they do not align, a secondary contributing assessor holding a professional qualification that aligns with the relevant Impairment Table(s) reviews the medical evidence and Impairment Tables used in the assessment.

JCAs are generally streamed to assessors with the appropriate qualifications in the first instance. If this is not possible, a contributing assessor must be used. For mental health conditions, this is a psychologist or an allied health professional with mental health qualifications. As with the previous Tables, provision continues to be made for vulnerable customers so they are not disadvantaged. To ensure these customers are not disadvantaged, DHS psychologists can gather evidence and establish a case history on which to base a mental health diagnosis for DSP eligibility purposes.

DHS Assessment Services is a multidisciplinary team comprising Registered Psychologists, Social Workers, Exercise Physiologists, Physiotherapists, Registered Nurses, Accredited Rehabilitation Counsellors and Occupational Therapists. DHS assessors are registered with their appropriate health / allied health professional governing body.

DHS also provides regular training to assessment staff about mental health awareness and First Aid, suicide identification and management, Mental Health Capacity Building, contemporary treatment options for mental health conditions, and the correct application of government social security and health policy.

In addition, assessors can arrange specialist assessments. This includes situations where the assessor observes or suspects that a person has an intellectual disability, acquired brain injury or psychological/psychiatric disorder and there is no evidence of diagnosis or treatment. A specialist assessment is generally scheduled after the ESAt or JCA and may be conducted by an appropriately qualified DHS assessor or an external medical or allied health professional.

DEEWR and DHS are working together to streamline assessment processes and have been implementing changes in order to better engage and assess the cohort of job seekers with a mental illness. An evaluation of the new assessment arrangements, with input from employment service providers, is due to be delivered in 2013-14. This evaluation – for which preliminary work will shortly commence – will also take into account the matters raised in the course of this Inquiry.

## **Recommendation 11**

**The Committee recommends that any future Disability Employment Services tender process require prospective disability employment services providers to provide evidence of expertise in working with people with mental illnesses.**

### **AGREE**

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The Australian Government recognises the importance of having services for people with disability delivered by those with the appropriate expertise.

The tender for 2013-2018 DES-ESS reflects the principle of the Inquiry Report recommendation. Through the Request for Tender for DES-ESS, the Government sought strong evidence of tenderers' expertise in working with people across a range of disability types. This includes demonstrated experience and past performance in the delivery of employment assistance and the achievement of sustainable employment outcomes for people with permanent disability.

Evidence of this experience and past performance was weighted heavily in the tender assessment process.

Additionally, tenderers seeking to deliver DES-ESS as a specialist mental health service provider needed to demonstrate to a high degree their knowledge of mental illness and strategies for meeting the specific needs of people with disability as a result of mental illness. The past performance of these providers in delivering services for people with mental illness was a key consideration in the tender process. It is important to note that specialist DES providers are not limited in the number of people they can service or the areas in which they can operate. As a result of the tender process, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of business allocated to specialist mental health providers – and through partnerships with other DES providers, Government expects that these specialists will deliver expert services to more people with mental illness across a much broader area than ever before.

To ensure ongoing retention of appropriate expertise and skills for delivering service to people with disability, tenderers were also required to demonstrate how they will recruit, train and retain suitably qualified and experienced staff, and ensure that front-line staff are appropriately skilled to work with a range of participants with differing work capacity and capability due to their disability.

To support DES providers to build and maintain appropriate expertise in working with people with mental illness, DEEWR has recently released online *Mental Health Capacity Building* training. This training is designed to improve the capability of all employment service providers, including DES providers and DHS front-line staff, in identifying, communicating with and assisting participants with mental illness. The training was developed as part of the National Mental Health Reform package and will better equip DES providers to assist participants to gain and maintain employment and better connect them with the appropriate services, including community mental health services and Medicare Locals. The training package consists of six 30 minute modules. As at 19 October 2012 more than 2,300 employment service provider staff had completed more than 11,000 modules. All DES providers, including those successful in the DES-ESS tender, are expected to undertake this training.

The Government is committed to ensuring that services for people with disability are delivered by the best possible providers and will continue to consider how the recommendations of this Inquiry can be further applied to the operation of DES and to future DES purchasing processes.

## **Recommendation 12**

**The Committee recommends that the Disability Employment Services Performance Framework be monitored and evaluated on a regular and ongoing basis. DEEWR should continue to consult with a technical reference group of stakeholders to ensure the framework's and star ratings' ongoing relevance and efficacy in achieving qualitative as well as quantitative outcomes for people with mental illnesses.**

### **AGREE**

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The Australian Government is dedicated to regular improvement of the DES program and as such, has committed to undertake a Performance Framework Review in 2012 prior to the new Deed period beginning on 4 March 2013. The Government believes that the current model is sound, but there are opportunities for improvements, including improving, in 2013, access to data on outcomes on specific disability types, including people with mental illness.

The current DES Performance Framework inherently rewards the achievement of outcomes for people with mental illness, along with people in the DES program with other disabilities and medical conditions. The calculation of the current Star Ratings takes into account the various disabilities of the people in the program, including mental illness, and calculates performance accordingly and adjusts for the other characteristics of the person and the local labour market conditions. The current Star Ratings are inherently relevant for people with mental illness and provide the capacity to produce the desired result of placing more DES participants, including those with mental illness, into sustainable employment. The Performance Framework Review will further enhance the model for all DES participants.

Between August and October 2012, DEEWR consulted with a DES Performance Framework Working Group regarding the DES Performance Framework Review. The membership of this Working Group included employment services provider peak bodies, consumer representatives, employer representatives, nominated DES providers and other representatives.

The purpose of the Working Group was to discuss enhancements to the current DES Performance Framework, to ensure it continues to provide appropriate incentives for sustainable employment outcomes and has a greater focus on quality. DEEWR will continue to consult with stakeholders through the Performance Review process, and will establish an ongoing reference group to aid in the implementation and evaluation of the review's outcomes. As more detailed data relating to outcomes for people with specific disability, like those caused by mental illness becomes available, DEEWR will work with stakeholders to ensure this data is made public, where appropriate.

### **Recommendation 13**

The Committee recommends that DEEWR and Centrelink prioritise the implementation of a clear, effective and timely communication strategy that advises clients of the services and supports available to them, including how changes like the participation requirements and revised impairment tables will affect them.

The Committee expects that any accompanying explanatory guides and commensurate training provided to Centrelink and employment service providers by DEEWR and DHS to assist clients with mental health conditions will similarly be provided in a timely manner and user-friendly format.

### **AGREE**

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While the Government has made significant improvements in communicating with clients with mental illness, there is always room for continued enhancement.

The Australian Government acknowledges that providing clear, timely and accessible information about changes which affect the entitlements of new and/or existing customers is very important. Developing a communication strategy is an integral part of all changes to payments.

FaHCSIA has responsibility for the DSP and worked with DHS to implement the revised impairment tables which were introduced on 1 January 2012. FaHCSIA and DHS also implemented the participation requirements for DSP recipients under age 35 and the measure to allow all DSP recipients to work up to 30 hours a week. These measures were introduced on 1 July 2012.

For the recent changes to DSP, FaHCSIA and DHS jointly developed communication strategies, with DHS providing information in a range of ways including:

- From July 2012, engaging disability champions to help build awareness of the changes for DSP customers under 35 years, promoting the overall benefits of participation and using new material in a range of media. This includes published information in newsletters for customers and community organisations, posters in service centre waiting areas, the department's website, radio and print media outlets including ethnic communities, videos, social media including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts and through local community presentations from departmental staff.
- Since 1 July 2012, progressively telephoning DSP customers with participation requirements to invite them to attend an initial participation interview. Staff will be explaining the changes, promoting the benefits of participation, discussing any barriers customers have to attending participation interviews, and arranging appointments flexibly, taking into account the customer's medical and other circumstances. DHS will then send the customer a letter with an accompanying information sheet, with details of the interview, the time and reasons for the customer's selection for interview.
- Trialling a Communication Support Plan to help people with mental illness and other conditions better engage with the department as part of the budget measure introducing participation requirements for DSP customers under 35 years from July 2012.

Commensurate with the communication strategy, DHS is also working towards a nationally consistent suite of social inclusion e-learning products to help tailor customer service solutions and improve services for customers. This suite of learning will include information such as insights from customers and providers to help staff better understand the issues faced by people with mental illness and referral options.

The social inclusion e-learning products will accompany existing learning material available to DHS staff such as Mental Health First Aid, Mental Health Awareness and co-designing customer solutions to help guide customer conversations. DHS staff also have access to the e-learning package *Mental Health*

*Capacity Building.* Further information about this package is outlined in the response to Recommendation 11.

As part of the development of the above training available to all staff, DHS' Assessment Services will provide material for inclusion that assists service delivery to vulnerable customers, including those with mental illness.

DHS' Assessment Services comprising qualified Health and Allied Health Professionals, many of whom are social workers and psychologists, are well versed in appropriate communication with customers with mental health conditions. Assessments for people with mental health conditions are conducted by appropriately qualified assessors and, where necessary, include input from contributing assessors from other professional disciplines.

On a more general level, accessible information on DSP and other payments is available on both the FaHCSIA and DHS websites. FaHCSIA notes the Committee's view that DSP eligibility is complex, due to incremental changes and that the recent changes to the payment may not yet be clearly understood across the community. FaHCSIA undertakes ongoing consultation with the DSP Advisory Group and disability peak organisations. Communication of changes is an ongoing process and FaHCSIA will continue to work with DHS to improve the dissemination of information and ensure it is effective. For DEEWR employment programs, further consideration will be given to ensuring that people with mental illness are aware of the services and supports available to help them gain employment. This includes ensuring that mental health clinical teams are aware of the support that employment service providers can offer as part of an individual's treatment and recovery plan.

## **Recommendation 14**

The Committee recommends that any new communication strategies be developed with input from clients and staff (from both Centrelink and employment service providers) into how best to disseminate information to clients so they can readily understand any changes to their entitlement and participation requirements.

### **AGREE**

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DHS is collaborating more closely with the community and customers (including people with mental illness) in the design and development of government services to improve the effectiveness and acceptance of those services.

For example, the department developed its communications strategy for new DSP participation requirements using input from internal and external stakeholders. The strategy was designed to complement DEEWR's public awareness campaign to communicate the broader messages of the *Building Australia's Future Workforce* package.

Customer engagement strategies for DSP participation requirements have also adopted recommendations from the Commonwealth Ombudsman's report *Falling through the cracks - Engaging with customers with a mental illness in the social security system*. As part of the DSP participation interview cycle, customers are asked about their preferred contact methods and times in developing a Communication Support Plan. Recommendations from the Ombudsman's report were also adopted to create more flexible customer engagement strategies and guidelines in relation to compliance. DHS held customer focus groups in March 2012 which informed the development of its communication products and staff learning packages for these changes. DHS will liaise with the relevant Business Teams in DEEWR to ensure that JSA providers and DEEWR JSA policy and contract management staff receive information that is consistent with that provided to DEEWR's DES policy and contract management staff and DES providers on the DSP measures.

Further, in June 2011, DHS established a Mental Health Service Delivery Working Party comprising key representatives from mental health, disability and community organisations, consumers and carers, the Ombudsman's Office and relevant policy departments, including DEEWR, DoHA and FaHCSIA. The Working Party has helped progress a number of initiatives to help improve service delivery to people with mental health issues, including promoting advocacy and peer support, improvements to letters and trialling of the Communication Support Plan to help people with mental illness and other conditions better engage with DHS.



## **Recommendation 15**

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government explore ways, in partnership with the states and territories through COAG, to support Individual Support and Placement and other service models that integrate employment services and clinical health services.

### **AGREE**

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The Australian Government recognises the important contribution that having a meaningful job can make to a person's mental health. Providing support, including ongoing clinical support as required, to encourage economic and social participation is critically important. To this end, the Government will continue to work towards better integrated employment and health services through a range of models – such as Individual Support and Placement – wherever possible.

The Government has recognised the need for greater collaboration and integration across different sectors in order to meet the full range of an individuals' needs (including their employment needs). The 2011-12 Federal Budget provided \$549.8 million (over five years from 2011-12 to 2015-16) for the Partners in Recovery: *Coordinated Support and Flexible Funding for People with Severe and Persistent Mental Illness with Complex Needs* initiative. This initiative aims to facilitate better coordination of clinical and other supports and services (including employment services) as well as strengthening partnerships between clinical and community support organisations responsible for delivering services for the target group.

*headspace* is another initiative currently funded by the Australian Government which provides a national coordinated focus on youth mental health and related drug and alcohol problems. The *headspace* program integrates employment services and clinical health services for young people in order to deliver better coordination between services.

The vocational provider (which each *headspace* centre includes as part of their consortium) considers and responds to issues faced by young people in the local area. These young people are often at risk of being disengaged with school, need support for vocational guidance and direction, or may already be struggling to access employment options due to mental health difficulties.

In addition, the DES program is designed to ensure flexible, personalised assistance for people with disability, injury or health condition (including people with mental illness) to secure and maintain sustainable employment. For example, the use of flexible ongoing support provides the kind of periodic assistance in the workplace that is required by some participants who experience episodic mental health conditions.

DES providers are required through their contracts to work with a variety of groups, such as community and State health services in order to assist job seekers.

To encourage innovative and local customisation of service delivery, DEEWR does not prescribe the exact model that DES providers should adopt for integrated/wrap around services. A variety of innovative models have already been developed by providers for supporting people with mental illness. Across all programs, this approach is incentivised and facilitated because it has been shown to improve outcomes. This is a guiding principle in program design and it will be considered as an important driver in future tender processes.

## Glossary

ACCI	Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
ADE	Australian Disability Enterprise
APS	Australian Public Service
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DES	Disability Employment Services
DES-ESS	Disability Employment Services – Employment Support Service
DHS	Department of Human Services
DoHA	Department of Health and Ageing
DSP	Disability Support Pension
ESAt	Employment Services Assessment
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
JCA	Job Capacity Assessment
JSA	Job Services Australia
OLT	Office for Learning and Teaching
PHaMs	Personal Helpers and Mentors
VET	Vocational education and training