



Australian Government

**Department of Employment and
Workplace Relations**

**SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO
MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN
AUSTRALIA**

Submission

**Australian Government Department
of Employment and Workplace
Relations**

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Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
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Introduction

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' (DEWR) aim is to maximise the ability of unemployed Australians to find work, and to support strong employment growth and the improved productive performance of enterprises in Australia. The Department's outcomes are achieved through strategies to encourage employers to employ a broader range of job seekers, including those in specific demographic groups. Equity and access underpin the department's policy development, programme implementation and service delivery.¹

The Australian Government recognises that many people with disability, including mental illness, want to work and have the capacity to work, and should share in the financial, social and personal benefits that employment offers. The Government also recognises the barriers that job seekers with mental illness can face in finding and maintaining sustainable employment.

A major policy challenge is to ensure the income support and employment assistance systems address the needs of people with mental illness. People with mental illness are represented across the full range of Australian income support payments. The number of people in receipt of Disability Support Pension (DSP) with a psychological or psychiatric condition has grown from 2 per cent of recipients in 1992² to 26.6 per cent³ in 2006. It is one of the three most common medical conditions for people receiving DSP, along with musculo-skeletal and connective tissue conditions, and intellectual and learning conditions.⁴

Welfare to Work, which was introduced on 1 July 2006, includes changes to payments and work incentives, workforce participation requirements, and employment and related services. The reforms focus on four priority groups, including people with disability. The aim of these reforms is to ensure people with disability are able to participate in the workforce as far as they are capable. The changes place a greater emphasis on what people can do, rather than what they cannot do.

The changes to income support and employment services are designed to encourage people with disability to try work while providing and maintaining a sustainable and adequate safety net for people who are unable to work.

¹ DEWR (2006) 'Annual Report 2005-06'

² FaCS (2003) 'Improving employment opportunities for people with a disability: Report of the review of the Employer Incentives Strategy' March

³ DEWR internal data sources

⁴ DEWR (2006) 'Annual Report 2005-06'

The Australian Government announced additional measures to increase employment opportunities for people with disability in the 2006-07 Budget. Among these initiatives was a commitment of \$40 million to be spent over five years to make it easier for people with mental illness to enter and remain in employment. This measure forms part of the Government's commitment to the Council of Australian Governments' National Action Plan on Mental Health.

On 28 March 2007, the Senate referred an inquiry into mental health services to the Community Affairs Committee. This submission addresses the Committee's Terms of Reference by detailing DEWR's progress since July 2006 on improvements to services to people with mental illness in relation to the department's portfolio responsibilities.

A – The extent to which the National Action Plan on Mental Health assists in achieving the aims and objectives of the National Mental Health Strategy.

The National Mental Health Strategy (the Strategy) is a commitment by the Australian and State and Territory governments to improve the lives of people with mental illness. The Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) National Action Plan on Mental Health (Action Plan) recognises this commitment through its four overarching outcomes. These outcomes acknowledge a shared responsibility across sectors and jurisdictions to improve services and support to people with mental illness beyond the primary health care sector.

The Strategy and the COAG Action Plan recognise that employment and the workplace environment are contributors to mental health status and that employment is a necessary component in addressing the needs of people with mental illness. However, the Strategy and the Plan also recognise that access to employment and training services can be inequitable for people with mental illness, and are designed to improve access to a range of employment related services for people with mental illness.

The COAG Action Plan has five action areas, one of which is participation in the community and employment. Governments have agreed to a number of specific policy directions to achieve positive change in this area.⁵ The \$40 million allocated to DEWR over five years under the COAG Action Plan directly addresses this area of action.

The measure administered by DEWR, *Helping People with Mental Illness to Enter and Remain in Employment*, enhances services and support for job seekers and employees with mental illness. It focuses on improving people's employment prospects and opportunities and assisting people with mental illness to find and maintain suitable employment.

Specifically, the measure provides:

- 2,500 additional places in the Personal Support Programme to help people with mental illness who are not yet ready to use employment services;
- additional post placement support and support for people with mental illness who are at risk of losing or leaving their jobs because of their condition through the Disability Employment Network and Vocational Rehabilitation Services programmes;
- projects evaluating best practice employment assistance to people with mental illness; and
- the provision of information on effective employment assistance available to employers, service providers and jobseekers.

⁵ Council of Australian Governments' (2006) National Action Plan on Mental Health

B – The overall contribution of the National Action Plan on Mental Health to the development of a coordinated infrastructure to support community-based care.

One of the key areas of action in the COAG Action Plan is ‘integrating and improving the care system’. This action area recognises that better coordination of services provided by Governments and the private and non-private sectors will enhance assistance to people with mental illness to live, work and participate in the community. This action specifically recognises the value of vocational education and training, employment and employment services in enabling people with mental illness to live stable and productive lives in the community.

DEWR has a range of programmes which assist people with mental illness. The programmes were enhanced through the Australian Government’s contribution to the COAG Action Plan, which built on the changes to income support payments and increased employment services announced in the Welfare to Work package in the 2005 - 06 Budget.

Personal Support Programme (PSP)

The measure under the COAG Action Plan provided 2,500 additional places in PSP commencing from the 2006 - 07 financial year. As a pre-employment programme, PSP provides assistance to help participants address non-vocational barriers that prevent them from participating in employment assistance or getting a job.

The additional places provided for PSP have been released to service providers in areas of high demand for assistance. This includes areas that have specialised service providers assisting people with mental illness. The release of additional PSP places has assisted a greater number of people with mental illness to access appropriate assistance and start moving towards employment services or a job.

PSP providers who have been allocated ‘mental health’ places are required to report to DEWR on the take up of these places and the outcomes achieved for PSP clients, including social and economic outcomes, on a quarterly basis.

The first and second reports from PSP providers have been received for the periods ending 31 December 2006 and 31 March 2007, respectively, and have been collated by DEWR.

According to these reports and administrative data, as at 31 March 2007, utilisation of the 800 places rolled out in July 2006 was at 99 per cent.

PSP has a maximum participation duration of two years, therefore it is expected that sufficient outcome data for those participants utilising the mental health places will be available early next year.

Disability Employment Network (DEN)

Under the COAG Action Plan, additional post placement support for people with a mental illness is being provided through the DEN programme. DEN plays a specialist role in helping people with disability get ready to look for a job, find a job and keep a job in the open labour market. The additional funding is in recognition of the nature of the greater support requirements of this complex client group and to help support

people with mental illness to retain their employment for example, if their employment is in jeopardy due to their mental illness.

The existing programme has not fundamentally changed and the provisions were developed in anticipation of increased demand for DEN services for people with mental illness. Accordingly, additional funding has been provided for:

- more Employment in Jeopardy support for workers with mental illness; and
- the introduction of a new Intermittent Support Fee (Mental Health) increased from the existing Intermittent Support Fee from \$275 to \$550 (excluding GST) with an equivalent increase in support expectations from a minimum of two occasions of support to a minimum of four occasions of support over 12 months.

The additional support provisions have funding of almost \$5 million over five years and were implemented on 1 January 2007.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS)

VRS provides specialist employment assistance, combined with vocational rehabilitation, to help people with a disability, injury or health condition find and retain safe and sustainable employment in the open labour market.

VRS assists job seekers to understand, compensate for and manage their injury or disability by building work capacity and/or developing new work strategies to avoid re-injury.

An additional intermittent post-placement support component has been introduced in the programme under the COAG Action Plan to assist people with a mental illness to retain their employment through the support of VRS. Funding has been provided for the Job in Jeopardy, and Intermittent Post-Placement Support-Fee initiatives.

The Job in Jeopardy and Intermittent Post-Placement Support Fee received funding of \$4.3 million over five years. The Job in Jeopardy places were released on 1 January 2007 and the Intermittent Post-Placement Support Fee has been available from 1 July 2007.

JobAccess

JobAccess is a free information and advice service that offers practical workplace solutions for employers, job seekers and employees, their co-workers and Providers of Australian Government Employment Services. JobAccess includes an easy to use web site and a telephone service to provide confidential, expert advice on the employment of people with disability.

As a result of the mental health package announced by COAG, additional resources have been developed to support the participation of people with mental illness in the workplace. This includes:

- the development of mental health content providing specific information about effective employment assistance for people with mental illness available to employers, employment service providers and job seekers—a total of 72 new

content items relevant to the measure have been published on the JobAccess web site; and

- the distribution of the Mental Health First Aid in the workplace e-learning course - the Mental Health First Aid in the Workplace training course is designed to increase understanding of mental illness and how people with mental illness can be supported in the workplace and the wider community.

C – Progress towards implementing the recommendations of the Select Committee on Mental Health, as outlined in its report *A national approach to mental health, from crises to community*.

The Senate Select Committee Inquiry on Mental Health tabled its Final Report: *A national approach to mental health, from crisis to community* on 28 April 2006. A small number of the 91 recommendations in the report relate to the Employment and Workplace Relations portfolio. This portfolio has contributed to a whole of government response to the report.

D – Identifying any possible gaps or shortfalls in funding and in the range of services available to people with a mental illness.

The Australian Government monitors and evaluates the success and responsiveness of employment assistance programmes. This process ensures any gaps or shortfalls in the range of services available are identified and enables the Department to improve the delivery of its services and programmes where necessary.

Job seekers with mental illness can access a wide range of Australian Government funded employment services. For example, many job seekers with mental illness access mainstream employment assistance such as Job Network, as well as specialist services such as the Personal Support Programme (PSP), Disability Employment Network or Vocational Rehabilitation Services.⁶ More information on Job Network and PSP follows (Attachment C provides further information on DEN and VRS).

Job Network

Job Network services assist job seekers into sustainable employment by providing personalised assistance that involves ongoing job search and employment focused activities. Job Network services are tailored to individuals based on assessed needs and duration of unemployment, providing more intensive services for those with greater needs, including people with mental illness.

Through the Welfare to Work initiatives, Job Network members (JNMs) have increased access to resources, including the Job Capacity Assessment programme and JobAccess. These resources support JNMs in providing appropriately tailored and flexible services to people with disability.

In addition, nationally there are 39 specialist JNMs providing services to groups of people in the community with a specific disability, including people with mental illness. Before being contracted specialist JNMs are required to demonstrate that they have expertise in delivering employment services to people in their particular speciality and that there is a need for the service within the local community. People with mental illness can choose whether to participate in a Job Network that caters to their specific disability type or a generalist JNM.

In 2006 the Department conducted mental health awareness training for JNMs in regional and metropolitan areas across Australia. The department continues to provide training support through on-line education on mental illness and how to best assist job seekers in this client group.

Personal Support Programme (PSP)

As at July 2007, around 24,000 people were waiting to access PSP. DEWR continues to closely monitor the demand for PSP and has, with the support of Centrelink and the Department of Human Services, commenced a review of a cohort of individuals waiting for assistance. The waitlist will be reduced as additional funding was provided through the Welfare to Work Initiative for over 8,000 new PSP places in 2007-08.

⁶ DEWR internal data sources

The Government's responsiveness to the demand for PSP is also evidenced through the provision of an additional 2,000 programme places over two years through the 2007 - 08 Budget. These places will be ongoing and will improve timely access to assistance for all PSP participants

Research into Employment Assistance

The Department is currently undertaking a number of projects funded under the COAG measure to evaluate projects which demonstrate the most effective ways of providing employment assistance to people with mental illness. A major project has just commenced: an Evaluation of Best Practice Employment Assistance to People with Mental Illness.

Evaluation of Best Practice Employment Assistance to People with Mental Illness (EBP)

The Australian Government acknowledges there is a gap in knowledge and evidence regarding best practice employment assistance to people with mental illness. A three year evaluation project to identify, evaluate and document models of employment assistance for people with mental illness in order to inform future policy and programme decisions has been established to address this.

The project will identify and engage a range of sites, models, or programmes supporting people with mental illness to find and keep a job or supporting people who are at risk of losing their job due to their mental illness. This project will increase the evidence base about what is best practice and about how and why selected service models achieve sustained employment outcomes for people with mental illness.

The objectives of EBP are to:

- describe 'best practice' when helping people with mental illness enter and remain in employment;
- consider the efficiency and effectiveness of selected service models and programs in achieving sustained employment outcomes for people with mental illness;
- identify factors that contribute to the efficacy of each of the models; and
- evaluate and document models of best practice employment assistance to people with mental illness.

A number of smaller research projects, designed to obtain a body of research on the relationship between mental illness and workforce participation and, in particular, to obtain information on possible features specific to mental illness which impact on a person's ability to enter and remain in employment have been completed or are currently being developed.

Undertaking research of this nature enhances the Department's knowledge of the barriers to work faced by people with mental illness and supports the Australian Government's objective of maximising the ability of Australians to find and remain in a job.

Case Based Funding (CBF) evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of a new model of funding, CBF, applied to the Disability Employment Network (DEN) programme from 1 July 2005.

The DEN programme commenced in 1986 to provide job seekers with disability assistance to find and maintain employment in the open labour market.

DEN members provide a range of services to jobseekers with disability in order to prepare them to return to work including vocational guidance, assistance in managing disability-related issues, training, job search support and ongoing assistance to maintain workers in the workplace. DEN members also provide a range of services to employers and co-workers to assist them to hire and retain a person with disability.

The CBF evaluation is investigating such issues as:

- the type of employment outcomes achieved for job seekers;
- what aspects of the CBF model appear to be driving employment outcomes;
- the effect the new maintenance funding has had on job retention and support;
- the effectiveness of additional fees;
- costs per outcome and whether they vary by characteristics of job seekers and service providers;
- the perceived strengths and weakness of operation and design of the CBF model; and
- the level of satisfaction of clients with the support delivered.

This evaluation includes ongoing examination of existing administrative data, a qualitative survey which has recently been completed with a sample of DEN providers from a total of 16 site visits and a quantitative survey, which will involve a sample made up of 50 per cent of DEN providers. The final report for this evaluation is due in November 2007.

Job Capacity Assessment (JCA)

A JCA, introduced with the Welfare to Work changes in July 2006, is a comprehensive assessment of a person's ability to work. The assessment involves identification of a person's barriers to employment and any interventions that may be required to help them overcome those barriers. For people with medical conditions or disabilities, the assessment also identifies the person's current and future work capacity.

All Job Capacity Assessors are allied health professionals, and the majority are psychologists and social workers. Many have years of experience in helping people with mental health conditions and all work as part of a team with other assessors in their organisations who have a range of allied health qualifications and experience. All Job Capacity Assessors are required to complete a training module on assisting people with mental health conditions. They do not carry out mental health assessments themselves or diagnose mental health or other medical conditions.

JCAs also refer clients directly to Australian Government-funded programmes of assistance, and recommend further referrals to a wide range of services that may help the client maximise their ability to work. These programmes include Job Network, Disability Employment Network, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Job Placement, Employment and Training, and Personal Support Programme. Assessors can also refer clients with mental illness to community mental health services and other community-based programmes that can help improve their work capacity.

The JCA evaluation which is being conducted as part of the Welfare to Work evaluation, will examine whether the JCA process has improved the timeliness and effectiveness of participation in programmes and services for people with disability, including those with mental illness. A range of issues reflecting the nature of the reforms as they affect people with disability, including people with mental illness, will also be addressed.

Conclusion

The Australian Government is committed to maintaining a sustainable and adequate income support safety net for people who are in genuine need, including people with mental illness. The Government recognises the positive impacts a job has on general health and wellbeing. The Government also recognises the significant challenges and demands people with mental illness can face in finding and keeping a job.

The employment assistance programmes administered by DEWR focus on improving people's employment prospects and opportunities. The Government currently funds a range of employment services across Australia to provide employment assistance to eligible job seekers with illness, injuries or disability, including mental illness. Services are funded to assist job seekers with employment preparation, job search and placement, and/or post placement support.

The Australian Government's contribution of \$40 million to the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) National Action Plan on Mental Health (Action Plan) enhanced a number of these programmes. The funding provides 2,500 additional places in the Personal Support Programme, extra support for people who are at risk of losing or leaving their jobs due to their condition, and additional post-placement support through Disability Employment Network and Vocational Rehabilitation Services. The additional funding also provided for the development of additional resources through the JobAccess website to support the participation of people with mental illness in the workplace.

Innovative research projects, also funded under the COAG Action Plan, are helping to increase the evidence base regarding best practice employment assistance to people with mental illness. The findings and outcomes from the projects will inform future policy and programme decisions, supporting the Government's objective of maximising the ability of people with mental illness to find and remain in a job.

The Government's contribution to the COAG Action Plan builds on changes to income support payments and increased employment services announced in the Welfare to Work package. The Welfare to Work changes are designed to encourage and assist four target groups, including people with disability, to participate in the workforce to the extent of their capabilities.