

CRS Australia services

Vocational rehabilitation services

CRS Australia (previously Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service) delivers vocational rehabilitation services to Australians of working age who have a disability, injury or health condition. Rehabilitation programs are tailored to individual needs and can include vocational assessment and counselling, job preparation, placement and training, injury management and workplace modifications. Vocational rehabilitation assists people to manage the impact of their condition on their quality of life and helps them to gain and keep a job.

CRS Australia currently provides services through 176 outlets across Australia, and assists more than 35,000 job seekers with disabilities annually to gain or retain employment. At present, 29 per cent of CRS clients have a mental health condition as their primary disability. CRS Australia employs approximately 1100 rehabilitation consultants from a range of allied health backgrounds, including psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, rehabilitation counsellors, and speech pathologists. The *Disability Services Act 1986* (DSA) guides the context in which CRS Australia offers rehabilitation services to clients.

People with mental health conditions undertaking vocational rehabilitation often experience non-disability related barriers, which nevertheless have a considerable impact on their ability to make progress in their programs. Such barriers include unstable accommodation, dysfunctional family relationships and lack of support due to social isolation. CRS Australia has identified opportunities for better service coordination and pathways for people with a disability and is an active partner in local communities to facilitate referral to the most appropriate agencies.

With regard to dealing appropriately with people affected by mental illness, CRS Australia has developed an internal training package, *Mental Health and Vocational Rehabilitation*, to assist staff to better understand the issues clients experience, to recognise the relationship between work and recovery, and to provide practical tools and strategies. A resource kit, *Journey to Recovery*, has been developed to assist clients and their families to consider employment as a key element of recovery. This can be downloaded from <http://www.crsaustalia.gov.au>.

Two pilot projects, Improving Access to Vocational Rehabilitation for Young People with Mental Illness and the Parenting Payment Participation Project, are addressing the vocational rehabilitation needs of people from these key target groups with mental health conditions.

The CRS Australia Disability Action Plan sets out the actions that CRS Australia will take as an employer, service provider and purchaser to improve access and opportunities for people with disabilities. People with mental health conditions are a priority area for 2005, with strategies including:

- young people with mental health problems;

- parenting payment recipients who often comprise single mothers with depression and/or anxiety;
- mature age workers who have been found to suffer lowered self esteem, loss of resilience, and depressed mood;
- Indigenous clients who may suffer from complex and comorbid conditions and drug and alcohol dependence;
- clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who may experience depression and other mental health conditions as a result of trauma;
- people living in rural and remote areas who may lack access to necessary services for their needs; and
- people with comorbid conditions, including drug and alcohol dependence.