

Supported Employment Position Paper

About Endeavour Foundation

Endeavour Foundation is an independent, for-purpose organisation established in 1951 with a vision to partner with people with disability to live their best lives.

For many years we have been committed to providing employment for people with disability across Australia, particularly those with high support needs. We currently employ more than 1780 people with disability.

Current Challenges

Like many NDIS providers, Endeavour Foundation's finances are stretched, and the commercial viability of some of our Disability Social Enterprises is under review. Financial pressures are most severe in rural and regional locations, and the challenges to increase wages and expand employment offerings are particularly difficult in these thin markets.

Despite these pressures, Endeavour Foundation, like many other Supported Employment providers, is developing new models and business partnerships to create different job opportunities for employees we support.

These new models emphasise pathways to mainstream employment while recognising the important role that Disability Social Enterprises can play in the employment journey.

What Our Employees Tell Us

Employees we support have told us what is important to them about working in our Disability Social Enterprises:

It's not charity, it's a real job: Employees value the routine and structure of work, as well as the real work experience they gain and the income they earn.

I feel valued: Employees report they are valued for their unique contribution and recognised for the work they do. They take genuine pride in a job well done.

I feel connected: A big motivator for many employees is the friendships they have formed at work based on care, teamwork, laughter and respect.

I can learn, grow and achieve my goals: Employees report building confidence and independence, upskilling and qualifications, reaching personal milestones and transitioning to mainstream employment.

Making possibilities a reality for people with disability

The Role of Supported Employment Providers

In its review of the Supported Employment Services Award, the Fair Work Commission (FWC)¹ recognised that Supported Employment providers do not simply act as employers of people with disability but also provide “a range of additional support services which an ordinary employer does not, including training in life skills as well as vocational training, counselling and behavioural support and transport assistance”.

The FWC also found that “the employment opportunities which the supported employment sector provides to disabled persons is of immense value to Australian society”.

Importantly, the FWC also concluded that “arising from the low productivity nature of ADE operations... they cannot financially be sustained by commercial revenue alone and are dependent to a large degree on government funding”.

Focus on Mainstream Jobs

In April 2025, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported that only 24% of working-age NDIS participants are currently in employment on full award wages², or just 21% in some regional areas.

We believe this will only change if the Australian Government prioritises more disability-employment-friendly policies and labour market incentives to attract and support more employers to create job opportunities for people with high support needs.

At Endeavour Foundation, we focus on services that support individuals to take up or transition to mainstream employment and services that build the workplace readiness of mainstream employers. This means we provide services in a range of settings, from learning hubs, Disability Social Enterprises, hosted mainstream employment, supported mainstream employment and self-employment.

The Way Forward

We have identified seven key strategies to improve employment opportunities for people with disability with high support needs.

1. Transition Funding for Disability Social Enterprises

Disability Social Enterprises will require adequate funding support to adjust their business models and absorb wage rises, protect jobs for those with the highest support needs and optimise the transition of workers to inclusive mainstream employment settings.

¹ 2019 FWCFB 8179

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare website, accessed 15 June 2025 (<https://www.aihw.gov.au/australias-disability-strategy/outcomes/employment-and-financial-security/ndis-participants-in-full-award-wage-employment>)

2. Removal of DSP Barriers to Employment

Consistent feedback from employees we support, and their families and carers, identifies that current policy settings for the Disability Support Pension (DSP) create unintended barriers to commencing work, increasing hours and advancing to higher-paid roles. Our view is that pension income rules should encourage employment and career progression. At a minimum, DSP recipients should be entitled to the same income allowance as the Aged Pension Work Bonus.

3. Employment First in NDIS Plans

Endeavour Foundation advocates that as a default NDIS participants should be encouraged to consider employment and that Disability Social Enterprises should be included as a legitimate employment opportunity for those with high support needs who cannot yet obtain mainstream employment or who require skills and work readiness development.

4. Implementing Social Procurement

As the Disability Royal Commission pointed out, as major purchasers of goods and services, governments (federal and state) can exert market pressure through procurement policies and tendering arrangements: “The Australian Government and state and territory governments should leverage this power to encourage inclusive employment practices in the private sector.”

5. More Public Service Jobs

Governments should lead the way by becoming truly inclusive employers. As the Disability Royal Commission recommended, federal, state and territory governments should take steps to increase the employment of people with disability in the public sector. They should establish clear targets for employment of people with disability, including disaggregated targets for people with cognitive and intellectual impairments.

6. Introduction of a Wage Subsidy

Endeavour Foundation advocates moving to the minimum wage for supported employees in all settings as soon as possible. Economic modelling shows that a government wage subsidy for supported employees is affordable, straightforward and has the potential to create 10,000 jobs for supported employees.

7. More Private Sector Jobs

Considerable investment, or a significant effort to achieve a change in social attitudes towards inclusion, is required to create more job opportunities for those with high support needs. This will involve targeting suitable employers, promoting employment of supported employees, providing tailored transition support and ensuring inclusive workplace cultures that promote career progression.

Conclusion

The Disability Social Enterprise sector continues to reform our business and employment models, and we have much to offer mainstream businesses in the aspiration for a more inclusive employment market for people with disability with high support needs.

Government can play a lead role in protecting and growing jobs for people with disability with high support needs by partnering with the sector and with those with lived experience to deliver on these seven key strategies for a better future.

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