



Geographic Labour Mobility Issues Paper: A Response

National Disability Services (NDS) is pleased to provide the following comments to the Productivity Commission for its upcoming study.

Background: The nationwide roll-out of DisabilityCare (NDIS) will impact on the Australian labour market

The disability sector has embarked on an ambitious transition to a radically different way of funding and organising disability support. DisabilityCare was launched in four sites in July 2013 and will be fully implemented nationwide in 2019. Total expenditure on disability support will grow from about \$7 billion dollars in 2011-12 to about \$22 billion in 2019-20.

DisabilityCare has major implications for future disability workforce demand and for future employment participation of people with disability and carers. Both these impacts should be taken into consideration in the Productivity Commission's planned assessment of geographic labour mobility within Australia.

Increasing demand for disability support workers

DisabilityCare aims to redress longstanding inequities in access to funded support. It will significantly increase the number of people eligible for support and the level of support available through more than doubling the funding in real terms. As disability support is typically labour intensive it is generally expected that the demand for workforce will double.

One estimate is that there are currently about 35,000 FTE disability support jobs, comprising about 70,000 disability workers across Australia. While other estimates suggest that the workforce is larger than this, no one disputes that the implementation of DisabilityCare will require a very large increase in the supply of formal paid workers. Adding to workforce pressure, 20% of workers in the disability sector are expected to retire over the next decade and there is significant competition for skills from allied sectors such as aged care, which is also set to grow considerably over the next decades.

The challenge of finding sufficient workers to meet demand will be further complicated by the fact that new workers will need to be available in all communities and most support work cannot be provided remotely. However, there is scope for the development of remote service delivery and work options for some skilled practitioners. These include workers providing some specialist assessment, therapy and communication supports such as Australian Sign Language Interpretation. To be effective, these remote service delivery options will likely require considerable investment in technology.

Widening gap between disability workforce demand and supply in rural and regional communities

Many rural and regional communities have higher proportions of people requiring care or support, including older people, children and people with disability. Correspondingly, there are lower proportions of working age people in these labour markets. Together this creates considerable extra pressure on the demand for disability support workers in rural and regional communities. Further labour market migration out of these communities would likely further exacerbate the gap between demand and supply.

NDS looks forward to the Commission's proposed exploration of interventions to boost workforce in rural and regional communities. In particular, it will be useful for the disability and aged care sectors and government to understand the potential impact of initiatives such as: grants for relocation; tax concessions; and sector specific attraction policies.

Increased diversity in the disability workforce

The current disability workforce is predominantly mature-aged, female, and lacks cultural and linguistic diversity. However, it is anticipated that the future workforce under DisabilityCare will need to better reflect the diversity of people with disability and their families.

There will be opportunities for work amongst a wide range of community groups under DisabilityCare, including people currently working in other sectors. Two thirds of the people registering an interest in disability work at www.carecareers.com.au are from other industries. NDS also envisages that it will be important to recruit new workers from within rural and remote communities, as well as cultural and linguistic minority groups. If this recruitment is successful, related skill acquisition amongst these groups could motivate future geographic labour market mobility amongst these communities.

Increased opportunities for people with disability and carers to find work

In addition to increasing access to support, DisabilityCare also re-orientates support provision so that people with disability and their families can exercise more choice and control over their lives. This will likely increase the number of people with disability and also carers who will be seeking work.

An NDS study¹ found that ABS data on work intentions in the 2009 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers shows that about 200,000 people with disability, not currently in the labour force, indicate they could work with the right supports and employer flexibility. DisabilityCare will enhance the capacity of some of these people to access work. There will also be many carers with new opportunities to (re)enter the labour market or seek more hours of work.

For many of these potential new labour market participants opportunities to undertake remote work will be important. For example, some people with mobility impairments can work more productively in their home environment where they have all the necessary modifications to their space and technology, and to avoid a regular arduous commute.

¹ NDS Policy Paper: The Economic Benefits of Disability Employment: 24 November 2011: Estimates of Labour supply impacts of the OECD integration scenario and the National Disability Insurance Scheme using SDAC 2009.

Similarly, some carers find they can fit their work more easily around their care responsibilities if they are able to work from home.

Furthermore, geographic labour mobility will be enhanced for people with disability and carers who, for the first time, will be able to transport their support packages wherever they go within Australia.

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About National Disability Services

National Disability Services is the peak industry body for non-government disability services. Its purpose is to promote and advance services for people with disability. Its Australia-wide membership includes 820 not-for-profit organisations, which support people with all forms of disability. Its members collectively provide the full range of disability services—from accommodation support, respite and therapy to community access and employment. NDS provides information and networking opportunities to its members and policy advice to State, Territory and Federal governments.