

Job Network Review  
Productivity Commission  
PO Box 80  
BELCONNEN ACT 2616

To Whom It May Concern

Blind Citizens Australia is Australia's peak body for people who are blind or vision impaired, advocating on issues of concern to the approximately 300,000 Australians who are vision impaired.

Employment is the issue most commonly raised by people contacting our advocacy service and this experience informs our interest in the Productivity Commission's Review of Job Network. There are two issues we wish to bring to the Commission's attention: the process of making referrals to specialist employment assistance providers and the introduction of quality assurance and minimum service standards for employment service providers. Each issue is briefly addressed below.

### **Referrals to Specialist Employment Assistance Providers**

Approximately 19% of the workforce-age population has a disability (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1998: 14). As the Commission is aware, people with disabilities wishing to obtain job search assistance can choose to utilise Job Network agencies or agencies funded by the Department of Families and Community Services (DFACS).

It is estimated that 14.7% of people referred by Centrelink to Intensive Assistance Job Network providers in 2000-2001 had a disability (DWRSB 2001). Despite this, only 3% of Job Network sites provide specialist employment services (35 out of 1,100) (DWRSB 2001).

Many Job Network members providing specialist employment assistance to people with disabilities limit their services to people with a particular disability, for example, people who are blind. The potential client pool for such services is thus demographically rather than geographically prescribed.

The current referral process requires Centrelink clients to specifically request to be referred to a specialist service. This system is adequate for those people with a disability who are already in touch with disability services. However, there are many people with disabilities who will not

be in contact with disability services and so are unlikely to be aware that specialist employment agencies are an alternative.

As you would appreciate, the small number and demographic focus of many specialist employment services make promotion and advertising of these services at each Centrelink office impossible. In addition, we have been informed that some Centrelink staff refer clients to DFACS funded employment services without first informing the client of the option of being referred to a specialist Job Network provider.

It is clear that the way in which Centrelink staff inform people with disabilities about the employment assistance options available to them is crucial. Informal research done by the Royal Blind Society of NSW found that specialist employment services operating in states with low Centrelink staff turnover rates received a higher number of client referrals because of the local knowledge retained by Centrelink staff (Simpson 2001).

Centrelink staff should more actively promote the option of specialist Job Network providers to clients with disclosed disabilities.

### **Quality Assurance**

DFACS has commenced a process to ensure that all employment services it funds comply with the Commonwealth Government's Disability Service Standards and associated minimum service standards. This will protect clients of these services by ensuring they receive an adequate minimum level of service. Compliance with the Disability Service Standards should be extended to all Job Network service providers.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to this review. If you would like to discuss this submission further, please contact Ms Collette O'Neill, National Policy Officer, on 03 9521 3433.

Yours sincerely

Maryanne Diamond  
**Executive Officer**