THE FUTURE OF REMOTE PARTICIPATION AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICING ARRANGEMENTS

DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AUSTRALIA’S RESPONSE TO THE DISCUSSION PAPER
The Future of Remote Participation and Employment Servicing Arrangements
Disability Employment Australia’s Response to the Discussion Paper

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Executive Summary ........................................................................................................................................... 5
Introduction ......................................................................................................................................................... 6
How can we provide services in a better way? ................................................................................................. 9
  - Simpler and more integrated services ....................................................................................................... 9
  - A single provider ..................................................................................................................................... 12
  - The importance of economic development ............................................................................................. 13
  - Strengthening job opportunities ............................................................................................................... 14
  - The role of Centrelink ........................................................................................................................... 15
How can we improve results for people? ........................................................................................................ 16
  - Matching services with community and individual need ........................................................................ 16
  - Labour mobility ...................................................................................................................................... 17
  - Young people ........................................................................................................................................ 17
  - Women ................................................................................................................................................... 18
  - People with disability ............................................................................................................................. 18
  - Finding incentives to participate ............................................................................................................ 19
How do we get more community ownership and responsibility? ............................................................... 21
Issues for service providers to consider ........................................................................................................ 22
  - Assessment ........................................................................................................................................... 22
  - Payments to providers ............................................................................................................................ 23
  - Performance management ..................................................................................................................... 23
About Disability Employment Australia ....................................................................................................... 24
Community Based rehabilitation ...................................................................................................................... 25
Participatory Action Research ...................................................................................................................... 26
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Disability Employment Australia is pleased to contribute towards the future of remote servicing in Australia. The discussion paper has a clear focus on employment services for Indigenous people living in communities; our submission is therefore delivered in response to that context. As the peak body representing Disability Employment Services we are concerned at the apparent lack of focus on disability issues. We submit three principle recommendations to the panel.

- **Community Based Rehabilitation.** We recommend future policies are informed by the lessons learned by the World Health Organisation. Services are community-directed and address local needs to reduce poverty and increase livelihoods.

- **Cultural appropriateness.** Disability and health conditions are more prevalent in the Indigenous population however services are rarely accessed due to cultural stigma. A new employment service must be designed to be culturally appropriate so people get the help they need.

- **Extension of current remote contracts.** There is no quick fix. Extending current contracts ensures stability and provides time to consult and explore a new specialised services model.

We congratulate Government on their commitment to closing the gap of Indigenous disadvantage. Now is the time for innovation.

Disability Employment Australia recommends WHO's Community Based Rehabilitation as a model for integrated remote servicing. Communities must define their own outcomes. Existing contracts should be extended to 2015 to allow sufficient time to design a culturally appropriate specialised employment service.
INTRODUCTION

Disability Employment Australia welcomes the opportunity to discuss remote employment servicing, especially within the context of closing the gap of Indigenous disadvantage. We applaud Government’s willingness to consider innovative solutions. We are concerned however by the minimal attention given to disability and health conditions in the discussion paper. Disability Employment Services are designed to assist job seekers with disability, health conditions and/or injuries into employment. The prevalence of disability alone among the Indigenous population is approximately 2.4 times higher than other Australians. 1

The issue of disability is complex as it has different connotations in Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. We are concerned people are missing out on the most appropriate service. As of 31 March 2011 there were 43,700 job seekers registered in remote Employment Service Areas, 2 yet only three (3) percent accessed Disability Employment Services.

![Figure 1. Participation in remote employment services of 31 March 2011](image)

People living in rural and remote areas are significantly less likely to access disability services. 3 Low usage of disability services among Indigenous people has been attributed to a lack of cultural appropriateness. It is not an indication that the services are not wanted, or needed. It is more likely a manifestation of issues experienced by a minority group within a minority group. 4 This is a cross-cultural issue that will require a culturally accessible, community-driven, integration of specialised services to increase employment outcomes for people living in remote Indigenous communities.

Disability Employment Australia agrees current remote policies need to change. We agree that a market-based solution isn’t working. We agree that an innovative and flexible approach is needed and submit that the key performance indicators of remote employment services are community-directed and that future policies foster community-driven implementation. Inflexible requirements in an over-monitored environment have been found to stifle innovative employment solutions for the most vulnerable. 5

The building blocks to Close the Gap of Indigenous disadvantage resonate with the Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) model developed by the World Health Organisation. 6 We recommend the CBR model be seriously considered to shape remote servicing policy, as recent studies have shown its effectiveness in increasing community responsibility in remote Aboriginal communities. 7

---

3 Ibid
6 World Health Organisation, 2010, Community-Based Rehabilitation: CBR Guidelines, Geneva
Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) is a development strategy that is currently implemented in over 90 countries throughout the world to address the needs of people with disabilities and their family members. CBR aims to provide rehabilitation, reduce poverty, equalize opportunities and promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in their communities.  

The objectives to Close the Gap of Indigenous disadvantage are:

- Close the life expectancy gap within a generation;
- Halve the gap in mortality rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under five within a decade;
- Ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four year olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years (by 2013);
- Halve the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (by 2018);
- At least halve the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020; and
- Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and other Australians within a decade (by 2018).

COAG has endorsed building blocks to address the gap and integration is a principle of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement. It is difficult to envisage how these objectives can be met without an integration of services such as that proposed by the WHO CBR model. We acknowledge this model is untested in Australia within an employment services context, but it is has proven to be effective in many other parts of the world.

Disability Employment Australia confirms our willingness to support a pilot of this model, with a longitudinal study with evidence-based research methodology.

The International Labour Office similarly endorses a CBR approach:

Community-based approaches to developing the skills of disabled people and preparing them for jobs or self-employment are an essential strategy in reducing poverty and addressing social inequality.

---

4 http://www.who.int/disabilities/cbr/mdg_cbr_infosheet.pdf
11 Ibid
Community Based Rehabilitation models have been implemented in remote Australian communities using Participatory Action Research (PAR). We acknowledge that future policies are being discussed with communities, but believe consultations should go much deeper, and for much longer, with focus on integration of all services provided to the community, not simply employment. This would need to be managed appropriately, based on existing protocols. Our members who work in remote communities have indicated they have received reports of ‘consultation fatigue’ from communities.

Disability Employment Australia strongly supports a permanent presence in communities if it is community-directed. We submit that community leaders should be present on the selection panel. This represents shared risk taking and is a sign of a partnership. The procurement selection should be weighted to advantage organisations that have the support of the local communities and can provide specialist services. The model proposed calls for a single provider (to manage the Community Based Rehabilitation program) who will draw on the expertise of existing services but would serve as a gatekeeper for service provision with a clear community mandate and accountability to Government.

In many cases, the Indigenous values of autonomy and relatedness clash with non-Indigenous values of employment. While this is widely acknowledged, policy regarding the employment of Indigenous people in remote areas has not adapted. Past policies have been imposed on communities; future policies must address community-directed needs.

Disability Employment Australia’s response is focused on remote employment servicing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Accordingly, our recommendations are to be held in that context. We recommend a further extension of all remote deeds and programs until 2015. Given the willingness of Government to consider alternate models of servicing, and the pervasiveness of health and social issues, we do not believe a start date of 01 July 2013 is realistic. Extending the deeds results in more development time, fewer disruptions and the opportunity to explore different models to address regional, rural, remote and very remote needs.
HOW CAN WE PROVIDE SERVICES IN A BETTER WAY?

We submit that services could be delivered in a better way if the Government was to adopt the World Health Organisation’s Community Based Rehabilitation philosophy (CBR). CBR has been successfully applied to disability rehabilitation services in remote Aboriginal communities. Through Participatory Action Research (PAR) we can work collaboratively with remote communities to explore their perceptions of disability, valued-status and work so that more culturally accessible services can be offered. This model requires individual consultations and extensive research within individual communities. However, evidence suggests it would result in greater flexibility and contributes to rebuilding trust between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous ‘western, imposed’ services.

We submit that a more collaborative approach is needed between other services. If the multitude of services currently servicing these communities were integrated and community-directed, a permanent provider presence in communities would become an increasingly viable option. An integrated model also provides opportunity for cost savings with economies of scale in relation to travel, information technology and infrastructure for visiting support people.

Simpler and more integrated services

We support services that are more integrated; however, we do not believe integrated employment services goes far enough. Integration is required across health, education, employment, social and empowerment services.

“... if you’ve got some sort of employment strategy happening, then you probably need something along the lines of a training strategy happening as well, a health strategy happening at the same time, a domestic violence strategy going, but they’ll need to actually work together and not be totally isolated because one’s with the police and one’s with DOCS and one’s with the hospital and one’s with whoever, and not enough of that happens.”

(Aboriginal Language and Culture Teacher, Wilcannia)

If policy was to shift towards a CBR model, the CBR program provider would ideally draw on the existing expertise of specialist employment services in remote areas. It is therefore important to reconsider what a remote servicing employment services model should look like, with particular focus on addressing disability, health conditions and injury in a culturally appropriate way.

A disability-specific employment service may therefore seem irrelevant to many Aboriginal people, further compounded by the stigma and/or fear associated with certain conditions, particularly mental illness. The marketing of a disability-specific service requires a nuanced approach to demonstrate its relevance to people who may not recognise or want to recognise their disability related needs.

We submit that services would be simpler if all people in remote communities were entitled to the same program. A new program based on specialised employment programs designed to mitigate the impact of disability, health conditions or injuries. The current general model of servicing is not working by virtue of the fact that many people aren’t getting the help they need.  

Disability Employment Australia submits the following suggestions for a simplified employment service and bases them on the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) principles as indicated below.  

Service delivery must be highly resourced. It must be holistic and draw from vocational, cultural and allied health specialists. Strategies must be developed to address the needs of individuals, and how those needs interact with the needs of their families and the broader community. Servicing must address community-directed goals and be person-centred. The service must be culturally accessible and should avoid words like ‘disability’ and ‘barrier’. It must focus on wellness, strengths and a sense of belonging. Extensive input is required from targeted participants as this service must be meaningful to them. Given the disengagement with previous ‘imposed’ employment servicing models, all references to past programs must be removed. We need a new service, not a reiteration and/or rebranding of unsuccessful models.

The service must provide all participants with the option of ongoing support, at whatever level is required, for as long as required. Ongoing support services are expanded to assist employers build their capacity to ensure enduring employment relationships with people living in remote communities. Job in Jeopardy services should be actively marketed to employers and available to all clients.

We recommend the funding framework is modelled on Disability Employment Services. All job seekers living in remote Indigenous communities attract the same funding as a level two job seeker in the Employment Support Service. The remote loading is increased from 70% to 100%. All participants are entitled to thirty-six (36) months of service. Controls are built into the framework to identify and address ‘gaming behaviours’ such as ‘parking’ and ‘creaming,’ for example, the CBR program provider would consult with the community to ensure the right services were being offered.

Disability Employment Australia supports outcome based funding. Outcome requirements in a new model must reflect community goals and be closely aligned with the realities of service provision in remote areas. We propose three types of outcomes: Foundational, Participatory and Employment.

---

18 ‘Creaming’ and ‘parking’ occur where organisations have a financial incentive to focus their efforts on clients with the lowest support requirements. Initial service fees that are too high can result in parking, high outcome fees can result in creaming.
The Future of Remote Participation and Employment Servicing Arrangements
Disability Employment Australia’s Response to the Discussion Paper

![Proposed hierarchy of outcomes](image)

**Figure 3. Proposed hierarchy of outcomes**

We submit these outcomes are available at a full and pathway level. A provider has the flexibility to claim one outcome in each category for every registration period. Outcomes are paid after thirteen (13), twenty-six (26) and fifty-two (52) weeks, with the biggest remuneration and performance being awarded to full 52 week outcomes for employment. This will drive evidence-based practice to ensure retention.

Foundational outcomes would encompass language, literacy and numeracy outcomes. It must also be possible for the community to set its own expectations of a foundational outcome. Other skills might include self-awareness, cultural heritage and language, storytelling, arts and crafts, caring for country, or activities of daily living. The spirit of foundational outcomes lies in developing employability skills for the future.

Participatory outcomes further develop employability skills and would encompass formal and informal training, education, work experience, volunteering and community development activities. The community must be able to create participatory opportunities they consider valuable, for example, social enterprises that will lead to open employment. Any new service model must support (rather than direct) community implementation.

Open employment outcomes, paid at award wages, in real long-term jobs, remains the defining measure of success. Similar financial and performance rewards must exist for the attainment of tertiary qualifications, or for graduating high school. The requirements for a provider to achieve an outcome in a new model must be better aligned with the realities of servicing. Outcome requirements should not be based on a speculative assessment of future work capacity. A provider should be awarded the flexibility to anchor an outcome at any time. Outcomes can be built over time. Abolish the need for permissible breaks.

---

*On-going employment is made difficult due to cultural commitments such as sorry leave, cultural leave and sports carnivals. One employer interviewed had employed over thirty indigenous workers in the past two years. Of the thirty or so*
Disability Employment Australia supports recommendation 8.1 in the independent review of the compliance framework. The Employment Pathway Plan must be redesigned to be culturally appropriate, for example, in plain English, local dialects or diagrammatically.

In our proposed model, the requirement to substantiate a disability, injury or health condition with medical evidence goes out the window. All people living in remote communities get a specialised service. What is delivered during that service would depend on individual and family needs. This requires a new assessment philosophy, which we discuss on page 21.

Quality is pivotal for a non-market based solution. We support the introduction of a cultural audit of services, as recommended by the 2010 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Health Strategy. Similar to the Disability Service Standards, we submit that Indigenous Service Standards are developed and incorporated into any deeds. Compliance to these standards would be mandatory for service provision. A single CBR program provider could monitor compliance against standards for all services provided.

A single provider

Disability Employment Australia supports a single provider model where that provider invests in a permanent presence in the community and where the community has given that provider a mandate. A single provider in our view would manage the Community Based Rehabilitation program and draw on the expertise of existing services to meet the community’s priorities. The CBR program provider serves as a gateway between the communities, Government and specialised services. We applaud the initiatives taken in this direction through the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Servicing Delivery.

There are concerns that writing a good tender doesn’t equate to the provision of quality service. We recommend contracts or funding is awarded not simply on the basis of a written document, but that time is taken to talk to the community about the organisations wanting to provide service. The community must be a part of the selection process.

---

22 Senate Inquiry Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee, 2009, DEEWR tender process to award employment services contracts, Canberra.
We note the concern that a job seeker would lose their right to choose a provider, however, we acknowledge that multiple providers tend to ‘trip over’ each other in a limited labour market and that provider choice is already extremely limited in remote areas. We submit that a single provider would have a community mandate to coordinate all services delivered onsite and that a single provider would draw on the expertise of other professionals and organisations. This would facilitate economies of scale and allow the sharing of the considerable costs involved in remote servicing. Further work opportunities would be made available as infrastructure would be required. Contractors awarded this work must engage local workers in some capacity.

The importance of economic development

Many remote communities were established simply to administer welfare policies with minimal economic development. A social enterprise has merit in static labour markets and can lead to increased participation and skills improvement. It also gives ownership to the community.

Disability Employment Australia supports activities that will result in meaningful and enduring employment outcomes. Social enterprises align with the policy objective of sourcing innovative solutions to build economic capacity. A recent study has shown social enterprises are community-driven and meet a local need, so the likelihood of cultural appropriateness increases.

As a whole, the dominant foci of our survey respondents were on creating opportunities for people to participate in their community, and on finding new solutions to social, environmental, cultural and economic problems.23

A social enterprise relies on paid and unpaid workers. It exists to fulfil a mission identified by a community. Development of the enterprise can be supported through philanthropy or through partnership with private investors (e.g. Australia’s mining industry) through social impact bonds. Opportunities can be fostered for inter-community social enterprises to trade with each other.

Future policies must ensure adequate education and training for the Indigenous business leaders of the future. Leadership development programs must be delivered to equal numbers of men and women. Economic development has been historically difficult. Implementation of a CBR provider for communities would require an investment in infrastructure.

There are limited employment opportunities with a significant gap between the size of the labour force and the number of jobs generated in the local economy as well as inadequate physical infrastructure for many economic development proposals. Low levels of education, limited opportunities for training, poor health, transport difficulties, and issues of alcohol and drug abuse are also factors affecting employment capacity.

It is clear that in order for economies to develop in remote communities other needs must first be met, such as health, education and safety. There is a need to identify skills and income generating activities that will increase quality of life and allow people to stay on the land. Opportunities that allow people to contribute to family and community livelihoods should be rewarded. Focus needs to shift away from clearly identifiable and self-sufficient work. Activities or work that promotes hygiene, food handling or market gardening are examples.

The International Labour Office publication Skills Development through Community Based Rehabilitation (2008) details several strategies to increase the economic capacity of individuals and communities in remote areas.

**Strengthening job opportunities**

Strengthening opportunities will only go so far if the capacity of Indigenous people in remote communities is not increased to match the demand. In a 2009 project, the Ngaanyatjarra Council found:

*The biggest issue isn’t a limited labour market. While there are more indigenous job seekers than there are jobs, there are more jobs than there are indigenous people with the skills to fill them.*

It was estimated in the same report that only 10.8% of the jobs on Ngaanyatjarra lands were filled by Aboriginal people. In the interim DES evaluation, providers responded that a lack of available training courses limited job options for Indigenous people. We submit that remote communities could increase education outcomes through an information technology infrastructure that facilitated distance learning opportunities by video conferencing. As the capacity of the community increases, work opportunities arise to staff and maintain the facility.

---

26 DEEWR, 2010, Interim Evaluation of Disability Employment Services, Canberra
There is mixed feedback regarding CDEP. We have received reports that CDEP works well in some areas and imparts important employability skills. In other areas we have heard that it is no different to not working and is not considered valuable.

Work is primarily managing social relatedness and autonomy. Being unemployed or employed on the CDEP are not different states but merely different social locales for fortifying relatedness and autonomy. Reaffirming ties is equally, if not more, important than attendance at the formal workplace.  

Given the resultant disruption to servicing, we recommend that all contracts are extended until 2015 to allow adequate time to consider alternative models of service that align with COAG building blocks, such as CBR.

The mining industry has been the most successful in generating jobs for people in remote communities. Employers also deserve a specialist employment service. Some employers consider innovative ways of recruiting Indigenous people, for example, by having a physical presence in the community and talking to people about their jobs and modifying the recruitment process to be culturally accessible.  

A good example of this is Rio Tinto’s Aboriginal Work Ready Program that has helped ninety people start work in the mining sector. Like other services, employers will need to drastically rethink their methods, but they should be supported by specialist employment services in order to do so.

Child care and education services offer significant areas for job and community development. There are also opportunities for an eco-tourism industry. Eva McRae Williams and Rolf Gerritsen (2010) share their views on employment in a remote Aboriginal community:

A better alternative may be to design forms of work that accord with Aboriginal preferences to be on the land and to work when work needs to be done, rather than to set timetables. One option is to develop work on suites of activities, such as eco-system management, art and crafts, and ecotourism (Altman 2006; Armstrong et al. 2009; Gerritsen 2009). Such economic activities would accommodate rather than ignore Aboriginal world views.

The role of Centrelink

Disability Employment Australia welcomes the recommendations for remote servicing in the 2010 independent review. We support the recommendation that Centrelink is provided with additional contact people. We would envisage that a CBR program provider, with a permanent, community-endorsed presence, could be nominated.

Centrelink is the face of government. There is a deep mistrust between Indigenous people and government authority. Integrated services are a feature of the CBR model and COAG building blocks. We are very supportive of wrap-around services and recommend they are provided to all job seekers living in a remote location. This could also be facilitated by a CBR program provider.

---

28 Ibid
29 The Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining, Indigenous Employment in the Australian Minerals Industry, The University of Queensland
HOW CAN WE IMPROVE RESULTS FOR PEOPLE?

There are instances where CBR has improved the standard of living for people in remote areas. This model should be thoroughly explored and extrapolated to holistic community-driven services that are supported by traditional mainstream expertise and specialisation. Future policies must enable communities to determine their definition of results. Existing remote contracts should be extended to 2015 to allow adequate consultation and program development time. It is not realistic to implement a new model in just over eighteen months.

It is important to recognise that there is no quick fix to overcoming the problems in remote communities. It will take time and a commitment from all parties to work together to deliver lasting improvements.

Matching services with community and individual need

Anthropologists have said there is no greater cultural divide than the one between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians. This is apparent when examining attitudes to employment. Future remote servicing policies must go further than simply acknowledging the centrality of autonomy and relatedness to Indigenous ways-of-being and world views. The fact that employment (and its associated values) is a cultural construct is often overlooked. Employment needs to be constantly redefined within the broad context of the community and the narrow context of individual responsibility. Put simply, employment (or participation) goals must be person-directed and of value. For many Indigenous people in remote areas work is maintaining relationships in a moral culture.

You work for yourself, take responsibility for yourself, or maybe just your little family. I [am] always working for family, that’s my main job, being responsible to family. Mother’s side, father’s side, husband ones, always working to show them I love and respect them. Then I know they will be there for my son and be working for him (Field notes, February 2008).

There must be more stringent requirements for non-Indigenous service providers to receive adequate training and competence in managing cross-cultural issues in a remote location. As recently as 2004, studies have shown non-Indigenous workers stereotyping Indigenous people as a barrier. Kendall and Marshall (2004) found these pervasive stereotypes among non-Indigenous workers in remote communities: a fear of Aboriginal hostility, belief that communities don’t want help, belief that Aboriginal people are not motivated and there’s too much conflict amongst Aboriginal people to bother helping. These myths are debunked eloquently by an Aboriginal leader:

“We don’t care if you’re black, brown, white or brindle, we just want help — our children are disabled because no one will help.’

---

36 Ibid
A single CBR provider would work with the community to ensure culturally appropriate servicing. Through that community mandate, the CBR provider would coordinate services to meet needs. This would involve assisting service providers to work through the complex web of emotions and general sense of helplessness reported among workers. To provide service to a remote Indigenous community one must be as skilled in cross-cultural communication as one is in their vocation.

**Labour mobility**

Disability Employment Australia is fully supportive of measures that will assist people who wish to take up work in a more buoyant labour market. Travel and accommodation services could be sourced through the CBR provider, or the CBR provider could draw on regional or national services. A new specialised employment service would be better placed to ensure retention.

We remind policy-makers that many Indigenous people will not want to leave their homes and families to take up employment (including fly in / fly out work). There is evidence that indicates when Indigenous persons have migrated to larger towns they have not improved their employment status.  

Our members have voiced a concern that this policy appears to target the most capable Indigenous people to leave their communities to take up work, which deprives the community of their leaders and peers.

**Young people**

The specialised program based on DES is well suited to young people. There are significant instances of hearing impairments among young Indigenous people, however they are rarely acknowledged nor adapted to with amplification aids. A PAR process could identify these people and a specialised employment service could provide access to amplification aids. The community would direct and implement the intervention – it is expected that literacy and participation levels may rise as a result.

The result of these interventions could help improve hearing aid use, thus improving literacy levels and behavioural problems, increasing school participation, and also improve personal and social states.

Our members have provided anecdotal reports of perverse incentives for young people to commit crimes in order to be incarcerated, where they receive regular food, routine and peer interaction. Young people must be consulted and their aspirations explored so appropriate recreational and educational supports are in place. A single CBR provider would be well placed to conduct such research and then get the ball rolling. Support and assistance must be provided to young people wishing to access tertiary or secondary education outside of the community, including provisions to cover multiple trips home over the school year. A CBR provider would manage students visiting home and costs would be mitigated due to economy of scale.

Tomorrow’s Indigenous leaders will come from this group of people. Leadership programs must be delivered to equal numbers of males and females.

---

40 Ibid
Women

Much of the work performed by women, for no remuneration, doesn’t fit the current non-Indigenous model of work. The role of women is a particular focus of a CBR program, for example, promoting school and education and helping kids to get there.

Disability Employment Australia refers the panel to the recommendations in the 2010 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Health Strategy: 41

- Include childcare in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and education programs
- Deliver Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women’s leadership programs aimed at development and advancement
- Organisations and agencies to employ and support career advancement of equal numbers of male and female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees within structural levels.
- Social and cultural health and peer support opportunities and programs – such as basket making, textile and fibre work, shell and wood works, story work and social food gathering and cooking.
- Increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women working and studying in the health workforce particularly in women’s health areas

People with disability

Disability Employment Australia reiterates our concern regarding the lack of focus on disability and health related issues in this discussion paper. It is clear that disability isn’t widely acknowledged or discussed in remote communities. That does not remove the need for services, what it does demonstrate is a need for culturally appropriate services.

In the broadest sense, policy needs to shift away from a medical model of disability to a social model. Much work needs to be done to explore an Indigenous model of disability. It has been widely acknowledged that many Indigenous people will not disclose (or are not aware of) their disability. The current entry requirements are restrictive and require medical evidence. It is extremely difficult for a remote job seeker to obtain the necessary medical evidence for a referral to a specialised program, let alone for them to keep it.

Medical model

Historically, disability has been viewed as a property of the medical sciences. The site of disability has been the body and the efforts to reduce, prohibit, and eliminate disability have focused on the individual. Consequently, the concept of disability has been built upon a (bio)medical vocabulary. Ideas of the normal body and its normal functions have been the point of departure to identify disabled people; those who diverge from normal curves of IQ, faculty of vision,

hearing, mobility, and other body functions create the disabled population, those in need of corrections and treatments. 42

Social model

Disability is a societal problem and political issue. The model concentrates on the social and physical environment—the barriers to participation, unequal rights, discrimination, oppression, and asserts that society disables by creating barriers to independence. Management of disability within this model requires social action. 43

Disability is not as widely acknowledged or accepted in Indigenous culture compared to non-Indigenous. In the current model, this cultural difference prevents people from accessing the most appropriate, specialised, employment service. The social model is closest to the Indigenous perspective:

For instance, many Aboriginal communities interpret diseases and disabilities according to the imbalance and disruption they cause within families and communities rather than in terms of the personal suffering or physical difficulties they create for individuals. 44

Disability Employment Australia supports a simplified employment services model that is integrated with other support services as per COAG building blocks and embedded within a CBR program. It may be more appropriate to talk about family and hierarchical support needs. As illustrated by Kendall and Marshall, it is not culturally appropriate to require an Indigenous person to put themselves in the centre of attention by asking for help.

If anyone did speak about the needs or difficulties faced by a person with a disability, it was within the appropriate hierarchy of the family structure and, usually, at a public gathering of the extended family. 45

Family-based interventions are increasingly identified to address serious concerns in Indigenous communities. It is becoming apparent that highly individualised supports are not as effective as community or family-based supports. 46 The CBR model provides strategies to build inclusive communities: where the community adapts to the person with disability instead of the other way round. This appears to be more culturally appropriate.

Finding incentives to participate

The broader questions here are, ‘what will motivate the individuals, and therefore the groups (and vice versa), within this community to identify where they want to be, and how to get there?’ The CBR model sets out to answer those questions.

Current policy is committed to the ‘no show, no pay’ concept, which relies on the presumption that a welfare payment can be linked to ‘good’ or ‘desirable’ behaviours. This works fine in a monetary economy, but many people living in remote communities exist within a moral economy. Therefore we question the effectiveness of financial sanctions. In many cases, these sanctions result in greater financial stress not only for the individual, but their social network that consequently help them out. In other words penalising the individual penalises the group. If financial sanctions continue, the current approach of small, early sanctions is preferable to later, larger sanctions (e.g. non-payment periods).

We submit that any new service model is focused on community-driven participation incentives and moves away from punitive measures. For example, in a moral economy there are disincentives for a person to work.

> ‘Why should I work, I get nothing but humbug [demands for resources] when I work.’

A number of questions need to be addressed. Will future policies continue to acknowledge cultural differences yet continue with ‘normalisation’, or will they move to an innovative model that is culturally appropriate? Will policy goals align with Indigenous imperatives? We support employment and activities that are considered meaningful by the individual and their community. We acknowledge that what is meaningful and valued may differ from community to community and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons.

Disability Employment Australia promotes a person-centred approach to servicing. Therefore we support voluntary income management. We note with concern the poverty stigma attached to presenting a ‘basics card’ in public. Along with the Australian Council of Social Service, Disability Employment Australia supports the Henry Review recommendation to increase the rate of the New Start Allowance.

We acknowledge the policy of mutual obligation. In remote communities there are often more people than jobs. Training courses and work experience opportunities are scarce. It is not fair to impose the same participation obligations as areas with significantly more opportunity. In these instances, it is preferable that the community lead the participation expectations for its people. While the benefits of employment are not misunderstood, there are many communities that have other priorities, for example: protection of children, reducing alcohol abuse and domestic violence. We submit that employment services may be hindered if parallel services were not established to address their primary concerns. We further submit that health and social services may be hindered if they weren’t integrated with employment services. A single CBR program provider who coordinates and directs all external services, mandated by community-directed imperatives, could facilitate this.

---

HOW DO WE GET MORE COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY?

Disability Employment Australia submits that greater ownership and responsibility will result when policy acts on the priorities identified by individual communities. The issue of community ownership and responsibility has been exacerbated through years of distrust and the persistent efforts of policy-makers to ‘normalise’ differing cultural views of employment, resulting in ‘mutual incomprehension’.

However, this continual work focus has had little impact on changing the ways-of-being and world views of Aboriginal residents in Ngukurr. Rules of relatedness continue to be privileged over official workplace rules and are enforced through ever-present Aboriginal surveillance systems.  


If there is a consultation process and community priorities are overlooked, given lip-service, or ignored, the likelihood of community responsibility diminishes. Services must be community-directed, draw on evidenced-based projects and lessons from previous cross-functional programs.

A CBR program has been successfully implemented over a period of three years in remote communities in far north Queensland. The program was implemented using participatory action research. It was found that:

[...] the capacity of the community had been strengthened to maintain engagement in such a process with the support of the local project worker, upholding the tenets of CBR philosophy.  


Given the success of the CBR model locally and internationally, we submit that greater community ownership and responsibility will be generated if future policies adopted its tenets.
ISSUES FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS TO CONSIDER

This response has focused on an alternative model of servicing for remote Indigenous communities; accordingly our recommendations are specifically for this cohort. The recommendations we have made may not be suited to rural or regional cohorts. We would welcome an opportunity to discuss regional and rural servicing.

The issues of remote servicing are broad and complex. Disability Employment Australia recommends all remote contracts are extended until 2015 to allow more time to explore alternate models of procurement and servicing. We reiterate our willingness to assist with a pilot to develop an Australian evidence base for a Community Based Rehabilitation program.

Disability Employment Australia acknowledges that current policies include Local Implementation Plans and Government Business Managers. These policies are aligned with a CBR program. We support the recent recommendation to reclassify the role of Government Business Manager to Government Engagement and Coordination Officer.\(^{52}\)

Assessment

Disability Employment Australia submits that a single CBR provider would be in an optimal position to conduct (or coordinate) assessments. These assessments must be allowed to include feedback from the individual, their family or network, the specialist employment service, cultural specialists, and allied health specialists. Assessments should be flexible and allow input over a longer period of time. The current format is not culturally appropriate and relies heavily on medical evidence, which can be difficult to source and even more challenging to retain. This is compounded by cultural perceptions of disability and/or mental health issues.

Particularly in remote and outer regional areas the evaluation was told of the inappropriateness of assessments conducted by ‘drop in’ assessors with insufficient understanding of local conditions and cultural norms.\(^{53}\)

In our proposed model of specialised employment services the purpose of an assessment to determine program eligibility is defunct. We submit assessments for job seekers in remote communities are strengths-based, person-centred and provide culturally appropriate priorities for service provision and an objective assessment of current work capacity. Consequently, all initial assessments must be in person. We submit that determining an employment benchmark based on future work capacity with intervention is flawed as it is speculative and not evidence-based.

We reiterate our support for a ‘cultural accreditation’ of all services in remote communities. This is aligned with the recommendations found in the Independent Review of the Compliance Framework.\(^{54}\)

All Job Capacity Assessments should be made by a person with expertise that is relevant to the particular job seeker’s circumstances, except in narrowly specified circumstances.\(^{54}\)

We submit that any assessments for people living in remote communities are conducted by an assessor who is approved by the community as culturally appropriate. This would ensure the assessor has a thorough understanding of local issues, opportunities and priorities. We envisage this approach would lead to more


\(^{54}\) Independent Review of the Compliance Framework, 2010, Recommendation 6.2
family-centred assessments and group approaches to overcoming issues. Many Indigenous people report feeling shame when put in the centre of attention. Many non-Indigenous people do not. Employers are remodelling their recruitment practices, including assessment methodologies, to be more culturally appropriate. Future policy should leverage from this example.

**Payments to providers**

We agree that simplifying the funding arrangements makes sense. Given the well-documented gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous disadvantage we recommend all remote job seekers attract the highest level of funding. We suggest that all job seekers attract the same service fees as a funding level two participant in the Employment Support Service. The DES funding framework affords a provider greater flexibility for expenditure.

Payments to providers have not been indexed in some time; this represents a decrease of funding per person. Serious consideration must be given to increasing fees. Disability Employment Australia also recommends the remote loading is increased from seventy (70) percent to one hundred (100) percent.

A challenge to starting any new social enterprise is capital. Funds would need to be made to providers in advance to assist the formation of these crucial economic capacity building ventures. The Indigenous Remote Service Delivery Special Account could be used to pilot a CBR program provider model.

**Performance management**

Quality must be integral to the performance framework. We recommend the establishment of a CBR program. This program would have a permanent presence in the community and would focus on achieving community goals. It would also serve as a gateway between government and specialist service providers. The CBR program provider is ideally situated to assist Government to monitor and report on service quality. Contract management should be concerned with quality, not with minutiae. A high level of scrutiny should apply to outcome payments and a greater level of flexibility should be given to participation and administrative activities.

The focus must be on long-term outcomes, not short-term throughput measures that are vulnerable to manipulation. There must be a focus on long-term, genuine person-directed outcomes. Disability Employment Australia recommends communities are able to define what an outcome means to them. Achievement of community-directed goals must be recognised and rewarded in the framework.

We submit that the financial and performance benefits are weighted towards long-term employment outcomes. A provider should be able to claim all three types of outcomes in a single registration period. The foundation and participatory goals may differ from one community to the next.
ABOUT DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AUSTRALIA

Disability Employment Australia is the peak industry body for Australia's Disability Employment Services (DES).

Disability Employment Australia exists to represent the interests of our members at a national level to government and other stakeholders. We have a range of functions designed to support our members to achieve best practice service provision in their role to find employment outcomes for people with disability. We advise, advocate, train, inform, as well as undertake events to promote the sector.

We have a particular focus on:

- government policy relevant to disability employment;
- issues impacting on the viability of the industry;
- removing barriers to workforce participation for people with disability; and
- promoting best practice and innovative ways to find people with disability meaningful and sustainable jobs.

Working from a social inclusion perspective, Disability Employment Australia approaches its work from a society-wide perspective and is committed to identifying opportunities to realise a 'better deal' for jobseekers and employees with disability and to educating the public about issues related to disability employment.

Disability Employment Australia has played an active role over many years in providing advice on increasing workforce participation rates for people with disability and has worked hard to establish itself as the peak organisation in relation to disability and open employment.

Disability Employment Australia has worked closely with government Ministers and departments over the past three years, during which time the Australian Government has undertaken significant consultation and review in the area of disability and employment.

Additionally, Disability Employment Australia has had many opportunities to work with DEEWR to gather industry views and feed into the policy and procedure making process. This has been particularly pertinent during the lead up to the implementation to the new DES program and post transition.

Formerly ACE National
Where partnership rather than service provision is at the heart of the interaction

World Health Organisation, Community Based Rehabilitation Guidelines, 2004

Figure 5. World Health Organisation – Community Based Rehabilitation Matrix
PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Participatory Action Research is a systematic process with continuous cooperation between researchers and community participants. It starts with community needs and is outcomes-focused. The process aims to include as many community members as possible in the planning, implementation and review stages. This facilitates a sense of responsibility.

PAR is a process that allows ordinary people to explore issues that are of priority in their day-to-day functioning using their own resources to produce knowledge and take action to improve the situation. This often occurs in collaboration with external researchers.\(^{56}\)

As the PAR process matures, community members are empowered to become participant-researchers who organise themselves to develop, implement and evaluate strategies. PAR has been successfully used to implement a CBR program in two communities in far north Queensland. The model is represented overleaf.

The PAR process assisted the communities with the implementation of their Community Based Rehabilitation program. This process appears to have successfully provided specialised services in a culturally valued way. We submit these findings deserve greater exploration, within a holistic context for the communities.

The focus on community consultation through PAR and the development of community partnerships has increased the cultural competency of the rehabilitation service, the capacity of participating communities and of the sector to respond in ways that are valued and owned by Aboriginal People with brain injury, their families and communities.\(^{57}\)

---


57 Ibid.
Figure 6. Participatory Action Research to implement Community Based Rehabilitation