



**Office of the Hon Kate Ellis MP**  
Minister for Employment Participation  
Minister for Early Childhood and Child Care

Mr Bob Buckley  
Convenor  
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**27 SEP 2012**

Dear Mr Buckley

Thank you for your letter of 14 August 2012 to the Hon Bill Shorten MP, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, on behalf of A4 Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia, concerning labour force participation of people with autism. As the matter you have raised falls within the portfolio responsibilities of the Hon Kate Ellis MP, Minister for Employment Participation, your letter was referred to her for reply. The Minister has asked me to reply on her behalf.

The Australian Government values the contribution people with disability, including autism, make to Australian society and believe that people with disability who want to work should be supported in their efforts to find and maintain employment.

I note the concerns you raise in your letter about the barriers people with autism face when trying to find employment and the Government is aware of these barriers. Disability Employment Services (DES), funded by the Government, plays a key role in assisting people with disability, injury or health condition to secure and maintain sustainable employment. Specialist DES providers are contracted to deliver services to participants in a wide range of specialty areas, including autism. Participants can choose to be assisted by an organisation that has particular expertise in helping people with specific needs.

There are currently around 4500 people with autism registered with DES providers. Since its implementation on 1 March 2010, DES providers have successfully placed over half of job seekers with autism into employment.

In addition to the services offered in DES, there are several other programs and initiatives which promote employment participation for people with disability from both an employer and job seeker perspective. These include wage subsidies, the Employment Broker Projects, the JobAccess service and the National Disability Recruitment Coordinator. Further information about these services is attached.

With regard to your comments around human resource policies and practices preventing people with autism gaining employment, you may be interested to know that both the private and the public sector have recently introduced initiatives to educate employers about employing people with disability. These resources focus on pre- and post-recruitment processes.



For example, the Australian Public Service Commission launched the *As One – APS Disability employment strategy* in May 2012. This strategy aims to strengthen the Australian Public Service (APS) as a disability-confident employer and improve the experience of people with disability in APS employment. Further, in June 2012, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in partnership with National Disability Services, launched its latest publication in a series of employer guides titled *Employ Outside the Box: The Business Case for Employing People with Disability*. This guide provides a strong business case for employing people with disability and promotes workforce diversification.

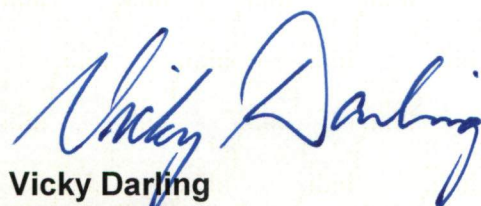
You raise concerns about the shortage of supported employment places currently available. The Government provides funding to 200 Australian Disability Enterprises. The Government recently released *Inclusive Employment 2012–2022: a vision for supported employment*, which sets out a 10-year path for reform in how people with disability are assisted in supported employment. The Vision is available at [www.fahcsia.gov.au](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au).

In addition, you have asked how the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) will directly improve employment of Australians with autism. As you might be aware, an NDIS is in its early planning stages. Following agreement with state and territory governments, this first stage of an NDIS will start to roll out in launch sites across Australia from the middle of next year. People residing in the Australian Capital Territory, Tasmania, South Australia, the Barwon region of Victoria and in the Hunter region of New South Wales will receive support as part of the first stage of an NDIS. In the coming months, the Government will be working with the states and territories on the key design issues necessary for the first stage.

During this time, the Government will also be considering critical questions such as funding, governance, eligibility, assessment and workforce and sector capacity for an NDIS. To ensure people with disability, their families and carers are involved, the Government has established the NDIS Advisory Group. Further information on how to become involved is available at [www.ndis.gov.au](http://www.ndis.gov.au).

Thank you for bringing your concerns to the Government's attention.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Vicky Darling', is written over a faint, circular official stamp.

**Vicky Darling**  
Chief of Staff

Encl.



## Wage Subsidy Programs

The Australian Government supports a range of wage subsidies which are designed to encourage employers to employ people with disability. The subsidies range in the financial benefit and duration of that benefit. The highest subsidies are paid in relation to job seekers with disability who have been on income support for two years or more.

As part of the 2011–12 Budget, the Government invested in a comprehensive package of measures called Building Australia's Future Workforce (BAFW) to promote workforce participation and encourage skills development. As of 1 July 2012, new wage subsidies have been introduced under this package which includes incentives and assistance to encourage employers to create jobs for the very long term unemployed and for people with disability

The following wage subsidies are available through Disability Employment Services (DES):

- The **Wage Subsidy Scheme** provides a flexible financial incentive for employers to offer DES participants an opportunity to demonstrate suitability for ongoing employment, by encouraging employers to employ eligible workers with disability under open employment conditions. DES providers negotiate wage subsidies with the employer, then monitor the job placement and provide any necessary support to the employer and participant.
- The **Enhanced Wage Subsidy** was announced as part of the Government's BAFW package. As mentioned about, it is a new wage subsidy targeted at long-term unemployed job seekers for placements of 15 hours or more per week. It provides a greater financial incentive for employers to offer enhanced employment opportunities to DES participants that do not have recent work experience.
- The **Wage Connect** initiative commenced on 1 January 2012 and has 35 000 places available over four years to help people who are very long term unemployed access sustainable, ongoing employment. Wage Connect provides job seekers with the opportunity to gain paid work and to transition to greater financial independence. Simultaneously, employers will get help to offset the costs of wages and training for the first six months a person is employed.
- The **Connecting People with Jobs** wage subsidy initiative commenced on 1 August 2012. It encourages employers to offer employment opportunities to participants that are willing to relocate to areas of higher employment.

For further information on wage subsidies, please refer to the following website [www.deewr.gov.au/Employment/Programs/DES/Employer\\_Support/Pages/home.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Employment/Programs/DES/Employer_Support/Pages/home.aspx).

## Employment Broker Projects

Disability Employment Broker projects will commence shortly to create new job opportunities for unemployed people with disability. The projects deliver information and training to targeted employers and industry groups to improve their knowledge of government programs and services that support employment of people with disability. The initiatives will support employers to create new jobs that are designed for people who find it difficult to access mainstream recruitment practices because of their disability.



For further information on the Disability Employment Broker projects, please refer to the following website  
[www.deewr.gov.au/employment/programs/des/employer\\_support/pages/disabilityemploymentbrokers.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/employment/programs/des/employer_support/pages/disabilityemploymentbrokers.aspx).

### **JobAccess**

JobAccess is an information and advice service that offers practical workplace solutions for people with disability and their employers. JobAccess includes a comprehensive, easy to use website and a free telephone information and advice service where people can access confidential, expert advice on all disability employment matters. JobAccess includes services, programs and products ranging from psychologists, accommodation, mentoring programs and workplace mental health programs.

For further information on JobAccess, please call 1800 464 800 or refer to the following website [www.jobaccess.gov.au](http://www.jobaccess.gov.au).

### **National Disability Recruitment Coordinator**

The National Disability Recruitment Coordinator (NDRC) service creates job opportunities for people with disability who are participants of DES. The NDRC provides support services to large employers and assists them to develop disability recruitment and employment policies. Through this initiative, the Government aims to increase the participation of people with disability in the Australian workforce by promoting the benefits of employing people with disability to employers. The NDRC improves employers' awareness of available government schemes that assist with the employment of people with disability and provide linkages between employers, especially large employers and program providers.

For further information on the NDRC, please refer to the following website  
[www.deewr.gov.au/Employment/Programs/DES/Employer\\_Support/Pages/NDRC.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Employment/Programs/DES/Employer_Support/Pages/NDRC.aspx).