



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

MC14-007561

Mr Bob Buckley
Convenor
Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia
cnvnr@a4.org.au

Dear Mr Buckley

Thank you for your email of 16 May 2014 to the Minister for Social Services, the Hon Kevin Andrews MP, on about changes to Disability Support Pension (DSP). The Minister has asked me to reply to you on his behalf. I apologise for the delay in replying.

Thank you for raising your concerns on behalf of Autism Asperger's Advocacy Australia about the changes announced to the DSP in the 2014 Budget. I understand you are predominantly concerned about how these changes will affect those with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Assessment for DSP eligibility involves examining the individual's ability to function in a work-related environment. As Autism Spectrum Disorder involves varying degrees of disability and a wide range of behaviours and social skills, these assessments will vary depending on the individual's level of ability. This process ensures that the system is fair and equitable and is not based on specific disabilities or conditions.

The Government recognises the barriers that many people with disability face when trying to find and keep work. The Government is improving support for Australians with disability to help them into work where possible, while continuing to provide an essential safety net for people who are unable to fully support themselves. Working helps boost people's self-esteem, improves social contact, provides more income and leads to improved health and financial security. The Government is committed to ensuring people with disability can access these opportunities wherever they are able.

The changes announced in the 2014 Budget aim to ensure our social security system is sustainable and able to meet future demand. The 2014 Budget measures also focus on supporting young people under age 35, with capacity, to gain and retain employment.

The Government has introduced compulsory work-focused activities for DSP recipients under age 35 who have an assessed work capacity of at least 8 hours per week. Activities will be focused on support to prepare for, find and maintain employment and could include connecting with an employment service provider, work experience, education and training, or rehabilitation activities to overcome individual barriers. DSP recipients who do not complete their activities may have their payment suspended or cancelled.

People who are aged 35 and over, whose DSP was granted on the basis of a manifest condition, who have an assessed work capacity of less than eight hours a week, or who are working in an Australian Disability Enterprise or under the Supported Wage System are not required to attend participation interviews. They can still contact Centrelink for advice and volunteer for services and programs, subject to meeting eligibility criteria for those particular services and programs.

You raised concerns about the ability for people with disability to find work. The Government supports people with disability to prepare for and find suitable employment through a range of programs including:

- Disability Employment Services, which can provide tailored assistance to address barriers to employment and work with employers to support a person with disability in the workplace. To ensure people get the support they need, the Government is investing over \$3 billion over four years in uncapping access to Disability Employment Services. Previously, access to these services was capped and people had to wait up to a year to access these services;
- subsidies to employers to assist them with the costs of employing people with disability in long-term sustainable jobs;
- the Employment Assistance Fund, which provides financial assistance for workplace modifications, special work equipment, Auslan interpreting and Disability Awareness Training; and
- the JobAccess Advisory Service, which provides individualised information to employers and individuals about the employment of people with disability. The service can provide information on workplace adjustments, job design and government services and programs that assist people with disability to obtain and maintain employment.

You queried the process of reviewing DSP recipients work capacity. Certain DSP recipients aged less than 35 years with a work capacity of 8 or more hours and granted between 2008 and 2011 will have their work capacity reassessed and eligibility reviewed against the revised Impairment Tables. This group was originally assessed for the payment prior to the introduction of the revised Impairment Tables in January 2012. The Impairment Tables were reviewed to ensure that they are up to date with current medical and rehabilitation practice. The Impairment Tables were previously updated in 1993. In 2011, an expert Advisory Committee was commissioned to oversee the review and provide expert advice on revised Impairment Tables. The Advisory Committee Included medical, allied health and rehabilitation experts, representatives of disability peak bodies, mental health advocates and relevant Government agencies.

The Advisory Committee undertook the review of the Impairment Tables in close consultation with medical and allied health professionals, as well as disability stakeholders. Following a thorough review, the Advisory Committee provided its final report which can be found at www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/benefits-payments/disability-support-pension-dsp-better-and-fairer-assessments and clicking of the link titled *Impairment Tables Review*.

DSP recipients found to have some work capacity when reviewed will be supported to help maximise their capacity to join the workforce. DSP recipients granted on manifest grounds and those assessed as having work capacity of less than eight hours a week will not be reviewed. The review process is not intended to cause distress, but is part of a general review process to ensure that a DSP recipient's circumstances have not changed and they remain qualified for the payment.

You queried the difference between the terms 'job capacity' and 'work capacity'. Eligibility for DSP is determined through the provision of medical evidence to establish an impairment rating of 20 or more points under the Impairment Tables and an assessment of work capacity. Work capacity is assessed as not being able to work or be retrained for work of at least 15 hours per week within two years because of the impairment. The impairment rating and work capacity are determined through a Job Capacity Assessment.

Thank you for providing your Organisation's feedback on the new policy measures. I trust this information is helpful in answering your concerns.

Thank you again for writing.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Mansupky". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M".

Age, Disability and Carer Payments Policy

12 September 2014