



23 January 2024

Mr. David Turvey
Acting Commissioner
Jobs and Skills Australia
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
GPO Box 9828, Canberra, ACT 2601

Submitted online.

Dear Mr. Turvey,

Amaze submission to Jobs and Skills Australia's 2024 – 25 Work Plan development.

Amaze works to build acceptance and understanding of autism in communities, educational settings, organisations and business, and wider society. Informed by evidence, experts and lived experience, we influence policy change for Autistic people and provide independent, credible information and resources to individuals, families, professionals, government, and the wider community. We are closely connected with the community through our national Autism Connect helpline, peer support networks and capacity building initiatives.

We welcome this opportunity to respond to your 2024-25 work plan development public consultation paper. Our submission is focused on how the work plan may address:

1. The current, emerging and future workforce, skills and training needs of disability service providers across disability, community and mainstream services. Severe workforce and skills shortages are currently having significant social and economic impacts on Autistic people and all people with disability, as well as their families and carers, communities and governments, and demand for these services is expected to grow significantly in the coming years.
2. How the skills and expertise of Autistic people can be harnessed to help fill workforce shortages. Autistic people can bring a range of much-needed skills and different perspectives to the workforce that are currently underutilised.

1. Address the workforce, skills and training needs of disability service providers.

A strong disability services sector can provide vast social and economic benefits to individuals, communities, and governments. It can:

- support people with disability to meet their full potential, socially and economically (including to find employment and live as independently as possible, reducing future costs of governments).
- foster inclusivity in communities and workplaces, enabling full participation and strong productivity (with strong flow on effects to communities and governments).
- create jobs across disability, education, employment, healthcare and many more sectors, stimulating economic growth.

However, severe skills shortages across the disability services sector and related market failures are stifling access to disability services, economic growth and the day to day lives and outcomes for people with disability. In late 2023, both the [Disability Royal Commission](#) and the [NDIS Independent Review](#) highlighted severe workforce and skills shortages across the sector, inadequate training and qualification requirements across some service areas and the impacts thin markets are having on people with disability (particularly First Nations people with disability, people with disability living in rural and remote areas and people with complex support needs). They made a number of recommendations to address workforce and skills shortages and ensure people with disability are safe, included and supported to participate and meet their full potential. Many of these reforms, if implemented, will require the disability services market to grow significantly, with reforms to the national training system (VET, higher education, and migration) to ensure sector needs are being met.

While demand for skilled disability service providers to support NDIS participants can be expected to increase, so can demand for disability support services across mainstream and community services, including for the many millions of Australians with disability who are not NDIS participants.

For example, the Australian Government is currently responding to recommendations by the NDIS Independent Review to require that all disability service providers providing services under the NDIS be subject to a mandatory registration scheme within 5 years. Under the current non-mandatory scheme, only 16,000 service providers are registered, compared to 154,000 unregistered providers, many of whom have little to no formal training or qualifications. Considerable investment and planning will be required to ensure sufficiently trained and skilled service providers are available to meet registration requirements, and that these reforms do not result in further market shortages and economic costs. The NDIS Independent Review also recommended increasing access to Foundational Supports across mainstream and community settings (i.e., early learning, education, employment and healthcare settings) for people with disability and developmental concerns,

including people who are not NDIS participants. These reforms, which Australian Governments have made financial commitments to and are currently progressing, will require vast increases in jobs and training across relevant settings, with improvements to the national training system. Furthermore, the Disability Royal Commission made recommendations to drive inclusive education, housing and employment and improve access to healthcare for people with cognitive disability. Again, reforms expected to flow from these recommendations will unquestionably require a significant increase in skilled disability support professionals across these sectors.

All these reforms have the clear potential to stimulate productivity and economic growth and improve social and economic outcomes for Autistic people and all people with disability, their families and carers, communities, and governments. However, a strategy to guide growth across this sector and improve training is urgently required.

Accordingly, we recommend that your next workplan drive the exploration of how the disability services workforce can be expanded, better trained and upskilled to meet current, emerging and future disability support needs (including for people with disability accessing the NDIS and/or future Foundational Supports) and contribute to strong social and economic outcomes and growth. For example, it could drive:

- Analysis of current market gaps and failures, and the capacity of the sector to meet emerging and future needs. This could involve working with governments to forecast the numbers and types of skilled workers that would be required in the next 2, 5 and 10 years to meet demand, policy commitments and regulatory obligations.
- Assessment of the social and economic impacts of failing to meet current and future disability service needs, including for Autistic people and all people with disability, the community and governments. The impacts on particularly vulnerable cohorts should also be assessed, including First Nations people, people in rural and remote areas, and people with complex support needs.
- Investigation of how well the current national training system (VET, higher education, and migration) is meeting the disability service sector's skills needs and necessary reforms.
- Scoping of how workers may be better supported to continue working in the disability services sector (including through better pay, conditions, professional development and safeguards).
- Exploration of how to attract, train and retain people with disability in service provider roles, harnessing their unique skills, perspectives and lived experience (see further discussion below).
- Assessment of how training and education pathways and qualifications (including VET and higher education) may be made more accessible, including for Autistic people and people with disability.

2. Harness the skills and expertise of Autistic people to help fill workforce shortages.

Autistic people can bring a range of strengths, interests and skills to the workforce, often demonstrating exemplary characteristics in the areas of visual thinking, attention to detail, honesty, strong work ethic, efficiency, precision, creativity, consistency, low absenteeism and disinterest in office politics. Neuro-diverse workplaces can deliver competitive-advantages including productivity gains, quality improvement, boosts in innovative capabilities, increases in employee engagement and reputational enhancement.

However, in 2018 the [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#) reported that only 38% of Autistic people of working age had a job, compared with 53% of all working age people with disability and 84% of people without disability. The unemployment rate for Autistic people was 34%, more than three times the rate for people with disability generally (10.3%) and almost eight times the rate of people without disability (4.6%). A survey conducted by the [Australian Autism Alliance](#) of 769 Autistic adults and 3,115 parents and carers of Autistic people in 2020 made similar findings. Of the Autistic people that were able to respond themselves, only 53% were in paid employment. Of the parents/carers responding on behalf of an Autistic person over 18, only 28% of the Autistic people they cared for held a paid job.

Accordingly, we encourage you to consider how your workplan may harness the skills, expertise and lived experience of Autistic people and drive Autistic employment. For example, in co-design with relevant stakeholders, including Autistic people, it could drive a better understanding of the skills that are currently being underutilised, address barriers to Autistic people accessing VET, higher education and workplaces across Australia, identify training gaps and needs, and create a strategy to support Autistic people to both help fill workforce shortages and gain meaningful employment.

Amaze is ready to assist.

Please contact me by email at jim.mullan@amaze.org.au or by phone on [03 9657 1600](tel:0396571600) if we can assist by providing further information or answering any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,



Jim Mullan
Chief Executive Officer

