

Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services

Media Release

Disability Employment Strategy Discussion Paper launched

14/04/2008

Joint Media Release with The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP, Minister for Employment Participation

The Minister for Employment Participation, Brendan O'Connor, and Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services, Bill Shorten, today released a discussion paper for the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy.

The discussion paper seeks input from a wide range of stakeholders about how to address the barriers faced by people with disability and/or mental illness in finding and retaining a job.

Mr O'Connor and Mr Shorten also met with stakeholders in Melbourne for the first consultation session as part of the strategy.

Mr O'Connor and Mr Shorten are holding consultations in every capital city around Australia, as well as a number of regional centres.

"There are many people with disability and mental illness who face employment barriers on a daily basis," Mr O'Connor said.

"The Government has identified boosting employment as one of the five key measures for tackling inflation and people with a disability or mental illness have much to offer.

"Yet despite 17 years of strong economic growth, Australia is ranked a disappointing 13 out of 19 OECD countries in employment rates for all people with a disability.

"We want people to share their first hand knowledge with the Government so that the strategy can not only identify barriers but also address them in a practical and effective way."

Mr Shorten said the strategy would be developed in consultation with people with disability and/or mental illness, employers, employment service providers, peak bodies, state and territory governments and experts.

"The OECD results show Australia is lagging behind the rest of the world. If we are truly to be the lucky country, people with disability or a mental illness must have the opportunity to participate in it," Mr Shorten said.

"The strategy aims to encourage more employers to employ people with a disability or mental illness by addressing myths about increased risks and costs, and increasing awareness of the benefits."

"As well as addressing barriers to participation in the workforce, the national strategy will also provide a comprehensive approach for Commonwealth, state and territory governments to work together more effectively," Mr Shorten said.

Copies of the discussion paper and more information on the strategy is available at www.deewr.gov.au/employmentstrategy