

Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services

Media Release

New strategy to get people with disability or mental illness into work

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

A new Rudd Government strategy will look at ways to help people with a disability or mental illness to find or retain employment.

The Minister for Employment Participation, Brendan O'Connor MP and the Parliamentary Secretary for Disability and Children's Services, Bill Shorten MP, will jointly oversee a National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy.

Mr O'Connor and Mr Shorten announced the development of a strategy at the Mental Health Council of Australia's Reforming Welfare to Work forum at Parliament House today.

Today's announcement is part of the Rudd Government's National Disability Strategy and will be developed in close consultation with people with disability, employers, disability employment service and training providers.

Mr O'Connor said the strategy would help to identify why people with a disability and mental illness find participation difficult and put in place strategies to address these challenges.

"The strategy will look at ways to create direct links between employers and people with disability and mental illness while exploring innovative ways to support people to find and retain work.

"Boosting employment participation is a key strategy in the Government's five point plan to curb inflation, a legacy of the former Liberal Government.

"The Rudd Government believes that everyone that can work should work and those who are unable should be supported.

"But the former Liberal Government neglected those who face the greatest barriers to employment and did little to adjust employment programs to suit a changing workforce landscape.

"The Welfare to Work changes targeted people receiving a Disability Support Pension yet just 12 per cent of the 705,000 recipients have been successful in gaining work when surveyed last year."

Mr Shorten said the strategy would take a national approach to tackling participation challenges for people with disability.

"People with disability have an enormous amount to contribute and it is very important that we tap into this tremendous resource in a supportive and fair manner," Mr Shorten said. "We need to engage with business to find more jobs for people with a disability."

"The strategy will provide clear and practical steps that the Rudd Government can put in place to overcome barriers that make it harder for people with disability and mental illness to gain and keep work.

"The previous Liberal Government failed to provide programs and policies to help people with a disability or mental illness."

Consultations will begin in April and be held in capital cities of each state and territory with the strategy to be released by the end of the year.

National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy Terms of Reference

The National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy will outline how policy and programmes across portfolios and state, territory and Commonwealth governments can work together to help people with disability and mental illness gain and retain work.

The Strategy will guide the Commonwealth Government's design and implementation of measures concerned with the employment participation of people with disability and mental illness.

The Strategy will provide clear and practical steps that Government can take to:

- (a) overcome barriers that can make it harder for people with disability and mental illness to gain and keep work, in particular:
 - i. resistance from employers in hiring people with disability;
 - ii. difficulty accessing appropriate transport;
 - iii. the costs associated with managing a disability; and
 - iv. the unpredictable nature of some disabilities and illnesses;
 - v. achieving skills through education and training
- (b) achieve attitudinal change which will ensure that those with disability and mental illness are given the vocational and employment opportunities they deserve;
- (c) better facilitate and promote employment opportunities for people with disability and mental illness;
- (d) consider whether welfare rules could be changed to help people with disability and mental illness gain and retain employment;
- (e) provide national coordination of the efforts to tackle the many reasons why people with a disability and mental illness find participation difficult.
- (f) engage and encourage employers to employ people with disability and mental illness, including:
 - i. fostering more direct linkages between employers and people with disability and or mental illness; and

- ii. advocating social firms as a model for employment of people with disability and mental illness and exploring best practice from these firms;
- (g) engage and encourage individuals with disability and mental illness to pursue paid employment and maximise their opportunities in paid employment; and
- (h) explore innovative and creative ways to help people with disability and mental illness gain and retain work.

It is important that the Strategy be developed in the context of the wider assistance which is provided to people with disability and mental illness, in particular:

- that the community sector plays a key role in supporting people with disability and mental illness and that the sector maintains considerable expertise in assisting people with disability and mental illness
- employment services which will also form an important element of the Strategy. However, the review of employment services being undertaken by Government will inform this aspect of the strategy.