



Catholic Social Services
Australia

Submission to the Commonwealth Government:
JOB CAPACITY ASSESSMENT SERVICES

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1 Background

Catholic Social Services Australia's member organisations deliver services under the Personal Support Program, Disability Employment Network and Job Network.

Catholic Social Services Australia supports the Job Capacity Assessment model. While some aspects of the program and its administration could be improved, the principle of using professional assessors to direct job seekers to appropriate services is sound.

Many of the system's problems lie outside the control of Job Capacity Assessors. For example:

- The volume of assessments demanded is high. Quantity may take priority over quality.
- While barriers are identified, caps on the Personal Support Program and the Disability Employment Network mean that they may not be addressed in a timely way.
- The combined requirements of income support, Job Capacity Assessments, and employment assistance can be demanding for vulnerable income support recipients. There is a risk that the assessment process will increase the chances of clients being breached unfairly.

2 Guidelines

Because of the number of programs and payments involved and the need to make decisions on the basis of limited evidence the guidelines are often difficult for Job Capacity Assessors to apply.

Because a single client can often have a range of barriers (eg mental health, physical disability, history of criminal offending) the assessment process can be extremely demanding. In some cases the guidelines may demand more than a single specialist assessor is able to do.

The difficulty of applying the guidelines can result in inappropriate referrals.

3 Qualifications of assessors

The principle of using Job Capacity Assessors with a broad range of qualifications is good. Referring a client to an assessor with appropriate qualifications reduces the likelihood of inappropriate referrals and increases the change that major barriers will be identified.

In practice clients are not always referred to an appropriately qualified assessor. Addressing this problem would significantly improve our member's satisfaction with the assessment process.

Some of our members are particularly concerned with assessments for clients with mental health problems. While it would increase costs, greater use of clinical psychologists and psychiatrists in the assessment process would significantly reduce the number of inappropriate referrals.

The current system discourages assessors from seeking additional specialist assessments.

4 Quality of information

Our member agencies report that the quality of information provided by Job Capacity Assessors is generally good — especially considering the limitations inherent in the system (time constraints on assessors etc). However, members have encountered the following problems:

- **Lack of information:** Sometimes assessors do not provide enough information or present it in a 'dumbed down' form that adds little to what the client volunteers themselves. In some

cases the time allowed for the assessment process is too short to ensure that barriers are identified.

- **Missing medical evidence:** Clients are not properly assessed because they arrived at the Job Capacity Assessment without documented medical evidence.
- **Unstructured assessments:** In some cases the assessor provides a large volume of information but in an unstructured manner. The practice of reporting barriers in an unstructured list generates unnecessary administrative work for providers in programs such as the Personal Support Program. This is because DEEWR requires providers to create an intervention plan which shows how they will address each barrier individually.

A better approach would be to group barriers into 3 to 5 categories or to separate the root problems from the problems they cause (eg treating an underlying anxiety disorder will reduce the occurrence of panic attacks).

- **Duty of care:** While some clients pose a potential risk to staff or other clients (eg PSP providers or children at a co-located service) this is not always disclosed in the assessment. For example a client with convictions for violent sexual offences may be referred to a provider where a female staff member is working alone.
- **Variability:** Assessments vary in quality.

5 Ensuring attendance at assessments

When providers refer a client to an assessment they are responsible for the client's attendance and must submit a PFR. This process is time consuming and adds to the administrative burden on providers of the Personal Support and other programs.

6 The JCA Account

The major problem with use of the Job Capacity Account is lack of information sharing and coordination between assessors and providers (PSP, DEN, Job Network).

In some cases the account may be used to plug gaps in the system. For example, long wait lists for the Personal Support Program may prompt assessors to use the account to make sure a client gets some help immediately. Rather than rely on the Job Capacity Account, it may be more effective to uncap programs such as the Personal Support Program.

7 Key strengths

Job Capacity Assessments allow barriers to be identified and addressed more effectively than under past arrangements. The use of a range of professional assessors is a strength.

Other strengths of the system include:

- Good working relationships between assessors and service providers;
- Providers are able to directly refer clients to Job Capacity Assessments. (The referral system is user friendly.)
- Assessments that usually match the client's view of their situation (although expected outcomes are sometimes unrealistic);
- Access to independent assessments — assessors do not work for Centrelink or providers.