



27 February 2008

The Hon Joe Ludwig  
Minister for Human Services

Dear The Hon Joe Ludwig

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the review of the Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) process, and the Job Capacity Account services. Mental Illness Fellowship Victoria is very supportive of your review of this process.

Mental Illness Fellowship is Victoria's leading membership-based not-for-profit organisation working with people with mental illness, their families and friends to improve their well being. We provide various employment programs which include Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) and also Disability Employment Network (DEN), which both have interface with the JCA process.

We believe the use of the Job Capacity Account funds should be extended to include participants referred to VRS and also DEN. The participants of these programs are highly vulnerable and would benefit significantly from the some short term interventions funded under this account, including pain management and counseling.

The JCA process has too many steps that a participant has to take before they can begin job searching activities with an employment service provider. Using the service provider pathway (which accounts for nearly 100 percent of our referrals) a participant will firstly speak to a DEN provider for assistance. They are then sent to Centrelink to ensure they understand the implications of undergoing an assessment and referred to a JCA provider. Then they attend the actual JCA appointment. Once a JCA is completed, they are finally referred to an appropriate employment provider.

This process can at times be a lengthy one. No employment activity may begin until the participant has completed this full process. On many occasions, because of the length of time taken for this, the motivation and optimism of the participant has considerably decreased. Often their anxiety levels have also increased due to the hurdles they have to jump in what should be a simple process.

We have a dedicated employment consultant based full time in the area's mental health clinics. Many of our participants are now only considering employment as an option because they know we have a partnership arrangement with their clinic and case manager. We are effectively delivering an employment service out of their clinic. This model helps to make the transition to job search a much easier process for the participants. It is a much less daunting task for them because of the knowledge that we are working alongside them, and also their health professionals.

When participants go through to the JCA process and are not referred back to the employment provider supporting them through this process, many stop engaging in the employment process altogether. They have lost the benefit of the one stop shop and the support this model provides. Consideration must be made by the JCA's to providers who offer innovative approaches such as ourselves. Consideration must also be made to providers who have made the effort to source the referrals in the first place and are supporting the participant through the JCA process.

The approach we take is based on evidence based employment research (Bond, Becker and Drake) which has shown to deliver far superior employment results for people with a severe mental illness.

The assessment process disadvantages people who are not receiving professional care. People with a mental illness who are not seeing a doctor or case manager are unable to get the Treating Doctors Report (TDR) or supporting information which is essential for the Job Capacity Assessor to make their assessment. There is a risk of an inappropriate assessment being made.

The need for the collection of supporting information, including the TDRs, serves to lengthen the time taken before a participant can actually start looking for work. Time is of the essence. For a person with a mental illness, it is important to begin job seeking activities as soon as possible. The need to provide sufficient information to ensure an appropriate assessment and referral is made requires more time on top of the time it already takes to get an actual JCA appointment. It is not uncommon for this process to be in excess of one month. There have been occasions when the next available JCA referral has been 4 weeks alone. In our experience the sooner you are able to engage a participant into job searching activities, the greater the chances are of achieving successful employment outcomes.

A limitation of the JCA process includes the assessment of a person's future job capacity. This is a very difficult task when dealing with people with episodic illnesses such as mental illness. Assessors must undertake specific mental illness training to gain a better understanding of the complexities faced by this population group.

If you require further information, I am more than happy to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,

Gafa Tuiloma

Employment Manager  
Mental Illness Fellowship Victoria