



PO Box 518  
Dickson  
ACT 2602

Senator Joe Ludwig  
Minister for Human Services  
Parliament House  
Canberra  
ACT

28 February 2008

## **Improving Job Capacity Assessments and Account Services**

Dear Minister,

In response to your call for input from employment service providers on how Job Capacity Assessments and Job Capacity Account Services can better meet the needs of people with barriers to work, UnitingCare Australia makes the following submission.

UnitingCare Australia is an agency of the National Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA). The agency represents the Church's UnitingCare network of community services of which there are over 400 nationwide.

The UnitingCare network is one of the largest providers of community services in Australia providing services to 1.8 million Australians each year, employing 35,000 staff and 24,000 volunteers nationally. It provides services to children, young people and families, older Australians, Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities, the poor and disadvantaged, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and older Australians in urban, rural and remote communities.

The UnitingCare network delivers a range of Commonwealth funded employment services across Australia including those operating under the Disability Employment Network (DEN), Personal Support Program (PSP), the Job Placement, Employment and Training Program (JPET) Community Work Coordinators (CWC) and the Job Network. This submission by UnitingCare Australia represents the views of the following organisations delivering Australian government employment services: Wesley Mission Sydney, Wesley Mission Brisbane, Wesley Mission Melbourne, Prahran Mission, UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide, UnitingCare Wesley Port Adelaide.

### **Key assumptions underlying UnitingCare Australia's submission**

Australia's existing employment services system was formulated in a time when unemployment was upwards of nine per cent and geared to those circumstances. In the current booming economy, the employment market is fundamentally different

and UnitingCare Australia believes a completely new model of employment service delivery needs to be adopted by Government to address the multiple barriers and provide the various supports required to assist the remaining three to four per cent of Australians left unemployed into sustained employment. These multiple barriers have similar characteristics i.e. social dislocation, high levels of discrimination and poor education outcomes and are experienced within a complex variety of specific geographical, cultural and social contexts.

It is our experience that people want to work given the right opportunity and the right supports most of the current three to four per cent of unemployed Australians want to participate in Australia's economic life, experience the being part of the workplace the dignity that comes with financial independence. and be valued by their community.

UnitingCare Australia specifically addresses the issues you have asked employment service providers to comment on in relation to Job Capacity Assessments and Services. However, we believe that a completely new model of employment service delivery needs to be adopted by Government to effectively engage those suffering significant disadvantage and with multiple barriers to employment. We briefly outline our proposed new model for employment services in Attachment A at the end of this letter and in greater detail in the attached submission to the review of employment services being conducted by the Minister for Employment Services, Brendan O'Connor.

## **Job Capacity Assessments principles and primary objectives**

### **Issue**

The current Job Capacity Assessment system is underpinned by the principle of Mutual Obligation with many of these measures having been based on the concept of mutual obligation developed by the American philosopher, Lawrence Mead.<sup>1</sup>

Mead strongly advocates a paternalistic approach, also described as 'hassle and help', which is essentially about behavioural modification through coercive means. He defines paternalism as, 'social policies aimed at the poor that attempt to reduce poverty and other social problems by directive and supervisory means. Programs based on these policies help the needy but also require that they meet certain behavioural requirements which programs enforce through close supervision.'<sup>2</sup>

UnitingCare believes the opportunity now exists to reverse this paternalistic trend through a process of engagement and true collaborative leadership across government, community and business. This can be done through the establishment and support of an inclusive and engaging public discourse about the nature of real social inclusion and the place of employment for people within this. We believe that the Government's social inclusion agenda will play a crucial role in indentifying and addressing the multiple and complex barriers that unemployed Australians face and enable them to develop the life skills and job readiness they need to get and keep a job.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mendes, Philip, (2003), *'Australia's Welfare Wars, The Players, The Politics and The Ideologies'*, University of New South Wales Press Ltd. Sydney, Australia p 93

<sup>2</sup> Mead, Lawrence M. (1997), *'The New Paternalism – Supervisory Approaches to Poverty'* The Brookings Institution, Washington p 2

Simplistic and ill-informed views of unemployed job seekers do not sit well with the experience of those who work in our employment services network. They report that the vast majority of job seekers are people generally doing the best they can, given the multiple barriers they face in participating in employment and society.

**Recommendation A:** Job Capacity Assessments are driven by a social inclusion agenda rather than the neo-liberal paternalistic approach that locates the primary cause of unemployment with the individual rather than a range of social and economic barriers that have a deskilling impact on individuals.

**Recommendation B:** The functions of 'mutual obligation' and containment of the number of people receiving government income assistance be separated from the Job Capacity Assessment.

### **Issue**

The current Job Capacity Assessment process is driven more by the objective of 'getting people off welfare' rather than the objective of 'getting people back to work'. This has resulted in an assessment process that is transactional in its nature and consistently under estimates the multiple barriers to employment for the three to four per cent of Australians left unemployed.

**Recommendation C:** A comprehensive employment capacity assessment is developed in association with industry, government and the research community designed to create a structure which focuses on positive not punitive engagement, centring on the needs of the person, not a system.

**Recommendation D:** The Job Capacity Assessment is renamed the 'Employment Capacity Assessment' to reflect the comprehensive nature of the assessment.

**Recommendation E:** This new 'Employment Capacity Assessment' is consistently updated with world best practice.

## **UnitingCare Australia's submission on issues raised by the Minister**

Below we outline UnitingCare Australia's issues and, where appropriate, recommendations on the specific areas you have asked employment service providers to comment on in relation to Job Capacity Assessments and Job Capacity Services.

### **Job Capacity Guidelines, particularly as they relate to assessment and referral practices**

Issues:

- The eligibility criterion set for all PAGES other than Job Network often discriminate or preclude job seekers who need extra vocational support or non-vocational case management support from receiving that support. Clients who then fail to meet the eligibility criteria for any other PAGES default to Job Network. In these cases, clients who clearly need non-vocational support often fall through the cracks.

- Clients on disability or parenting payments are often not advised what the Personal Support Program entails and asked if they wish to participate in it or access other services.

**Recommendation 1:** A comprehensive employment capacity assessment is developed that addresses multiple barriers to employment.

**The appropriateness and range of the qualifications necessary for the Job Capacity Assessors to undertake assessments of people with different disabilities, including those with mental illness.**

Issue:

- Job Capacity Assessments can currently be undertaken by any allied health professional. It is not always possible to access providers with appropriate qualifications to deal with cases at hand, with the majority of providers only having specific skills in one area which makes it difficult to ensure clients receive appropriate and holistic assessment when referral places are limited going to be assessed correctly when referral places are limited. This means that people with predominantly physical health problems can be assessed by a Job Capacity Assessor with mental health training or vice versa.

**Recommendation 2:** Assessments should be completed by qualified and experienced practitioners who have the knowledge and expertise to assess mental health conditions, both diagnosed and undiagnosed, drug, alcohol and gambling addictions and major social barriers and have an awareness of the extent to which past experiences can impact on a person's ability to positively function in the community and in employment (eg. child sexual abuse, assault, poverty, homelessness, drug and alcohol issues). The assessment ought to have measures of social connectedness, discrimination and violence and work readiness.

**The quality of information recorded during the assessment process, including whether this is sufficient to assist agencies making decisions on income support and/or employment assistance.**

Issues:

- Client assessments are currently conducted by Job Capacity Assessors over a short period of time up to 45 minutes that is driven in part by the current payment structure and not correct Centrelink has the biggest contract. For any intervention to be successful a comprehensive assessment is required.
- Due to the transient nature of the client group, many people have either lost, or never kept, documentation required to substantiate mental health or disability claims. UnitingCare services have found that Job Capacity Assessors do not have the time and are often reluctant to follow up with treating doctors or psychiatrists due to the nature of the time constraints involved with the assessment process and the finalising of the report.
- Some JCA referrals are made prior to the completion of the assessment, resulting in the client being referred back to employment service providers inappropriately
- Many providers conduct assessments over the phone so it is very difficult for them to assess a physical disability or mental illness.
- Aboriginal people are not receiving a fair and equal service to be assessed correctly by face to face attendance with Job Capacity Assessors.
- Job Capacity Assessors have little understanding of the programs they are referring people too, this problem is worsening due to high staff turnover.
- Job Capacity Assessors often take a client's word on their situation and make no effort to independently verify this information.

- Clients have little information about the assessment process and go to interviews ill-prepared which often results in an inadequate assessment.
- Job Capacity Assessors are not informing clients where they are being referred to and for what purpose.
- Disability Support Pension recipients need to attend a Centrelink appointment before seeing a Job Capacity Assessor and are told they may/will lose their pension. This acts as a major disincentive to recipients of DSP pursuing the assistance they need to re-enter the workforce

**Recommendation 3:** The assessment process expand to involve a series of substantive face to face interviews (up to four) over a three to four week period to enable the Job Capacity Assessor to build an accurate picture of the client and their needs.

**Recommendation 4:** It becomes mandatory for job assessments to involve gathering independent information about the client from a range of sources, particularly to check and verify health information and the multiple barriers to employment.

**Recommendation 5:** Job Capacity Assessors undergo a comprehensive training program to ensure they fully understand the programs they are referring clients to.

**Recommendation 6:** Job Capacity Assessors also have regular contact with employment service providers to ensure the programs they are referring clients to are available.

**Recommendation 7:** Clients are given adequate information and assistance in preparing for assessments, including what information they are required to take to the assessment.

### **The appropriateness of arrangements to ensure attendance at Job Capacity Assessments**

Issue:

- When clients fail to attend a second rescheduled job capacity assessment appointment, they default back to the Job Network provider without an assessment being completed. It then becomes the responsibility of the employment service provider to call the client back into their service. This is problematic as the employment provider is not notified directly that the client needs to be re-engaged.

### **The role of the Job Capacity Account Program, including the effectiveness of the current referral arrangements to the Job Capacity Account and the Job Network**

Issues:

- Clients are being asked to travel long distances to access counselling services, however, travelling expenses are not covered and come at a great cost to the clients. Counselling is then often not completed.
- At times jobseekers are referred to counselling services that are conducted over the phone and this can be totally inappropriate.

**Key strengths of the current arrangements and any lessons for the future, from your knowledge of current and past arrangements in Australia and internationally.**

Issues:

- The notion of a Job Capacity Assessment is worth pursuing.
- The Job Capacity Assessment system provides a mechanism for further assessment and referral of clients which can be used by employment consultants as a case management tool.

**Recommendation 8:** Further research, resources and funding are allocated to developing a comprehensive 'Employment Capacity Assessment' process designed to create a structure which focuses on positive, not punitive engagement and centres on the needs of the person. This is done in partnership with industry, government and the research community.

We look forward to working closely in partnership with you a best-practice and person-centred employment services system. Please contact Lin Hatfield Dodds, UnitingCare Australia National Director on 0408 402 222 to discuss this submission further.

Yours sincerely



Lin Hatfield Dodds  
National Director  
UnitingCare Australia



**Australia**

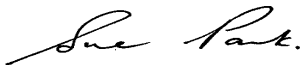


Elizabeth Orr  
General Manager Operations  
Wesley Mission





Quinn Pawson  
Chief Executive Officer  
PrahranMission



Sue Park  
Chief Executive Officer  
UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide Inc



Wesley  
Mission  
Melbourne



Judy Leitch  
Chief Executive Officer  
Wesley Mission Melbourne



Geoff Batkin  
Executive Director  
Wesley Mission Brisbane



*EJ Craft*

Elizabeth Craft  
Chief Executive Officer  
UnitingCare Wesley Pt Adelaide



**UnitingCare Wesley Port Adelaide Inc.**

## **Attachment A: A new model for employment service delivery**

UnitingCare Australia proposes a preferred model of employment service delivery which will deal structurally with issues currently impacting the government funded employment service arrangements. The model is part of an integrated representation of the reality of employment support for Australians, particularly those suffering significant disadvantage and have multiple barriers to employment.

UnitingCare Australia views social inclusion (and employment as a component part of it) from a particular perspective. We believe that:

- all people have intrinsic value, physical, spiritual and social needs;
- all people have a just claim to be heard, either directly or through those who are close to them and understand their strengths and hopes;
- all people have the right to participate in community as fully as they wish and are able; and
- all people have the right to opportunities that will enhance their life chances and quality of life.

The UnitingCare network has significant experience working with people who desire to have fuller participation in the social and economic life of the Australian community but who have complex needs and experience barriers to employment. This paper promotes a person-centred focus, a point that is driven by our philosophy that all Australians have a right to access and participate in the nation's economic and social prosperity. In short all have a right to be included. As such our approach is to identify the needs of individuals and work with them to remove barriers and identify solutions to participation and inclusion.

UnitingCare Australia believes that there is a need for strong, positive and authentic leadership to be taken in working with disadvantaged individuals to create opportunities for participation and inclusion. At the heart of this is a view that the circumstance of social and economic disadvantage is an issue of such risk and magnitude that a genuine partnership with government, the community and business is the only way forward. The leadership required is not just about direction but also attitude. Until recently the public discourse (supported by government) relating to those suffering significant barriers to employment for example has been a pejorative one. From our perspective this attitude in itself has been responsible for much of the disconnection that exists amongst the long term unemployed. We advocate active leadership of an inclusive public discourse focusing positively on the needs of those Australians in less fortunate circumstances.

Many of the individuals we work with live a dislocated existence and have multiple barriers to employment. Multiple barriers require multiple supports. Individuals have the right to a prescription of support developed and delivered in response to their particular needs. We propose that a "roadmap" to employment participation be established, a set of diverse pathways that can be accessed and utilised by individuals in response to their needs.

We acknowledge and commend the Government's commitment to social inclusion. UnitingCare has extensive experience in providing services to support disadvantaged communities and individuals through its various agencies. We believe that this equips us to make recommendations on how employment services could be designed to meet the needs of unemployed and disadvantaged people.

The attached paper entitled, Meaningful Employment, was prepared in response to the review of employment services being undertaken by the Minister for Employment Services, Brendan O'Connor. The paper provides a background and critique of the current employment service framework and outlines our recommendations for improving the system to ensure that it is more responsive to the needs of Australians and achieves the objectives articulated in the Government's Social Inclusion and Skills policies.

The paper proposes a simplified employment service model that reduces confusion, empowers community agencies to work effectively with unemployed Australians, and targets workforce participation and community connection. The model does this through a re-allocation of existing resources (no increased funding required), reducing the number of program streams to five, and ensuring that these streams work collaboratively.

We recommend that one of each of these services be contracted for each Centrelink region or ESA (depending on the need in the area). As a consequence, providers would not be competing for the same target group of job seekers in a geographical region. The focus would instead be on encouraging specialisation and best practice in working with specific groups of clients. Five service streams would form the foundation of a road map to employment participation and would include:

- **Labour Market Advice and Placement Portal (LMAPP)** - Providing universal employment services to the job ready, assisting non job ready individuals to identify appropriate options to support their needs and a connecting point with local industry and commerce.
- **Community Linking and Personal Resilience** - Linking and reconnecting individuals with the community.
- **Specialist case management** - Focusing on individual needs in an individual way.
- **Work Experience Bridging** - Building capability through work experience and training.
- **Disability Employment** – Preparing, placing and supporting those with disability to actively participate in the employment community.

UnitingCare Australia recognises that a move from current arrangements to the approach suggested above will require a significant time investment for all involved.