

Senate Community Affairs Committee
ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
SOCIAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO
2016-17 Supplementary Estimates Hearings

Outcome Number: 3.1 Disability, Mental Health and Carers Question No: SQ16-000355

Topic: Disability Employment Services Programme

Hansard page: Written

Senator Carol Brown asked:

1. Can you provide an update on the outcomes of the Second Round of consultations on the National Disability Employment Framework?
2. When did the Department provide advice to the Minister and/or Assistant Minister on the outcome of the consultation rounds?
3. Has the Department provided a draft Framework to the Minister/Assistant Minister's office yet?
4. Will any further consultations rounds be undertaken? If so:
 - a) What is the timeline for the consultation?
 - b) Will it be open or invite only?
5. The Issues Paper, released to inform the first round of consultations, gave the "first half of 2016" as the timing for the "Development of a new disability employment framework" and the discussion paper for the second consultation gave the "Beginning of 2016" as the timing of analysis and presentation of options to Government. Given that it is now late 2016 and well past this time, can you outline what delays or obstacles, aside from the caretaker period, have deferred the completion of the Framework?
6. The Department's website indicates that the Framework will be published this year. Is it still the intention to release a finalised Framework this year?
7. What is the current status of funding for the various government funded disability employment supports and services?
 - a) Do any of these programmes have funding agreements that are due to finish this calendar year? Or this financial year?
 - b) Is there any plan to provide funding extensions to allow for the implementation of the new Framework? If so, for which programs, for how long and what would be the quantum of funding?
 - c) Have possible funding extension been discussed with the sector/service providers?
8. Will the new Framework be progressed under the Second Implementation Plan of the National Disability Strategy?

Answer:

1. The second round of consultations took place in November and December 2015 with 382 individuals attending information sessions in seven cities across Australia, 84 stakeholders participating in targeted policy development workshops, 294 online surveys on specific policy proposals were completed and 28 written submissions were received.

The Disability Employment Taskforce recommended broad change to Disability Employment Services (DES) in the following areas:

- Broadening eligibility and improving access to disability employment services;

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- Improved assessment and planning;
- Ensuring services are more participant-focussed and consumer-driven;
- Driving greater market competition and a more effective and efficient market;
- A greater focus on open employment for all people with disability; and
- Better IT infrastructure

These general recommendations informed the development of the discussion paper *New Disability Employment Services from 2018* which was released on 2 November 2016.

2. Minister Fifield was briefed on the outcome of the first consultation round in August 2015.

Minister Porter was briefed on the progress of consultations and early findings from the second round of consultations as part of a broader briefing on DES in late January 2016.

Assistant Minister Prentice was briefed on DES and the outcomes of the second consultation round following her appointment as Assistant Minister for Social Services and Disability Services in late February 2016.

3. Yes.

4. a) Public consultations commenced on 2 November 2016 and will run until 16 December 2016.

A Disability Employment Reference Group will meet three times in 2016 and may also reconvene in early 2017 to finalise consultations on the new DES model.

4. b) The discussion paper is available on the Department's stakeholder engagement portal, engage.dss.gov.au which is open to the public. Advice of the release of the discussion paper has been emailed to more than 700 people and organisations that participated in the previous rounds of consultations. People and organisations are welcome to send comments or submissions through the links available on the engage.dss.gov.au web site.

Membership to the Disability Employment Reference Group is by invitation.

5. The timing of the release of details of a new framework for disability employment is a matter for consideration by the Government.

6. The discussion paper *New Disability Employment Services from 2018* was released on 2 November 2016.

7. Disability Employment Services has ongoing appropriation of around \$800 million per annum over the forward estimates under Outcome 3.1.3 of the Department's Budget allocation. Details of the current estimates are below:

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3.1.3 - Component 3 (Disability Employment)

Annual administered expenses

	2015-16 Estimated Actual \$'000	2016-17 Budget \$'000	2017-18 Forward Estimate \$'000	2018-19 Forward Estimate \$'000	2019-20 Forward Estimate \$'000
Ordinary annual services (Appropriation Bill No.1)	813,244	832,768	846,035	819,203	801,652

7. a) Yes. The National Panel of Assessor Deed of Standing Offer is due to end on 30 June 2017, with an option to extend of up to 12 months. The National Panel of Assessors is an ongoing measure under the Disability Employment appropriation. The role of assessors is to provide independent assessment services for people with disability in the workforce on a fee-for-service basis. In 2015-16, \$3.3 million was spent on assessments.

7. b) The current contracts with organisations for provision of DES Disability Management Services and Employment Support Services run until March 2018. There are no current plans to extend the current contracts prior to the introduction of new arrangements in 2018. New arrangements are expected to be in place to continue disability employment support from March 2018. Should a need arise to extend current arrangements, including as part of transitioning to new arrangements, this will be a matter for consideration by the Government.

7. c) The general concept may have been raised by one or another organisation. There has been no suggestion by the Department that an extension is being actively considered.

8. The broad aim of the proposed reforms is to improve employment outcomes for people with disability, which is an identified priority under the National Disability Strategy.