

Moving from ADEs to open employment – Plain language summary

This report presents a summary of findings from NDIA research into how NDIS participants with high support needs¹ are supported to transition from ADEs to open employment if this is what they want.

Background

People with disability have the right to work and have employment choices equal to others. This includes the right to inclusive and accessible work.

Together with state and territory governments and the Disability Employment Service (DES), the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) supports eligible participants to work towards their employment goals. Employers, families, friends and other supporters also support NDIS participants to reach their work goals.

¹ High support needs are defined as those who need substantial ongoing support to obtain and/or keep paid employment.

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) (we) completed a large research project and wrote a report called *From ADEs to open employment*. This is a summary of the findings from that project. You can find the full report on the research section of [our website \(external\)](#).

Why we did the research

Open employment is work that is open to people with and without disability and can include self-employment, apprenticeships, and employment in the public or private sector. Australian Disability Enterprises (we call them ADEs) employ people with high support needs, to work with other people with disability.

Not many NDIS participants move from an ADE to open employment. Only 1% of NDIS participants working in an ADE aged 25 years and older have left an ADE to work in open employment. Only 3% of NDIS participants aged 15 to 24 years old have moved from an ADE to open employment.

We wanted to know how NDIS participants working in ADEs are supported to change their employment type if this is what they want. Our research wanted to:

1. see what predicts a participant moving from ADEs to open employment
2. understand how ADEs support NDIS participants to transition to open employment
3. find out how open employers support workers with high support needs.

How we did the research

Three NDIS participants were employed to advise the research. These Research Consultants made sure that the research asked the right questions and is meaningful for NDIS participants with high support needs, their employers, and the disability sector.

We used the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) to see what areas of functioning and disability (for example, the workplace environment) influences whether people move to, and stay in, open employment.

We looked at:

- what other research has found
- what NDIS participants told us in a survey
- what NDIS participants, family, ADE managers, open employers, disability advocacy organisations, and disability service organisations told us in interviews and focus groups
- NDIS participant data.

Who participated in the research

- NDIS participants, family and carers
- Open employers with experience hiring people with high support needs
- ADE managers and providers
- Disability advocacy organisations and disability service organisations

What data we used

- Findings from 45 research articles
- Data from interviews and focus groups (45 research participants)
- Survey responses (116 research participants)
- NDIS administrative data (16,369 NDIS participants)

We analysed the data using standard research methods and then combined the data to get a good understanding of the key themes coming out of the research.

The Monash Health Human Research Ethics Committee approved this research HREC/91668/MonH-2023-355000.

What we found

We found that

1. Young people are more ready for open employment
2. Building skills and learning about employment is important.
3. Family support is important for moving into open employment.
4. ADEs and other organisations are supporting people to move into open employment in new ways.

Young people are more ready for open employment

- Younger NDIS participants (15-24 years old) worked in open employment more than older NDIS participants.
- Younger NDIS participants working in ADEs with School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES) funding are a lot more likely to move to open employment from an ADE.
- Younger NDIS participants in ADEs do have some concerns [or worry] about how they will manage in open employment including:
 - How they communicate with co-workers
 - How they manage changes to things like rosters and work tasks
- Young people, families, and ADEs see young people as wanting to move towards open employment.
- Some ADEs are starting new businesses so young people can try working in the community.

Capacity building is important for moving into open employment.

- More NDIS participants working in an ADE with NDIS funded support to learn skills for employment move from ADEs to open employment.
- ADEs started new businesses so NDIS participants can try working in the community.
- Open employers want to learn how to support people with disability at work.

Family support is important for moving into open employment.

- Families help NDIS participants think about what they want to do for work.
- Families can be a part of talks about work and careers.
- Families can help NDIS participants find work through the people they know.

ADEs and other organisations support people to move into open employment in new ways.

- Some ADEs ask their employees if they want to move to open employment.
- Some ADEs move supported employees to open employment jobs at the ADE.

- Some ADEs work with Disability Employment Services (DES) to support NDIS participants move to open employment.
- Some ADEs work with open employers to help people be successful in open employment.

What we learnt

The research told us that the NDIS, other government departments, and family and mainstream supports can do the following.

Build employment goals early:

- Introducing employment goals while participants are at school.
- Including participants' family and carers in planning conversations about employment to bring them on the journey.
- Including SLES or other employment capacity building supports in plans at the right time.
- Considering further education and training options when planning for post school activities.

Build participant knowledge and understanding:

- Employment options including microenterprises.
- Independence in the community and financial literacy.
- Workplace expectations and rights.
- NDIS funded and mainstream employment supports.

Gain open employment experience:

- Gaining work experience in open employment while at school.
- Gaining after-school work in open employment settings.
- Building the capacity of open employers to enable open employment opportunities.
- Building participant confidence in their employment potential.

Build abilities of supported employment services:

- Provide work experience in mainstream or community-facing settings.
- Directly hire supported employees in open employment positions.
- Develop partnerships with open employers and local DES.

- Educate employers about participant needs through on the job support to both employers and participants.
- Use job customisation to support transitions to open employment.
- Give on-going on the job support to maintain open employment.

What we will do with the research findings

We will use these findings to inform future policies and projects to improve employment outcomes for people with disability.

We will also make sure we co-design these improvements with participants and the disability community.

Information on employment and the NDIS is available on [our website \(external\)](#).