



# From ADEs to open employment research

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## **This document**

This report presents research findings exploring employment for NDIS participants with high support needs. The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) conducted this research.

## **The Evidence and Practice Leadership Branch**

The NDIA's Evidence and Practice Leadership Branch is responsible for ensuring that trustworthy and robust evidence informs NDIA policies, practices, and priorities. This ensures that decisions are based on an understanding of what works and benefits participants and the Agency.

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## **Acknowledgements**

The NDIA acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians throughout Australia and their continuing connection to the many lands, seas, and communities. The NDIA pay respect to Elders past and present and extend that respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be reading this Report.

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## **Suggested citation**

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## Abbreviations

<b>ADE</b>	Australian Disability Enterprise
<b>CALD</b>	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>DES</b>	Disability Employment Services
<b>DSP</b>	Disability Support Pension
<b>DSS</b>	Department of Social Services
<b>ICF</b>	International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health
<b>LAC</b>	Local Area Coordinator
<b>LGBTIQA+</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual and + to represent the many more identities and affirmed genders
<b>NDIA</b>	National Disability Insurance Agency
<b>NDIS</b>	National Disability Insurance Scheme
<b>SLES</b>	School Leaver Employment Supports
<b>UNCRPD</b>	United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation
<b>WRI</b>	Work Readiness Inventory

# Glossary

<b>ADE</b>	Australian Disability Enterprise.
<b>ADE provider</b>	A parent organisation that has ADEs as part of its service offerings. These are often, but not always, disability service organisations.
<b>Autism<sup>1</sup></b>	Autism involves brain-development differences that result in social and communication difficulties. Atypical activities and behaviours include difficulty and behaviours include difficulty switching tasks, being detail-oriented, and unusual sensory reactions.
<b>Cerebral palsy</b>	Cerebral palsy is a physical disability that affects movement and posture. Cerebral palsy is an umbrella term that refers to a group of disorders affecting a person's ability to move. Cerebral means 'of the brain' and palsy refers to 'a lack of muscle control.'
<b>Down syndrome</b>	Down syndrome is the most common genetic cause of intellectual disability. It occurs at conception as a result of an extra chromosome. In Australia, around one in 1,100 babies are born with Down syndrome. People with Down syndrome have areas of strengths and other areas where they need more support, just like everyone else in the community.
<b>Functional capacity assessment</b>	A functional capacity assessment measures how a person's disability or a child's developmental delay affects their ability to carry out their daily activities. Depending on their developmental delay or disability, the type of functional capacity assessment that we complete will vary. Commonly, assessment results are given a score of 1-15. 15 is the highest level of impact on daily activities.

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<sup>1</sup> People prefer different terms to describe autism. To acknowledge this, we use the terms 'autism spectrum' and 'participant on the autism spectrum' in this report. We use 'person first' language to be consistent with how we refer to the other target populations. However, we acknowledge that some NDIS participants prefer 'identity-first' language.

<b>High support needs</b>	Substantial and ongoing support to obtain and/or keep paid employment.
<b>Intellectual disability</b>	Intellectual disability is a broad term for several conditions that start from birth and make it hard for them to do things such as learning, and adaptive functioning (such as communication and living independently).
<b>Natural supports</b>	Natural supports in the workplace that are available to all employees such as co-workers, team leaders, managers.
<b>NDIS participant</b>	NDIS participants are people with disability who access the Scheme and usually have NDIS funding
<b>Open employment</b>	Work that is open to people with and without disability and can include self-employment, apprenticeships, and employment in the public or private sector.
<b>Psychosocial disability</b>	Psychosocial disability refers to the social and economic consequences related to mental health conditions. The term describes the challenges, or limitations, a person experiences in life that are related to mental health conditions.
<b>Qualitative research</b>	Qualitative research methods such as focus groups and interviews allow researchers to hear people's unique stories and voices and then pull it together to look at common themes.
<b>Quantitative research</b>	Quantitative research seeks to answer questions such as how many people have the same experience or understanding.
<b>Research participant</b>	A research participant is a person who participated in this research.

**Supported Employment  
Services and sector**

Disability support providers that provide on the job supports, including those traditionally known as Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) and social enterprises.

**Survey respondent**

A survey respondent is someone who has filled in a survey.



## Summary

Since 2017, 234 (3.1% of ADE supported employees) NDIS participants aged 15-24 years and 539 (1% of ADE supported employees) aged 25 years and older have transitioned from an ADE to open employment according to the NDIS participant short form outcomes questionnaire<sup>2</sup> (Evidence and Practice Leadership Branch; NDIS 2023a). To help improve this transition rate, in July 2020, the NDIA changed its pricing structure for Supports in Employment to facilitate increased choice of employment type. Under the new pricing structure, participants can use their employment supports in any workplace they choose, including government and non-government organisations, an ADE, social enterprises, micro-enterprise, self-employment, or a family run business. This change gives ADEs the opportunity to modify their business models to better support employees to build capacity and experience different employment environments, including less segregated workplaces.

This research aims to explore how ADEs have changed their business models, the support they provide to their supported employees to find and keep open employment and how NDIS participants with high support needs, are or could be, enabled to find and maintain open employment.

The National Disability Insurance Agency's (NDIA) Evidence and Practice Leadership Branch (we) conducted mixed methods research to understand the barriers, enablers, and predictors to transitions from ADEs to open employment. Three NDIS participants joined the research team as Research Consultants and provided feedback on scope of research data collection tools, preliminary findings, and dissemination of results.

We used the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF; WHO 2001) to identify specific areas of functioning and disability that influence success in transitioning to open employment. By mapping the research findings to the ICF we found that many of the barriers and enablers experienced by participants when transitioning from segregated to open employment are modifiable. Understanding and responding to the root cause of these modifiable issues has the potential to increase transition rates and more successful open employment experiences for people with high support needs<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The short form outcomes questionnaire is administered to all participants, or their nominees, during planning meetings and includes questions about if and where the participant works.

<sup>3</sup> High support needs are defined as those who need substantial ongoing support to obtain and/or keep paid employment.

Through this research we identified the following four themes.

### **Young people are more ready for open employment.**

The research showed that more young NDIS participants (15 to 24 years old) are ready for open employment than those aged 25 years and older. ADE providers and managers recognise that young people do not want to stay in segregated employment and see ADEs as a steppingstone to open employment opportunities. To help with this transition some ADEs offer less segregated/more open workplace options and work directly with supported employees to enable this transition by understanding individual strengths, interests and skills and matching these with available jobs.

### **Building skills and employment literacy increases likelihood of transitioning into open employment**

Our research found that NDIS participants who had transitioned to open employment since joining the NDIS were more likely to have purchased employment capacity building supports. Despite this, ADE providers and managers, and NDIS participants and their family expressed minimal understanding about how these supports could be used to facilitate transitions. This suggests that supporters such as ADE staff, family members, and open employment co-workers and employers could benefit from building an understanding about how NDIS funded supports can assist with enabling transitions from segregated to open employment successfully.

### **Family support is important for transitioning into open employment**

Our research found that family and carers of NDIS participants are heavily involved in their adult children's lives. As such, family and carers can influence participants' work goals, dreams, and aspirations. Disability Employment Services (DES), ADEs, NDIA planners, and Local Area Coordinators (LAC) can play a role in coaching family and carers along the employment journey to better understand expectations and outcomes. This can commence from an early age as well as at key life stages such as before the transition to post school services.

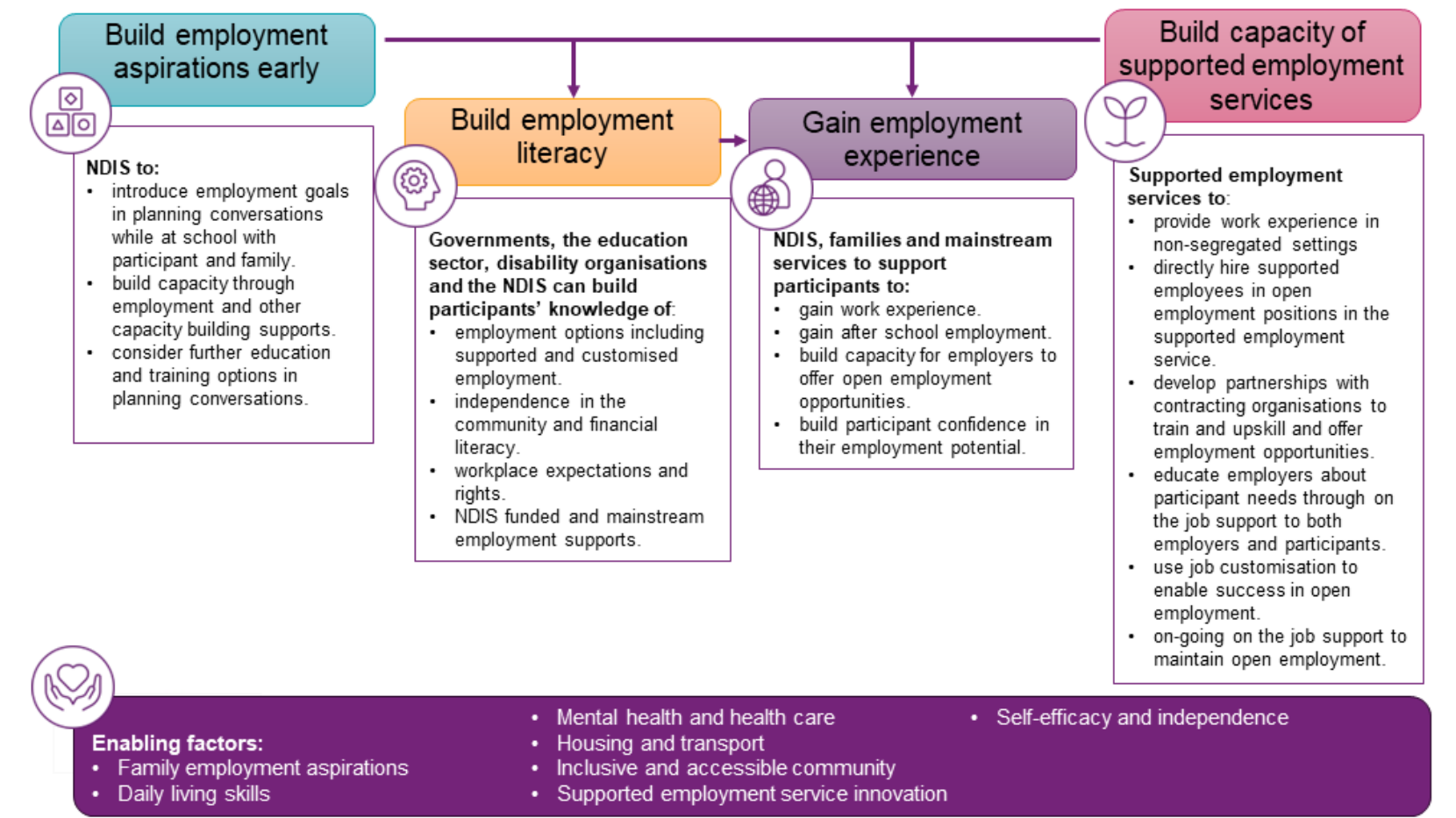
## **Innovative approaches to supporting transitions to open employment**

Our research showed that some ADEs and disability organisations, including service and advocacy organisations, have introduced a range of innovative ways to enable transitions from ADE to open employment. ADE providers that were incorporated into larger disability organisations have developed in-house open employment teams. ADEs that did not have an in-house open employment team or DES, sought partnerships with local DES services (or their staff). Open employers get advice about employee's support needs, interests, and skills when they partner with ADEs. This helps to facilitate successful transition periods between ADE employment and open employment contexts.

## **A model to promote participant pathways to open employment**

Based upon the research findings, Figure 1, illustrates the components of a pathway that can positively contribute to assisting participants along their employment journey.

Figure 1: A model to promote open employment



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) recognises the ‘...*right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market.*’ Therefore, these opportunities need to be open, inclusive and accessible (United Nations 2006). The objects and general principles of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Act 2013 (Cth) articulate the purpose of the NDIS as supporting people to achieve independence, and social and economic participation.

The Australian Disability Strategy (2021–2031) supports these obligations with a policy priority for employment and financial security that aims for ‘people with disability to have more control over their lives, be financially independent and have a better standard of living’ (DSS, 2021a p.9).

Despite these obligations, people with disability in Australia have worse employment outcomes than the general population. In fact, the labour force participation rate for people with disability aged 15 to 64 years old is 53% compared to 84% of people without disability (AIHW, 2022). Overall, the employment rate of people with disability has shown no improvement over the last 20 years (Commonwealth of Australia 2023a).

In 2021 the NDIA Evidence and Practice Leadership Branch (formally the Research and Evaluation Branch) published the “[Achieving a sense of purpose: Pathways to employment for NDIS participants with intellectual disability, on the autism spectrum and with psychosocial disability](#)” report detailing research on barriers and enablers to employment for NDIS participants with intellectual disability, psychosocial disability and/or on the autism spectrum. In this research NDIS participants and NDIA staff reported the lack of inclusive employment options as the greatest barrier to participants finding and keeping a job. Other barriers reported by NDIS participants in 2021 included:

- A feeling that their disability and needs were not always well understood
- A lack of clarity around what funding and supports were available

- A lack of post-school training and education options appropriate for people with intellectual disability, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and/or psychosocial disability and a lack of clarity about what supports and services are available
- A lack of self-confidence that they are employable people (NDIA 2021).

People with high support needs have lower work force participation rates than people with lower support needs (27% compared to 62%) (AIHW 2020). People with high support needs are more likely to work in ADEs than those with lower support needs. Approximately 16,000 people with disability work in around 160 ADEs across Australia (Commonwealth of Australia 2023a).

In our 2021 research, NDIS participants with experience working in an ADE reported being funneled into ADEs without exploration of other options (NDIA 2021). Further, participants wanting to move from ADEs to open employment encountered many barriers such as few opportunities for building their capacity while at the ADE.

The report noted the recent introduction of a new pricing framework for participants who require on the job supports that could introduce new opportunities for participants to expand their employment options and for providers to develop new service models. This change was designed to enable greater choice and control over where supported employees worked (NDIA 2021). However, it was not known how this change would impact the open employment outcomes of NDIS participants with high support needs (DSS 2024a).

In late 2022, the Minister for Social Services, the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, held a roundtable with state and territory disability ministers, people with disability, family representatives, ADE representatives, peak bodies and other sector experts. The attendees agreed on a set of 12 guiding principles for the future of supported employment (for people with disability with high employment support needs) (DSS 2023c). Principle 8 states that “NDIS participants and providers, including ADEs, are supported to make full use of NDIS employment support funding to achieve their employment goals” (DSS 2023c).

Following the development of the guiding principles, the Commonwealth, State and Territory Disability Ministers agreed to work together to create a comprehensive employment plan. The plan was endorsed by Disability Ministers on 3 November 2023, and includes a range of practical initiatives and actions, with a specific focus on employment for people with disability with high support needs (DSS 2024b).

One of these initiatives is the new Structural Adjustment Fund which aims to increase opportunities in mainstream employment for supported employees. To facilitate this, the fund will provide grants to enable supported employment services

and social enterprises to evolve their business models to align with the guiding principles (DSS 2024b).

Also in late 2023, the The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the Commission) (Commonwealth of Australia 2023b) handed down their final report. The Commissioners recommended that there was a greater need for supporting people with disability working in ADEs to move to more inclusive, open employment options if they choose. Although there was a mixed response from the Commission on the abolishment of segregated employment, it was made clear that more opportunities for open employment are needed to increase choice and control.

In December 2023 an independent review, *The NDIS Review* (the Review), into the NDIS noted that limited available paid employment, lower incomes, reliance on government payments as well as a lack of supports outside the NDIS, present significant barriers to employment for people with disability (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023c).

The Review recommends the provision of foundational supports (available to all people with disability) so that people with disability can access the right employment supports at the right time and place to reach their employment goals. The review recommends that general and specialist navigators should be available to all people with disability at key life transitions to prepare for employment (along with education and independent living) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023c).

In July 2020, the NDIA changed its pricing structure for Supports in Employment to facilitate increased choice of employment type. Under the new pricing structure, participants can use their employment supports in any workplace they choose, including government and non-government organisations, an ADE, social enterprise, micro-enterprise, self-employment, or a family run business.

Along with increasing participants' employment choices, the change to the pricing structure also provided ADEs an opportunity to modify their business models to better support employees to build capacity and experience different employment environments, including less segregated workplaces.

To further support an increase in transition from ADE to open employment this research aims to explore how:

- ADEs have responded to this pricing structure change including any changes to their business models
- ADEs provide support to employees to find and keep open employment



- NDIS participants with high support needs, are or could be, enabled to find and maintain open employment.

## 1.2 What the literature tells us

As part of this research, we looked at the recent (2018-2023) national and international published research on employment for people with high support needs. The research indicated that there are many social, environmental, and functional factors that predict open employment for people with high support needs. These included:

- increased independence in daily living skills (Chan, Smith, Hong, Greenberg, Lounds Taylor and Mailick 2018; Engeland, Strand, Innstrand and Langballe 2020, 2021)
- having family who support them with their employment goals (Park and Park 2021)
- previous open employment experience (Shogren, Anderson, Burke, Antosh, Ferrara, Pallack and Dean 2020)
- the size and breadth of people's social networks (Chan et al. 2018; Spencer, Van Haneghan and Baxter 2021; Ramsey, Cameron, Harrison and Young 2022)
- the higher their level of education (Engeland et al. 2020; Park and Park 2021)
- the higher their level of family income (Chan et al. 2018; Park and Park 2021).

Previous research also identified environmental and individual barriers that made it difficult for supported employees to transition from segregated workplaces to open employment and remain in this position. These barriers included:

- families' and employees' concerns about potential impacts to disability related income benefits such as the Disability Support Pension (DSP) in Australia (Spencer, Van Haneghan and Baxter 2021)
- families' safety concerns, including psychological safety in open employment (Carter, Bendetson and Guiden 2018, Chauhan et al. 2022)
- fatigue in open employment leading to negative self-perception about their ability to keep up with assigned workloads (Vlachou et al. 2021).

According to the literature, the initial stages of transition from segregated to open work environments can be difficult and stressful for people with intellectual disabilities (Vlachou, Roka and Stavroussi 2021). To support the transition phase job coaches can work with all parties in the workplace including co-workers, supervisors, co-worker mentors, and the employee with disability to support the set-up and



sustainability of the employment (Pellicena, Àngel, Ivern, Giné and Múries 2020). Further, coworker mentors can collaborate with employees, supervisors, and job coaches to create more adaptable work schedules, evaluate task quality and completeness, aid in the repair of errors and acknowledge accomplishments (Pellicena et al. 2020).

Quality interactions between employees with high support needs and their coworkers without disability is crucial to open employment success (Pellicena et al. 2020). As such, workers who have positive and friendly interactions from peers without disabilities feel valued and appreciated at work (Soeker, Heyns, Kaapitirapi, Shoko and Modise 2021). Matching people with high support needs, to suitable work tasks enables them to display their competency and feel appreciated (Inge, Graham, Brooks-Lane, Wehman, and Griffin 2018).

Overall, the literature tells us that there are many factors that influence the rates of open employment for supported employees. This includes the workplace environment and the attitudes of coworkers and family. It also shows that people with high support needs experience barriers to demonstrating competence, making work and career decisions, and relating to others. Higher rates of open employment are associated with a higher level of independence in daily living activities, previous open employment experience, and size and breadth of social networks.

### **1.3 The disability support ecosystem**

The NDIS is one part of an ecosystem of supports (Figure 2) that people with disability can access. The ecosystem includes mainstream services, community supports, informal supports, specific supports available for all people with disability, and NDIS individualised budgets. The Review notes that the ecosystem is fragmented and creates a chasm between supports available inside and outside the NDIS (Commonwealth of Australia 2023c).

Within the context of employment, the disability ecosystem of supports includes:

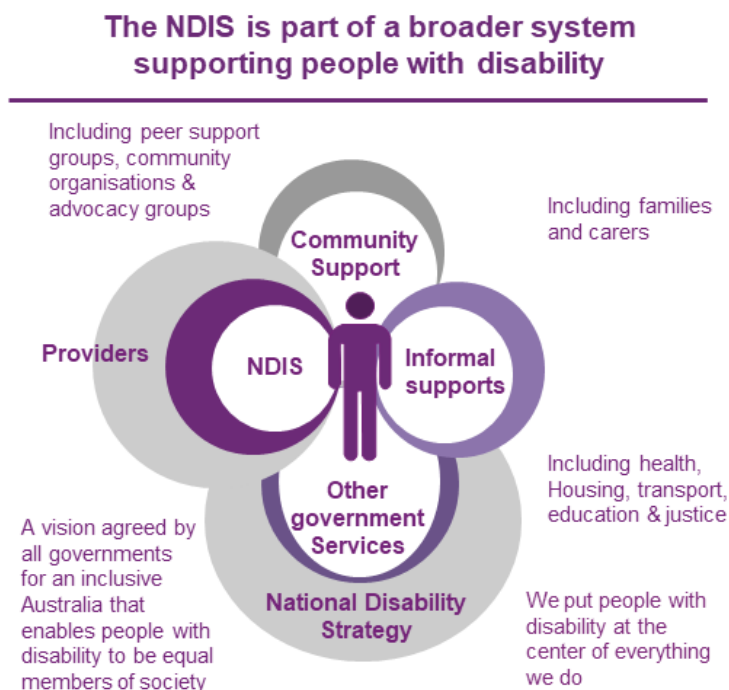
- Mainstream services such as health, education, Centrelink and Workforce Australia.
- Community supports such as peer support groups, community organisations and advocacy groups.
- Informal supports such as family and friends.
- Natural supports around the employee such as colleagues and team leaders.
- Specific disability supports such as, information, advice and peer support and Disability Employment Services (DES).

- NDIS individualised budgets such as funding to purchase on-the-job supports (supports in employment).

NDIS participants are required to navigate the disability ecosystem to access the right supports that will assist them to reach their employment goals. This could include a combination of supports from different parts of the ecosystem. Our previous research found that NDIS participants faced barriers to navigating the ecosystem of employment supports (NDIA 2021) including finding and keeping a job through interaction with the DES program.

Since its inception in 2010, the DES program has been criticised in a number of inquiries and reports for not improving the employment outcomes of Australians with disability (Boston Consulting Group 2020). To achieve better outcomes for people with disability, the Commission recommended that the Australian Government develop a new Disability Employment Services model using inclusive design (Commonwealth of Australia 2023b).

**Figure 2: Ecosystem of supports for people with a disability**



## 1.4 Employment supports for NDIS participants

NDIS participants with high support needs<sup>4</sup> can be supported at work in a variety of ways. These supports include NDIS funded supports, other Australian Government funded supports (for example, travel), natural supports (for example, those in the workplace such as coworkers and employers) and informal supports (for example, family and friends).

### 1.4.1 NDIS-funded employment supports

As of 2023, NDIS participants can purchase employment supports from either their core or capacity building budgets. The support available in the core budget is for regular support at work. These supports are called “Supports in Employment.” Participants can purchase these supports from their core budget if they:

- need frequent and ongoing supports, delivered in a workplace, including an ADE or open employment
- need support to build skills, for example are doing supported work experience or volunteering.

Supports in Employment funding can include on-the-job supports such as individualised or small group work for intensive tasks or more general support and supervision in a larger group. On-the-job supports can include training, skills development, support with daily work tasks and supports to manage disability related behaviour or complex needs. Participants’ funding may also include non-face-to-face supports linked to the participant’s disability. These may include:

- individualised planning
- defining tasks required to perform the role
- task analysis
- job design and modification
- creation of task prompts
- writing NDIA requested reports.

NDIS participants who need support to move from an ADE to open employment can also purchase Capacity Building Employment Supports, including School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES) and employment related assessment and counselling.

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<sup>4</sup> High support needs are defined as those who need substantial ongoing support to obtain and/or keep paid employment.

SLES aims to support NDIS participants move from school to work by helping them to explore different types of work they may like, build skills for work, gain work experience and/or connect to the right job and employer.

Employment related assessment or counselling supports help participants to successfully engage in work. This can help participants to identify their work goals, challenges they may face in employment and what type of employment supports they may need. Services can include:

- vocational or functional assessment
- education and support for the participant, employer, and others in the workplace
- counselling when a participant's disability prevents them returning to their previous job and to assist them to identify future employment options.

#### **1.4.2 Other Government funded employment supports**

Other Government funded supports can assist NDIS participants with high support needs to find and maintain open employment. These include:

- Disability Employment Services (DES), which support eligible people with disability, injury or a health condition to prepare for, find, and maintain employment.
- Employment Assistance Fund, which pays for specific equipment or specific services that enable employees with disability to perform their role.
- Supported Wage System, which enables people whose disability affects their level of productivity to compete in the open employment market by setting their wage according to their productivity.
- Wage Subsidies, which provide an incentive to employers at the start of job placement to help meet the start-up and onboarding costs.

## **1.5 Employment of NDIS participants**

As part of the participant pathway into the NDIS, participants complete the NDIS short form outcomes questionnaire, containing questions about work, when they complete their first planning meeting. This is repeated at subsequent planning meetings. Participant responses show that 23% of all NDIS participants aged 15 years and older are in some form of employment as of June 2023<sup>5</sup> (NDIS 2023c).

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<sup>5</sup> Responses to the question 'Are you in paid work?' in the outcome framework questionnaires. Paid work includes all types of paid work including ADEs, salaried employment, and self-employment among others.

Using employment information from recent plan review data<sup>6</sup> overall 20% (n=15,367) of employed NDIS participants aged 15 years or older work in an Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE). This is higher in participants aged 25 years or older 25% (n=13,893) compared to participants aged 15 to 24 years 7% (n=1,474) (Evidence and Practice Leadership Branch; NDIS 2023a).

Graph 1 shows that participants with a primary disability of intellectual disability or Down syndrome are the largest groups of NDIS participants working in ADEs. This is especially the case amongst participants aged 25 years and over, where 67% of employed participants with a primary disability of intellectual disability, and 69% of employment participants with Down syndrome, work in an ADE.

In contrast, most employed participants with a primary disability of intellectual disability aged 15 to 25 years work in open employment (73%) (Evidence and Practice Leadership Branch; NDIS 2023a).

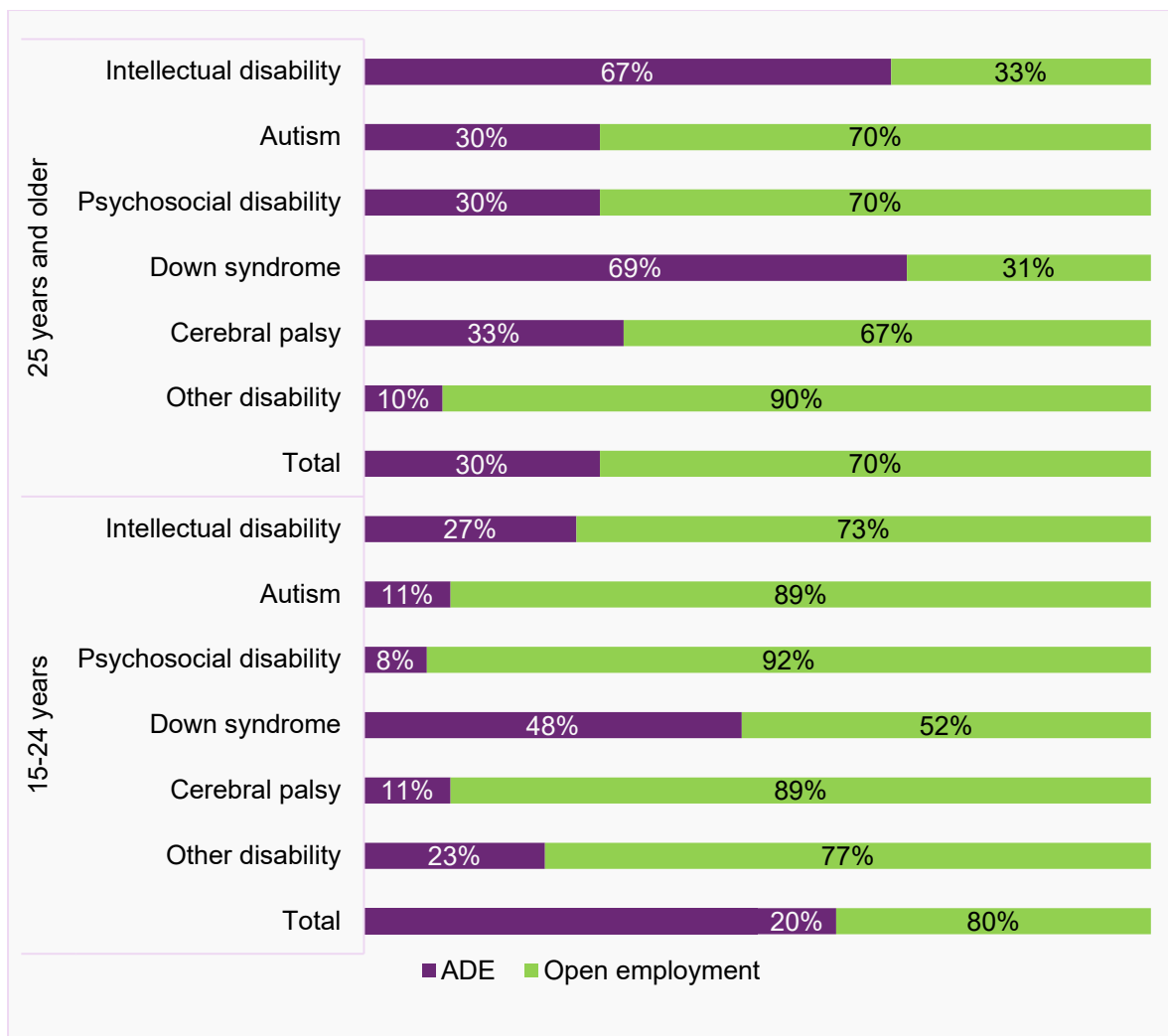
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<sup>6</sup> Number of NDIS participants who meet the following conditions: 1) participants' most recent plan was active between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2023, 2) participants recorded working in an ADE for the SFOF associated with their most recent plan, and 3) they received any ADE supports in employment payments in their most recent plan.

**Graph 1: Employment type by age and primary disability.**

**Notes: Other disabilities include other sensory/speech and other physical and others. Data accessed 17<sup>th</sup> August 2023.**

**Source: Evidence and Practice Leadership Branch; NDIS 2023a.**



When comparing the impact of the disability on NDIS participants’ daily activities<sup>7</sup>, NDIS data suggests that the greater the impact of a person’s disability the less likely they are to be employed in open employment compared to an ADE. This is especially so for participants aged 15 to 24 years old (Graph 1).

However, data also shows that regardless of functional impact, over three-quarters of employed participants are working in open employment (Graph 2). This suggests

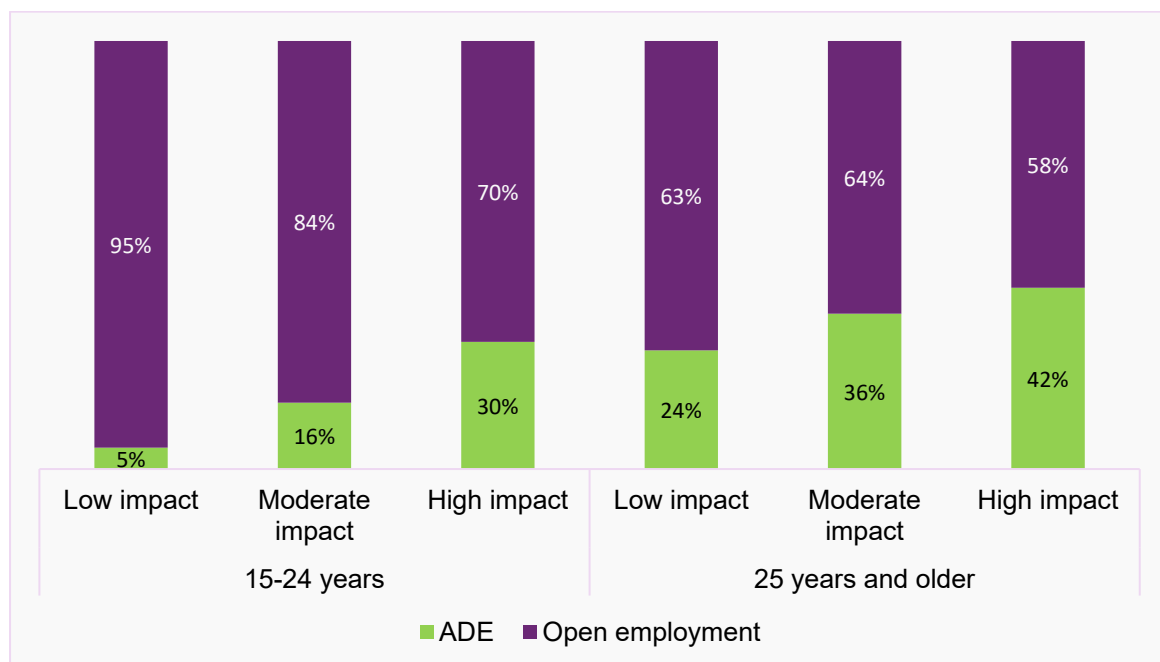
<sup>7</sup> A functional capacity assessment is how we assess the impact a person’s disability or a child’s developmental delay has on their daily activities. Depending on their developmental delay or disability, the type of functional capacity assessment that we complete may vary. A score of 1-15 is derived from the functional capacity assessment. 15 is the highest level of impact on daily activities.

that many NDIS participants in ADEs could work in open employment despite the level of functional impact on their daily activities

**Graph 2: Functional impact of disability by age and whether they are in an ADE or open employment**

**Notes:** Disability impact is based on a normalised severity scale which the NDIS derives from a participant’s functional capacity assessment. A score of 1 is the minimal impact a person’s disability on their daily activities and 15 is the greatest impact on overall function. Low = 1 to 5; moderate = 6 to 10 and high = 11-15. These data include all employed NDIS participants at their first plan from 2017 onwards.

**Source:** NDIA Research and Evaluation; NDIS 2023a



## 1.6 Transitions from an ADE to open employment

Despite most employed NDIS participants with high support needs working in open employment (Graph 2), very few NDIS participants have transitioned from an ADE to open employment. Since 2017, 234 (3.1%) NDIS participants aged 15-24 years and 539 (1%) aged 25 years and older have transitioned from an ADE to open employment according to the NDIS participant short form outcomes questionnaire<sup>8</sup>. Once they have transitioned however, most of these participants remain in ongoing open employment (Evidence and Practice Leadership Branch; NDIS 2023a).

The NDIS short form outcomes questionnaire data does not indicate if specific disability or function affects the likelihood of transitioning (Evidence and Practice Leadership Branch; NDIS 2023a).

Analysis of NDIS participant data shows that the change made to the pricing structure for Supports in Employment did not significantly predict the number of ADE employees aged 15 to 24 years, or 25 years and older, transition into open employment ( $p > .05$ )<sup>9</sup> (Evidence and Practice Leadership Branch; NDIS 2023a).

## 1.7 Our research

While we know that very few NDIS participants have transitioned from ADEs to open employment, we do not have sufficient insights into how ADEs support NDIS participants to transition to open employment if this is what they want.

Within these aims the research has three specific objectives:

1. To identify predictors of successful and unsuccessful transition to open employment.
2. To understand how ADEs support NDIS participants to transition to open employment.
3. To identify successful strategies and the challenges for open employers to employ participants with high support needs, including those leaving an ADE.

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<sup>8</sup> The short form outcomes questionnaire is administered to all participants, or their nominees, during planning meetings and includes questions about if and where the participant works.

<sup>9</sup> Models account for a participant's age, primary disability, disability severity, living situation, number of daily living activities the participant needs support in, whether they have volunteered, their involvement in community, cultural or religious groups, whether they know people in the community and their overall NDIS plan utilisation rate.



We focus on NDIS participants with high support needs such as those who work or have worked in ADEs, or who may work in an ADE if other opportunities were not available to them. We included participants who met one or more of these criteria:

- has an intellectual disability (including Down syndrome) because they are the most represented disabilities working in ADEs
- requires support at work or job customisation
- has worked, or currently works in an ADE.

## 1.8 This report

The rest of this report describes how we undertook the research and what we found:

- Chapter 2 – Gives an overview of our research methods.
- Chapter 3 – Details our research findings.
- Chapter 4 – Links the research findings to the ICF to describe the impact of disability and environmental and personal contexts on participation in employment.
- Chapter 5 – Provides considerations for supporting participant pathways to open employment.
- Chapter 6 – Presents an open employment pathway model

Appendices provide extra information as follows:

- Appendix A – Detailed qualitative and survey methods.
- Appendix B – Detailed statistical method.
- Appendix C – Full results of statistical data.
- Appendix D – Research participant demographics.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 How we framed the research

#### 2.1.1 The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health

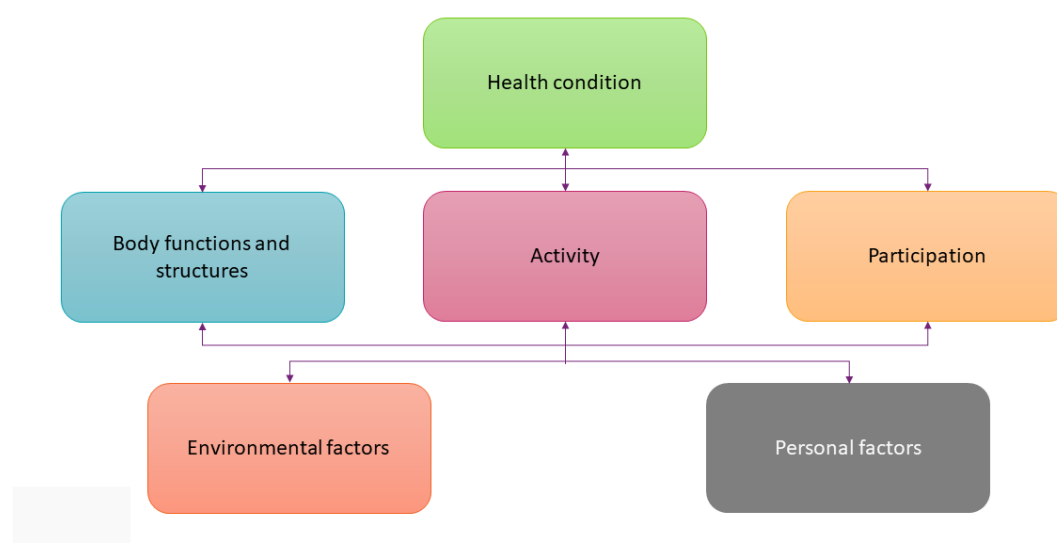
The World Health Organisation's (WHO) International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) is a framework that helps us understand how different factors affect people's functioning (WHO 2001) (Figure 3). The ICF has two main parts:

1. **Functioning and disability**, which looks at what a person can do and where they may have difficulty. This includes body functions and structures, and activity and participation.
2. **Contextual factors**, which consider the features around a person that can influence their functioning and disability. This includes environmental factors such as their physical surroundings and the people they interact with, and personal factors such as age, gender, education, and personal traits.

We aligned the barriers, enablers and predictors to the different factors that help with functioning (ICF categories).

Figure 2: ICF Framework

Source: WHO 2001



## 2.2 Research consultants

We designed this research to use an inclusive research approach. Research projects can be inclusive of their target population in various ways such as advising researchers, leading and conducting research, and co-conducting research (Bigby, Frawley and Ramcharan 2014).

For this project, NDIS participants with experience working in an ADE as either supported employees or support staff were recruited to contribute their lived experience to the research project. The research consultants were not included as research participants in this research. Rather, their lived experience expertise improved the research design, implementation, and interpretation of the findings.

The research consultants were paid for their time and their input included:

- review and feedback on qualitative data collection tools
- reflections on the research findings
- review and feedback on the easy read report.

The research consultants provided insights that changed the qualitative interview questions for NDIS participants, ADE managers, and open employers. Drawing from their lived experience, they provided added context to the research findings which contributed to the results presented in this report and the accompanying summary and easy read documents.

## 2.3 Who participated in this research?

NDIS participants, family, and carers contributed their voices to this research. They told us about their experiences working in ADEs, open employment, and transitioning between the two environments.

ADE managers, and representatives from disability service organisations told us about changes they had made to their supported employment service's (ADE) business models and how they supported NDIS participants to transition to open employment.

We also heard from open employers who told us about how they support people with high support needs in their workplaces and the barriers and enablers to this from their perspectives.

Finally, we heard from disability advocacy organisations who told us about pathways to ADEs and strategies and programs for supporting people with high support needs to gain and maintain open employment.

## 2.4 What we did

We used the following data and methods to address the research objectives:

- an online survey for NDIS participants
- interviews and focus groups with NDIS participants, family, ADE providers and managers, open employers and disability advocacy organisations<sup>10</sup>
- statistical analysis of NDIS participant administration data.

### 2.4.1 An online survey of NDIS participants

We developed an online survey to understand the employment status of NDIS participants with high support needs including their industry. NDIS participants who have or need support at work were invited to complete an online survey. The survey asked about past, current, and desired employment types. Survey respondents could complete the survey with or without support. A support person, such as family, could also fill in the survey on the NDIS participant's behalf.

Those who completed the survey (n=116) included or answered on behalf of:

- current ADE employees (n=66)
- current open employment employees (n=13)
- not currently employed (n=38).

Respondents indicated one or more disabilities for either themselves or the person they responded on behalf of (n=88). These included:

- intellectual disability (73%)
- autism (43%)
- other (23%)
- psychosocial disability (7%)
- cerebral palsy (7%)
- Down syndrome (1%).

The survey used the Work Readiness Inventory (WRI) to identify respondents' readiness for open employment or areas for development. These include being responsible for themselves, equipment, and the organisation, being flexible to work-related changes, understanding their skills and abilities, communicating effectively, understanding their personal views on work, and maintaining good health and safety practices (Brady 2010).

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<sup>10</sup> We use the term 'disability advocacy organisations' in this report to refer to disability services that are not NDIS service providers and who advocate for disability rights.

Appendix A describes the additional demographics of respondents, data collection and data analysis methods.

### **2.4.2 Interviews and focus groups**

To get a deeper understanding of the employment aspirations and transition pathways, skill building programs and activities, and barriers and enablers to transition from ADEs to open employment we conducted qualitative focus groups and interviews with:

- 8 NDIS participants with high support needs who have experience working in an ADE and/or open employment
- 9 parents of NDIS participants with experience working in an ADE and/or open employment including microenterprises
- 3 open employers with experience hiring people who have, or could have, worked in an ADE
- 18 ADE managers
- 7 representatives from a range of disability services and advocacy organisations.

NDIS participants who participated in an interview or focus group were paid for their time.

Appendix A describes the additional demographics of interview and focus group participants and data collection and analysis methods.

### **2.4.3 Statistical analysis of NDIS participant data**

We examined NDIS participant data for 15–24-year-olds and 25+ year olds. Variables including demographic, disability, daily living activities, health and wellbeing, work, social, community and social participation, and NDIS employment supports payments predicted whether an ADE employee is more likely to transition to open employment.

We used the employment outcome collected in the NDIS short form outcomes questionnaire. We included data for 1,433 participants aged 15-24 years and 14,936 participants aged 25 years or older. These participants:

- Started work in an ADE
- had completed two or more short form outcome questionnaires.

Appendix B presents the detailed statistical methods.

## 2.5 Ethical approval

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

## 2.6 Strengths and limitations of this research

### 2.6.1 Strengths

- The collaborative approach to designing and implementing the research was a key strength of this research. NDIS participants provided advice on the design of the qualitative data collection tools, the interview approaches, and the meanings of the findings. Stakeholders at the NDIA also guided data collection tools and the interpretation of findings.
- Another key strength of this research is the mixed methods design, which means the research questions can be explored from multiple viewpoints and data sources.
- Another important strength is that over 160 NDIS participants, their family and carers, ADE managers, open employers, and disability service or advocacy disability services directly contributed to the research.
- A strength of the NDIA participant data analysis is that we can track participants over time, which gives us a more accurate picture of when they transitioned from an ADE to open employment.

### 2.6.2 Limitations

While the research is comprehensive there are limitations.

- Some of the NDIS participants, family, and carers who took part in focus groups and interviews were recruited via a list of persons registered as interested in offering input to the NDIA. As such, there is likely to be sampling bias towards people with something to say, meaning the findings may not be representative of all NDIS participants with high support needs.
- Due to the sampling approach, data underrepresents culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) NDIS participants, First Nations NDIS participants, people with profound or severe functional impairment, and those in the justice system.

- The NDIA currently measures the building of NDIS participant capacity using the NDIS short and long form outcomes framework questionnaires. The response options for many of the relevant questions are 'yes' or 'no,' and only measure full attainment of outcomes and not incremental progress. This limits our ability to model the impact of capacity building supports on open employment-related outcomes because we cannot identify incremental changes.

## 3. Research findings

This chapter presents the research findings in four main themes.

1. Young people are more ready for open employment
2. Building employment literacy increases the likelihood of transitioning to open employment.
3. Family support is important for transitioning into open employment.
4. Innovative approaches to supporting transitions to open employment.

Within these themes we drew together NDIS administration data, interviews, focus groups and survey findings.

### 3.1 Young people are more ready for open employment

In this section, we look at the association between age, the length of time working in an ADE and how this affects the transition to open employment. The section also looks at what makes it difficult to transition out of ADEs and how expectations for young people are changing.

#### Key findings

- Younger NDIS participants (15 – 24 years old) are less likely to work in ADEs and more likely to transition to open employment than older NDIS participants
- The length of time in ADEs can impact transitions to open employment
- There are a number of established pathways to ADEs from segregated environments like special schools
- Young ADE employees are concerned about work readiness, especially how to communicate in the workplace and manage change such as rosters and job tasks
- There is a shift in thinking from young people, in relation to their ambitions and expectations about the type of work they can do
- ADEs are diversifying their industries to attract young people with high support needs who do not want to work in highly segregated ways.



### 3.1.1 Younger NDIS participants and those who have worked in an ADE for a short period are more likely to transition to open employment

As highlighted in Chapter 1, participants younger than 25 years old are more likely to transition into open employment from an ADE<sup>11</sup> (Evidence and Practice Leadership Branch; NDIS 2023a).

Further, analysis of NDIS data shows that as participants get older, they are less likely to transition from an ADE to open employment<sup>12</sup>. Compared to participants aged 25- to 34-years, those aged:

- 35 to 44 years are 1.59 times less likely to transition from an ADE into open employment (p=0.017)
- 45 to 54 years are 2.22 times less likely to transition from an ADE into open employment (p<0.001)
- 55 years and older are 3.45 times less likely to transition from an ADE into open employment (p<0.001) (Evidence and Practice Leadership Branch; NDIS 2023a).

Responses to the online participant survey indicate that once NDIS participants are working in an ADE, they are likely to stay working in an ADE. Of respondents who indicated they currently work in an ADE, 70% have worked there for five years or more. Although some respondents indicated that they currently work in open employment, they had been in their role for a much shorter period than the ADE employees on average (see Table 3).

**Table 1: Time with current employer by employment type**

Source: Online survey.

How long have you worked for this employer?	ADE	Open employment
Less than 1 year	7 (11%)	5 (38%)
1–4 years	12 (19%)	6 (46%)
5–9 years	17 (27%)	2 (15%)
10–19 years	13 (21%)	0 (0%)

<sup>11</sup> 2.3% of ADE workers aged 15 to 24 years have transitioned into open employment compared to 1% of ADE workers aged 25 years or older.

<sup>12</sup> Analytical models account for a participant's age, primary disability, disability severity, living situation, number of daily living activities the participant needs support in, whether they have volunteered, their involvement in community, cultural or religious groups, whether they know people in the community and their overall NDIS plan utilisation rate.<sup>13</sup> NDIS participants indicate in which areas of daily activity they require support in the Short Form Outcome Framework. The 8 areas are: domestic tasks, personal care, travel and transport, communication with other people, getting out of the house, finances/money, reading and/or writing, and using technology.

How long have you worked for this employer?	ADE	Open employment
20 years and over	14 (22%)	0 (0%)

### 3.1.2 Existing pathways leading into segregated employment

Representatives from disability advocacy organisations talked about the direct pathway from schools to ADE employment. ADE managers confirmed this, sharing that they liaise with special schools and mainstream schools with support classes to provide work experience and first jobs in the ADE. Parents also confirmed that they had received advice from schools about employment for their children in ADEs but less so about open employment.

### 3.1.3 Factors that influence access to segregated employment

When a child attends segregated schools the lack of community and social participation make segregated employment appealing as they haven't been exposed to the variety of social settings open employment brings. Disability organisation representatives and ADE managers agreed that forming friendships and social connections are a strong motivator for employees to remain in an ADE. Parents whose adult children work in an ADE explained that benefits of ADEs including being a safe environment for their children to go during the day and gaining a sense of community. Family, ADE managers, and disability service providers discussed the safety concerns in open employment, another reason influencing the decision to remain in an ADE.

Vera, mother of Dante, intellectual disability, ADE employment, said: My motivation has always been for him to be a part of the community to get out and meet people and learn to travel on trains and things like that. It's not about work really – to earn money – it's about being a part of the community and having a reason to get up every morning and go off and do something.

It is important to note that some families and NDIS participants recognised that there are opportunities to form social connections in open employment too.

Interviewer said: Can you tell me what you like about working there?

Suzie an NDIS participant with an intellectual disability working in open employment, said: The friendships.

Families and ADE managers explained that negative experiences in open employment had caused some participants to lose their confidence. This led to the need for more intensive emotional or behavioural support from the ADE before a participant tried open employment again. Negative experiences include non-inclusive

workplaces, no reasonable adjustments and lack of the right type and intensity of support.

Becci, a supported employee at ADE said: I don't get support from work, except from team leaders [with disability]. Not from staff so much because they don't have time.

Sally, ADE manager said: But they've not received the support that they needed to maintain [open employment], and they've landed back in the ADE after three months, six months, feeling very defeated and then quite damaged by their experience.

ADE managers and family members discussed the concerns about the potential reduction of Disability Support Pension (DSP) payments and Health Care Card benefits if their child moved to open employment. A number of the ADE managers interviewed recognised that there are NDIS participants working at the ADE who could easily transition to open employment if they were not concerned about losing a stable DSP.

Hannah, ADE manager, said: What's not working for us is all the people that we support are very reliant on their disability support pension. And so, there's a resistance from them to want to move into open employment.

### 3.1.4 Young people's employment expectations

While there remains many motivating factors to continue working in an ADE, our research suggests that there are changing aspirations about employment for young people with high support needs. Younger NDIS participants (aged 18-23 years old) who were interviewed told us about their expectations and described their dream jobs, for example particularly in industries that help other people such as disability advocacy and childcare. A group of parents of young NDIS participants also told us how they aspire for their young adult children to work in inclusive workplaces.

Ruby an NDIS participant with intellectual disability in open employment, said: I'm a public speaker. I'm trying to do more of that throughout my life, because I want to be an advocate for people who have a disability, as well as an influencer... I really want to get into schools and the university, or even other workplaces to talk about how they can communicate better with someone that has a disability, as well as treat them as a normal human-being.

ADE managers also commented that younger people no longer expect to work in ADEs for all their working life. In the online survey more ADE employees aged 18 to 24 years indicated that they aspired to change jobs, this was more so than older age groups (36% compared to 18% of 25- to 34-year-olds). Some ADE managers

highlighted that they have responded to this changing expectation by diversifying the types of workplaces that they offer to build capacity to work in different industries.

Dina an ADE manager said: I opened a kiosk because I felt there was a need for the younger generation coming through, who didn't really want to be in manufacturing and to give them more choice.

Simon, ADE manager said: It's a little bit of a culture shift to say this doesn't have to be someone's workplace for life and to mirror the kind of new way that young people are approaching work.

### 3.2 Building a participant's capacity increases likelihood of transitioning into open employment

In this section we look at the role of capacity building to support transitioning, finding, and maintaining open employment. It includes:

- Capacity building for NDIS participants.
- Capacity building for employers.
- Capacity building for ADEs.

#### Key findings

- Purchasing NDIS funded capacity building supports is associated with increased transitions to open employment.
- ADE supported employees could benefit from learning practical skills in communication in the workplace and how to manage change i.e., shift times or work tasks.
- Participant's understanding of workplace rights may lead to greater self-efficacy in employees who can take control over their careers.
- Undertaking volunteering and/or using informal networks to gain employment is an associated route to transitioning from ADEs to open employment.
- Open employers want to learn how to engage and support employees with high support needs but lack information to make it feasible (such as applying the supported wage system).
- There were differing views across ADEs about their role in building participants' capacity and supporting a transition pathway to open employment. They requested more national guidance and/or local education programs.

### 3.2.1 Capacity building for NDIS participants

#### **Capacity building funding is associated with an increase in transitions to open employment**

Although purchasing capacity building employment supports is associated with the transition from ADEs to open employment NDIS data shows that, on average, only 10% of participants aged 25 years and older who have worked in an ADE have purchased these supports. On average, 13% of participants aged 15 to 24 years who have worked in an ADE have purchased SLES. Of those who have purchased SLES over half (7%) have successfully transitioned from their ADE into open employment (Evidence and Practice Leadership Branch; NDIS 2023a).

The association between capacity building funding and increased transitions was also found through further analysis of NDIS participant data, which showed:

- Participants aged 15 to 24 years were 3.38 times more likely to transition from an ADE to open employment if they had purchased SLES while working in an ADE ( $p=0.002$ ).
- Participants aged 25 years and older were 2.26 times more likely to transition from an ADE to open employment if they had purchased Capacity Building Employment Supports while working in an ADE ( $p<0.001$ ).
- Participants aged 25 years and older who have worked in an ADE are 1.10 times less likely to transition to open employment for each additional daily activity in which they need assistance<sup>13</sup> ( $p<0.05$ ).

Grace, mother of Zac, said: If you get young people doing work experience, that is absolutely pivotal, but you also need people to do that observational work, because that's where you get all the information that you need to then to be able to come up with a really good work-based profile about what the individual has to offer to an employer.

#### **Opportunities for participants to build career skills in an ADE or disability service**

During interviews, ADE managers talked about building ADE supported employees' capacity to move towards open employment, which included a variety of pathways, these included volunteering or working in open employment, or opportunities within

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<sup>13</sup> NDIS participants indicate in which areas of daily activity they require support in the Short Form Outcome Framework. The 8 areas are: domestic tasks, personal care, travel and transport, communication with other people, getting out of the house, finances/money, reading and/or writing, and using technology.

ADEs, some of which offer a diverse range of products or services. Some ADE managers spoke about open employment opportunities within their organisations, including supporting employees to transition into roles usually classified as open employment opportunities. Some ADEs also run formal training or provide informal help to participants to access training reflecting their open employment goals.

One ADE manager spoke about developing supported employees to be employment ready to meet workforce shortages in larger organisations. He explained that a person diversifying their role or taking on extended duties could use these as a steppingstone to gain open employment. For some ADE managers we spoke to, the NDIS funding change has enabled ADE employees to try new roles in a variety of business areas across the organisation.

Ainsley an ADE manager said: I've been a massive fan of the funding change because it's really enabled us to provide that extra level of support and training. So, we've been able to offer support, offer employment to people who have got a higher support level because we've got staff now that can support that. It's giving us the capacity to spend time with people and upskill those who have wanted to be upskilled and create opportunity for them.

### **Building capacity to enable work readiness**

To better understand the areas where ADE employees need support to build capacity to become 'ready' for open employment, our online survey of NDIS participants included the Work Readiness Inventory (WRI) (Brady 2010). The WRI measures work readiness across 6 domains: health and safety, self-view, communication, (vocational) skills, flexibility, and responsibility.

Overall, a higher percentage of survey respondents indicated that they were concerned or very concerned about being flexible (for example, adjusting to roster or task changes)<sup>14</sup> in the workplace (25%) and communicating<sup>15</sup> with coworkers and employers (21%) (Graph 2). Many respondents said that they were a little or not concerned about health and safety (70%) and showing responsibility<sup>16</sup> (60%).

These results contrast with the interview findings with ADE managers and participants indicating that health and safety can be a motivating factor to remain in

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<sup>14</sup> Examples of specific survey questions in the WRI to determine level of concern about communication are, 'telling my employer what I want' and 'checking instructions, I don't fully understand'.

<sup>15</sup> Examples of WRI questions to determine level of concern about flexibility are 'changing my work schedule', and 'taking on different job duties'.

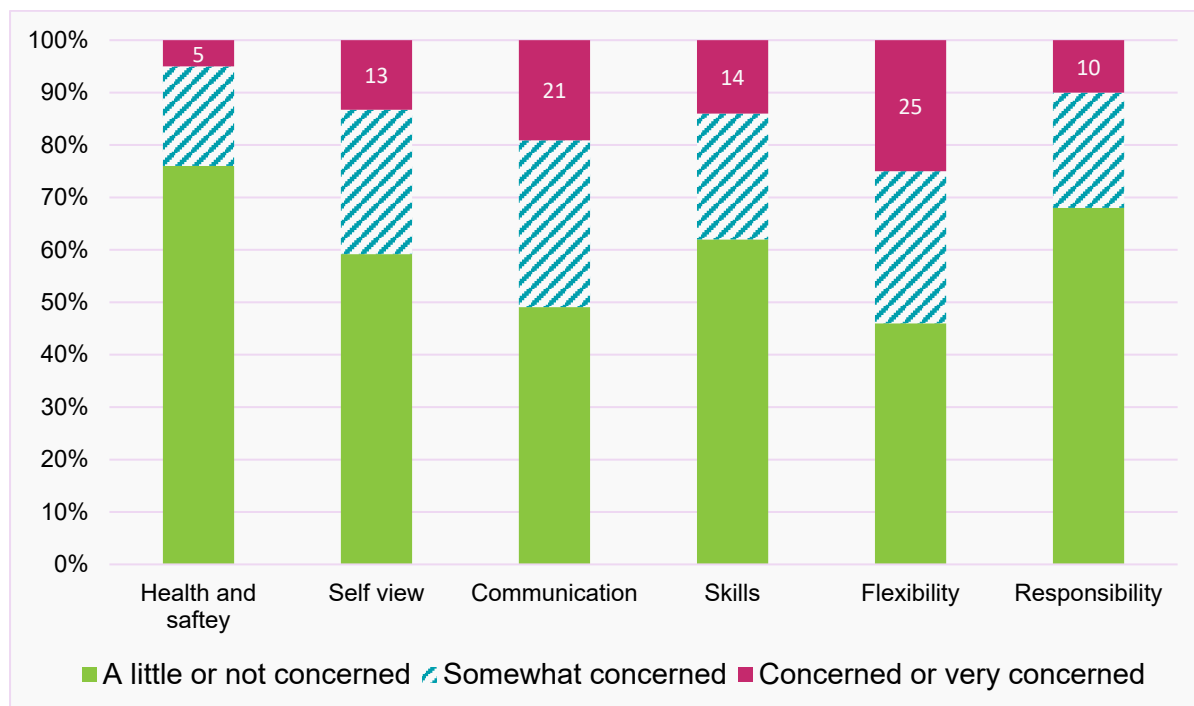
<sup>16</sup> Examples of specific survey questions in the WRI to determine level of concern about responsibility in employment include: 'participating in employer training/retraining' and 'receiving feedback and criticism.'

an ADE (Section 3.1.2). It was further noted that ADE employees in the packaging, manufacturing, or warehousing industry (n=37) were more concerned about health and safety in open employment when compared to those working in the rest of the ADE industries combined (n=25;  $p < .05$ ). These findings could be interpreted to mean that the priority on health and safety is different across different industries or that ADE employees in other industries (such as hospitality) were more confident about their abilities.

**Graph 3: ADE employed survey respondents and their average level of work readiness concerns (n=36)**

**Note:** Scores are categorised as: 25-30 (very concerned), 10-24 (concerned), 13-18 (somewhat concerned), 7-12 (a little concerned), less than 6 (not concerned) (Brady 2010).

**Source:** Online survey, Work Readiness Inventory (Brady 2010).



Workforce readiness results were different across age groups. For example, the survey found (Graph 4) young ADE employees were most concerned about communication and flexibility<sup>17</sup> compared with those aged between 25 to 44 years who were only a little concerned about their work readiness in most domains and somewhat concerned about flexibility. However, these results should be interpreted with caution due to the small number of survey respondents.

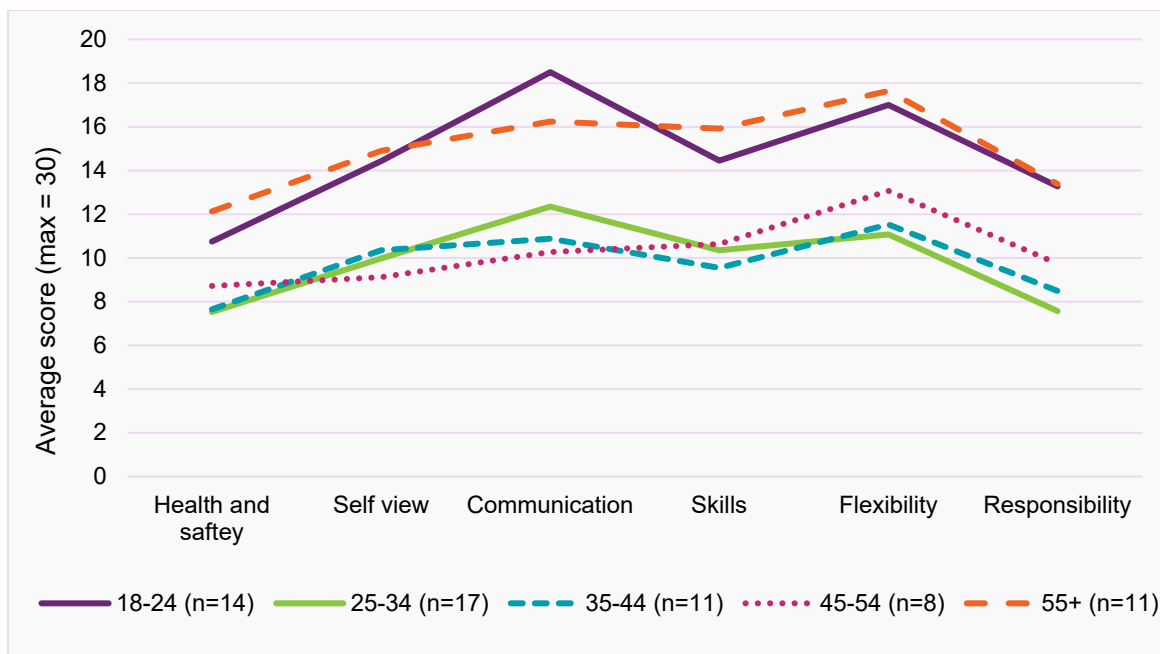
<sup>17</sup> Examples of specific survey questions in the WRI to determine level of concern about communication are, 'telling my employer what I want' and 'checking instructions, I don't fully understand'. Examples of WRI questions to determine level of concern about flexibility are 'changing my work schedule', and 'taking on different job duties'.



**Graph 4: WRI scores by age group**

**Note:** score interpretation is as follows: 25-30 (very concerned), 10-24 (concerned), 13-18 (somewhat concerned), 7-12 (a little concerned), less than 6 (not concerned).

**Source:** Online survey, Work Readiness Inventory.



These findings could suggest that work readiness concerns reduce with age, and presumably with more work experience in an ADE. However, confidence is lost when they reach 55 or over years of age. This suggests that ADE employees aged in their mid-twenties may be more confident about being employment ready than both the younger employees or those aged 55 years and older.

### **ADEs pathways to open employment**

Some ADEs and ADE providers told us about their new business areas, which are external facing. This includes customer facing roles such as cafes or retail, and jobs that are similar to open employment industries such as cleaning or catering.

ADE managers explained that this was in response to a societal shift towards increased inclusion of people with disability in open employment. This has been made easier by the NDIS pricing changes. According to ADE managers, these new business areas aim to provide employment opportunities that are more appealing to younger people than segregated work such as packaging. ADE managers saw these new business areas as a key step in a pathway before transitioning to open employment.

Johanna an ADE manager said: We've started some microbusinesses ourselves, so that way we're giving them a taste of what open employment can be like. For example, our candle business, they go out and actually sell candles at a store, so they're getting some customer service skills and retail skills.

Further, ADEs that are part of larger organisations (ADE providers) have the opportunity to diversify their business model and offer broader experiences to employees and to supported employees. This gave supported employees an opportunity to be exposed to a range of roles and tasks that could be steppingstones to open employment. Likewise, some ADEs and ADE providers looked for opportunities where supported employees can transition to open employment roles at the ADE or parent organisation.

Simon an ADE manager said: We have an internal economy, if you like, by using [parent organisation] for some of those services. So, we are cleaning some of the sites particularly our residential aged care facilities. We have some property maintenance contracts with social housing providers, and we've just started a small hospitality enterprise which is a mobile coffee van that goes to a range of sites as well.

### **Understanding workplace rights and the supports available can increase self-efficacy**

Mostly all research participants emphasised that employees with high support needs can be vulnerable to exploitation by all employers. According to ADE managers, employees who experience unfair work practices when transitioning to open employment can return to ADEs with reduced confidence.

Sally, ADE manager, said: [Open employers can] take advantage of people's intellectual disability, not being committed to educating them about their rights in the workplace, expecting them to work long, unreasonable hours without the equipment they need or not addressing complaint or bullying from other mainstream workers. There's a lot of complexity there, as I think for a lot of participants who are going that route, the potential for the experience to set them back is quite high.

The NDIS participants and families we interviewed had limited understanding of the current flexibility of NDIS funded on-the-job employment supports (Supports in Employment funding), or how to use Capacity Building Employment Supports to build skills and find open employment. NDIS participants and their families noted that both disability support services and NDIS planners provide inconsistent information about the type and availability of NDIS employment support funding.

ADE managers commented that there needs to be a shift in thinking across the sector as the flexibility of on-the-job doesn't mean ADEs are the only setting for supported employment.

However, ADE managers also commented that their support staff did not always have time to provide the necessary one-to-one coaching for families on how to best implement NDIS plans to create open employment opportunities for participants.

Samantha an ADE manager said: [We have] limited capacity, either from a staff awareness point of view or time in the day to do that 1 to 1 coaching and support about how to best implement your NDIS plan.

### **Volunteering and involvement in the community can empower individuals and build skills that contribute towards work readiness**

Analysis of NDIS participant data indicates that volunteering and/or using informal networks in the community may help build networks and work readiness. The data shows that:

- Participants aged 15 to 24 years are 1.67 more likely to transition from an ADE to open employment if they report using informal networks in the community ( $p < .05$ ).
- Participants aged 25 years and older are 1.32 times more likely to transition from an ADE to open employment if they have volunteered in their community ( $p < .05$ ).

ADE managers told us that some supported employees have tried volunteer work with support workers through the DES. An NDIS participant with prior work experience in an ADE said that he has volunteered prior to getting his job in warehousing with an open employer.

Families also spoke about the role of volunteering in finding other employment. For one parent, volunteering was a way for her young adult daughter to break into the childcare industry.

Melissa mother of Asha who has an intellectual disability said: [She has] a position in this childcare centre that's very supportive, very respectful. But we started off with this volunteer work [before paid work].

### **3.2.2 Building skills and awareness of open employers**

In addition to building the capacity of NDIS participants, ADE managers, disability advocacy and service organisations told us that many open employers need upskilling in how to support and include people with disability in the workplace.

Some ADE managers told us that they undertake capability uplift work while consulting with individual employers. Likewise, some disability advocacy and ADE providers run training and workshops for open employers which focuses on diversity and inclusion in the workplace. However, they noted that this was an ongoing role as open employers often required refresher training due to staff turnover or disability champions leave the company.

### **Enablers and barriers to gaining organisational buy-in**

Open employers who were involved in this research told us that they were motivated to hire people with high support needs. This was due to personal experiences, the experiences of friends and family, and if they had seen positive employment examples. Parents also said that open employer settings could draw upon lived experiences with people with disability and use these understandings to support their employees with disability.

It was noted that case studies of successful employment opportunities for people with intellectual disability could be used as exemplars for open employers who may not have their own personal experiences to draw from.

Ivy an open employer said: [I'm motivated by] my own personal beliefs, I think that's a really important thing that we should really be fostering within this organisation because that is what we are about.

While an individual manager may be motivated to employ people with high support needs, they will also require the buy-in from various levels of the organisation or business.

This includes CEO or board sign-off but also motivating the broader workforce. Open employers explained how staff buy-in was important for the success of the employment due to needing these natural supports to provide everyday support and a welcoming and inclusive environment. However, they said that it often takes someone to champion the change in the organisation. Open employers told us that pointing to workplace values, policies, or agreements that already supported the notion of hiring employees with high support needs relieved concerns about starting from scratch.

Building an understanding and gaining exposure of working with people with high support needs in the workplace improved attitudes among staff. Parents and open employers told us that this can take time.

Annette, mother of Lucy, intellectual disability, said: The supervisor said that a lot of people were a bit unsure at first about having someone with a disability within the workplace. And she's noticed that the change of culture within that workplace over the two-thirds of a year that she did there, that has really changed.

### **Capacity building to support employees with high support needs**

The open employers in this research said the guidance isn't clear regarding what NDIS funded employment supports are available to eligible NDIS participants. Examples were provided, such as an open employer ready for an employee to start but had to wait for NDIS plan approval funding approval. Another open employer wasn't aware of funding for supports to assist with employment, indicating a lack of awareness of the potential support available.

Open employers also told us that additional emotional support is required for employees with disability and there is a need for support or information about how best to offer this. Similarly, the employees who were NDIS participants also expressed the need for emotional support in the workplace. This support could be accessed from natural supports on-the-job, their NDIS employment provider, or DES contacts.

Tom an NDIS participant with intellectual disability in open employment, said: I get along very well with my [DES worker]. He rings me every fortnight. If I've ever got a problem I'll ring him, tell him that something's bugging me at work, and he'll do something about it. He'll ring up [the boss] and say, "Look, this is what's happening. He's not happy." Yeah, so I'm 100 per cent happy with the support I get.

NDIS participants told us that being patronised or condescended is a source of emotional distress. Open employees told us that they avoided supervisors who spoke down to them to manage the situation. However, it is the employers' responsibility to make sure that the workplace is psychologically safe for employees with disability, including creating a culture where employees feel safe to speak up about negative workplace experiences.

NDIS participants in this research reported a range of positive and negative interactions with co-workers without disability. For example, they told us that they appreciated coworkers without disability working with them on a common team goal. However, they also told us that sometimes they actively avoided coworkers to avoid feeling discriminated against. Disability advocacy organisation representatives and ADE managers recommended a facilitated approach to help employers get to know the employee including understanding their likes and dislikes and how best to support and communicate with them in the workplace.

Tom an NDIS participant with intellectual disability in open employment, said: But I can't flat out say "You're discriminating against us because we've got disabilities". But I just look at how he is with other people [without disability]. He seems to be quite okay with them.

### **Human resources, the supported wage system and the DSP**

Due to the lack of examples and support infrastructure relating to employment for people with high support needs, open employers told us that they had to learn as they go. Examples include writing role descriptions, developing contracts that align with DSP parameters, finding appropriate workspaces, and making judgements about the appropriateness of tasks. Open employers told us that this involved trial and error with regular check-ins with the employee.

Ivy an open employer said: We had some success and some [failures]. I quickly realised maybe the [job] in the doctor's lounge, even though it was suitable [for someone with a disability], the space was too small, and it was probably quite confronting [to the employee with disability].

Some disability support or advocacy organisations collaborate directly with employers to develop position descriptions suited to the employees. They also support the development of support plans including visual aids and emotional supports that are suitable to both the employee and the workplace. However, they told us that this work is outside scope of what is currently funded yet has enormous benefits.

Phill, ADE Manager said: we're currently providing free is this sort of capacity building piece [to open employers] ... if this thing's going to really have legs and we're going to scale this up. We're doing it at the moment kind of as goodwill gestures.

### **3.2.3 Capacity building for ADEs**

ADE managers have different views about the role of ADEs to support transition to open employment. Around half of the ADE managers who participated in this research told us that supporting employees to transition was outside of their remit and was not explicit in the NDIA Pricing Arrangements and Price Limits (NDIS 2023b). Other ADE managers told us that it is an increasingly important part of their role. However, some also stated that the funding did not adequately cover support needs, particularly if the ADE needed to shift from a 1:3 support ratio to a 1:1 support ratio in open employment.

ADE managers may benefit from further information and support about the use of NDIS capacity building and on-the-job support funding that could allow for greater ratio flexibility. They also told us that they wanted examples of successful use of NDIS funding to build capacity of supported employees.

David, ADE manager, said: If someone could do it and we could see a positive way to do it, we would replicate it and do it. But we just don't see the case studies.

### 3.3 Family support is important for transitioning into open employment

In this section we explore in more detail the role of the family in supporting open employment opportunities and how informal networks can lead to open employment opportunities.

#### Key findings

- Low family expectations about the type of employment opportunities type can influence impact transitions to open employment.
- NDIS participants living alone<sup>18</sup> are more likely to transition to open employment. Including family and carers in career conversations can help lift family expectations and harness their support for open employment.
- Harnessing family and community networks provide pathways to open employment.

#### 3.3.0 Family expectations and concerns can impact transitions to open employment

Analysis of NDIS participant data indicates that living with family, or with friends and/or group homes is associated with a reduced likelihood of transitioning to open employment. NDIS participants aged 25 years old or older are 33% less likely to transition if they live with family compared to those who live alone ( $p < .05$ ; Evidence and Practice Leadership Branch; NDIS 2023a). While this could be an indicator of their level of daily independence, family influence might also play a part.

ADE managers explained that family expectations about the suitability of employment type (for example, ADE or open employment) impacts the degree of support for transitioning to open employment. ADE managers said that some families are concerned that open employment will likely lead to negative experiences such as bullying, and that these fears lead families to establish, or seek out, segregated employment.

Ainsley, ADE manager, said: I've worked here since it was a sheltered workshop and parents founded this organisation to create a space for their children to come and work. So, it's really trying to break out of that kind of thinking now. It's really quite ingrained.

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<sup>18</sup> We controlled for level of functional impact.



Some of the family members in our research told us that they did not think that their family member employed in an ADE could work in open employment, even with support.

Vera, mother of Dante, ADE, intellectual disability, said: it's not that I would have concerns [about open employment], I just know he couldn't do it. I just know that purely because I know.

Disability advocacy organisations emphasised the importance of including parents in career planning activities and discussions with NDIS participants. This involves coaching families to have conversations with their children about employment opportunities from a young age and at different life stages. They noted that children without disability are often asked what they want to be when they grow up. But this is not asked of children with disability, especially those with intellectual disability, but should be encouraged.

Disability advocacy representatives also talked about the need to harness the positive expectations of some families about what employment options are possible for their children. They spoke about acknowledging the strength of family to influence open employment aspirations.

As an example, families who participated in this research who have high expectations about employment opportunities invested significant time and effort into identifying employment opportunities. This included accessing support to help their adult child consider their interests and strengths and working with job coaches to facilitate open employment. However, a number of families did note that their social-economic status and networks enabled them to drive opportunities, and this may not be as accessible for all families.

### **3.3.1 Family and community networks provide support to find and maintain open employment**

Open employers told us that staff who have family members with disability have approached them about hiring their family member with disability. ADE managers also mentioned that some ADE employees have left the ADE to find employment through family connections. This was confirmed by NDIS participants in open employment who spoke about finding employment through their families' social networks.

Drew, NDIS participant, ADE and open employment, intellectual disability: [I found the job] through someone – I think through a family friend who worked at the TAFE, so they worked at the TAFE, so I started working there with them.

Open employers, family, and disability advocacy organisations also talked about the role of families in finding and keeping a job, including providing unplanned support to the employee when required.

Sian, mother of Noah, said: My husband just goes in once every week for half an hour to see what my son's being taught. He takes videos. They come home then they practise it.

Disability advocacy organisations told us that they are training families about using their networks to increase the number of employment opportunities available in the market and how to customise roles with potential employers.

One disability advocacy organisation we spoke with is piloting a program that trains well-connected community members to raise awareness about the benefit of hiring people with disability. Although this is still in its infancy the program is proving time and resource intensive and has remained local.

### 3.4 Innovative approaches to supporting transitions to open employment

Analysis of NDIS data shows that changes to the funding rules for NDIS Supports in Employment have not contributed to increasing the number of participants who transition from an ADE to open employment. We used interviews with ADE managers, and ADE providers to explore this further.

#### Key findings

- ADEs identify supported employees interested in open employment differently.
- ADEs and ADE providers have made changes to their business models to facilitate open employment in a number of ways.
- Disability services and disability advocacy organisations are supporting transition to open employment through specific strategies, but many are time intensive.

#### 3.4.1 Some ADEs and ADE providers are using the pricing change to increase support for the transition to open employment

ADE managers who participated in this research told us about their approaches to identify if supported employees are interested in open employment. Some told us that they wait for a supported employees to request open employment and then start planning how to facilitate a transition.

Other ADE managers said that they are proactive in identifying who would be interested in open employment and is raised at annual planning meetings. For some, this means being aware of employee's career goals and looking for opportunities. Some ADE managers told us that they explain to all new supported employees that the ADE can be a pathway to open employment.

Phill an ADE manager said: We obviously have records of what people's goals and career goals are. So particularly for those that are looking for open employment opportunities, it's a bit of a, "Hey, did you see this opportunity?" We then do a meet and greet with the employer, and they will then undertake a work trial.

### **Establishing in-house open employment teams**

Some ADE providers have established teams who work with ADE employees, SLES participants and participants using other services in their organisation to seek employment opportunities. Some of these organisations have started customised employment projects or pilots including discovery processes or job carving (for example dividing a position up so that more than one person does the tasks matched to their skills and interests). For some, the pricing changes to NDIS Supports in Employment meant they could hire employment consultants to work with supported employees on training and capacity building to get them ready for open employment.

The pricing changes have enabled some ADEs to increase the ratios of support that better suit the support needs of their supported employees. This has meant that they can participate in a greater range of work tasks and business areas, including higher support needs. However, others noted that if supported employees wanted to try tasks that required higher levels of support, there was not always the NDIS funding available.

Other ADEs and ADE providers support NDIS participants in organising a plan review to access Capacity Building Employment Supports. They explained that this is to purchase specialist employment coaches to support job carving or customisation in mainstream employment. The rationale they provided for needing Capacity Building funding as opposed to using Supports in Employment funding is that these specialists demand higher remuneration due to their expertise and the intensity of their support.

An ADE provider representative said: Once somebody is identified as wanting to move into open employment, then we will write a supportive letter and support them to organise an [NDIS plan] review to get that funding put in and then we can support them with customised employment and support the people around them with job coaching and mentoring.

## **ADE partnerships with DES and mainstream services**

Some ADE providers also offer DES. These ADEs told us that they often refer a supported employee who shows an interest in open employment to their in-house DES. In some organisations, ADE support staff liaise with DES staff to provide context about the supported employee's skills, capabilities, and interests.

Other ADE managers reported seeing DES as the only pathway to open employment for supported employees at their organisation and noted funding, NDIS price guide descriptions, and support ratios as barriers to them directly supporting employees to find and maintain open employment.

We asked ADE managers if there are other professionals, services, or organisations that they engage with to support employees who want to transition to open employment. Other than DES, many did not know of other services. However, a few ADE managers talked about training courses and services that they refer people to if they express an interest in working in another industry, for example hospitality. Some ADE managers and ADE providers also spoke about tapping into SLES programs at their organisation for contacts, knowledge, and mutual support.

Katie an ADE manager said: Sometimes I get in contact with the support coordinator, and we talk about allied health specialists or training. We also have a school leaver employment support system on site so we link up with those guys and see what they can provide us. Even though it's for school leavers, we've got that relationship where if they have any outsourced companies that they can give to me so we can work together.

## **ADE partnerships and liaison with open employers**

As already mentioned, ADE managers spoke about how they, or their teams, liaise with open employers to increase their knowledge about disability, support needs and certain employees who have expressed interest in open employment.

A few ADE managers spoke about marketing themselves to open employers as labour hire in response to the NDIS pricing changes. They explained that they have put extra support staff on so they can hire them out as labour hire with the supported employee. However, ADE managers also described difficulty in covering the costs of this extra support, especially if the employee has previously been employed at a lower support level (for example, 1 supporter to 7 supported employees in a warehouse) but required 1 to 1 support in the new workplace as they adjust to the unfamiliar environment.

### **3.4.2 Disability advocacy organisations are supporting transition to open employment using a range of strategies**

Some disability advocacy organisations who participated in this research advocated for job matching. They explained that a strength of this strategy is that it matches people's interests and strengths to the workforce needs. Strategies previously shown to be successful include working with employers to design a role description based on company requirements, defining job assignments and performance assessment criteria, having someone like a job coach to serve as an employment mediator and supporting the person at the job placement (Spencer et al. 2021).

Disability advocacy organisations explained that they promote or use job coaches to support open employment. According to previous research, job coaches can work with all parties in the workplace including co-workers, supervisors, co-worker mentors, and the employee with disability to support the set-up and sustainability of the employment (Pellicena, Àngel, Ivern, Giné and Múries 2020).

However, families we spoke with perceived job coaches to be hard to access through disability services and so used NDIS funding to hire freelance job coaches for their adult children. This suggests that there may be a shortage of expertise that can provide job coaching.

## 4. Discussion

In this section we discuss the key research findings and acknowledge these in the context of The NDIS Review (the Review) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023c), the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the Commission) (Commonwealth of Australia 2023b), and the existing evidence-base. Drawing on these findings, we have identified a series of considerations that could promote the cohesion of the disability support ecosystem to achieve better open employment outcomes for NDIS participants with high support needs.

### 4.1 Responses to the research aims

This research aimed to understand how:

- ADEs have responded to this pricing structure change including any changes to their business models
- ADEs provide support to employees to find and keep open employment
- NDIS participants with high support needs are, or could be, enabled to find and maintain open employment.

We summarise the findings aligned to the objectives below.

#### 4.1.1 ADEs responses to the pricing structure change

Our research showed that some ADEs, disability service and advocacy organisations supported transitions to open employment using several innovative approaches. These included the introduction of opportunities for people to work in public facing roles like gardening or hospitality. Some ADEs ran training or certification courses, and others linked interested supported employees with local training opportunities. There were also ADEs that opted to maintain the status quo and provide on-the-job support within their own workplace.

The flexibility afforded by the pricing changes enabled ADEs to hire employment consultants to build the capacity of supported employees to prepare for open employment. The pricing change also enabled some ADEs to adjust ratios of support to increase the variety of work tasks supported employees could participate in, potentially increasing their skill level and exposure to different settings such as community-facing workplaces. Further, in response to the pricing change, some ADEs now market themselves to open employers as labour hire to facilitate transitions to, and on-the-job support in, open employment settings.

#### **4.1.2 ADEs supporting employees to find and keep open employment**

ADE providers that were part of larger disability or care organisations had the resources to develop in-house open employment teams. These teams worked with ADE supported employees to apply for funding for employment capacity building supports that would support their career needs. NDIS funded supports then enabled the ADE provider to work with the participant and potential open employers to create customised transition pathways.

Conversely, those ADEs that did not have an in-house open employment team or DES, sometimes sought partnerships with local DES, or even specific DES staff, where they had developed relationships with them. These relationships enabled greater communication between the ADE and DES including sharing information about the NDIS participant's support needs, interests and skills.

Open employers benefitted from partnering with ADEs, as it enabled employers to tailor their support for the person and seek advice during and after the transition. During transition, some ADEs provided un-funded wrap-around support such as reminders about upcoming appointments and emotional support to the supported employee.

Disability advocacy organisations also provide support to families, open employers, and NDIS participants including sharing knowledge about matching people to jobs, discovery processes, and job customisation including establishing microenterprises based on interests and skills.

To support employees to find and keep open employment, ADE providers established in-house teams to actively support ADE supported employees to access employment capacity building funding, identify capacity building opportunities, engage with local DES providers, and find and be supported in open employment or volunteer opportunities. However, about half of the ADE managers were of the opinion that supporting employees to transition was outside of their remit. This suggests that ADEs and ADE providers may require further support to see how this could be a viable aspect of their business.

A common theme in interviews with ADE providers and managers was around how to identify supported employees who are interested in pursuing open employment. Some ADEs have made changes to their processes, using a more pro-active approach such as recording people's employment goals, following up with them, scouting for opportunities, and having ad-hoc conversations with interested employees around the workplace. Other ADEs only have conversations with supported employees about their work goals once a year at their annual check-in.



### **4.1.3 Enabling NDIS participants to find and maintain open employment**

The research identified that young participants are more ready to start considering and preparing for their careers in open employment. Young participants aspired to access open employment and ADEs were a steppingstone to achieving this. Some ADEs were changing their business model to respond to this need and using an individualised approach to work directly with young people to identify interests and skills and match them to suitable jobs. The research further noted that NDIS funded employment capacity building supports also helped NDIS participants build skills and get work ready.

Our research found that young ADE employees were concerned about work readiness, especially how to communicate in the workplace and manage change such as rosters and job tasks. As such, young ADE supported employees could benefit from learning practical skills in communication in the workplace and how to manage change such as, shift times or work tasks.

Changes in families' aspirations for their adult child's employment opportunities could also impact young people's own expectations. Some ADEs have responded to these changes by diversifying their industries to attract young people with high support needs who do not want to work in highly segregated ways. Family support extended to identifying open employment or volunteer opportunities, drawing on family informal networks, and using NDIS funding to hire support workers with experience in job coaching and/or job customisation approaches. Some advocacy organisations provided families with support to identify opportunities including establishing micro enterprises.

To further enable NDIS participants to find and maintain open employment, employers needed to learn about how to successfully accommodate and support employees with high support needs. For some, this involved a steep learning curve, often undertaken by an individual staff member who championed the employment of people with high support needs in their workplace. Gaining buy-in, navigating human resources, the supported wage system, and support available through DES and ADEs were barriers to employing people with high support needs. Further, a single workplace champion often took on this navigation, meaning that these employment opportunities were not embedded in the open employment business and could be lost due to the champion leaving the workplace.

Some ADEs provide support to open employers about how to create workplace environments that facilitate successful experiences for people transitioning from ADEs to open employment. Further, offering supported employees as labour hire means that ADEs can provide on-the-job support in open employment settings.



It is acknowledged that employment services often require involvement and input from mainstream services. The research shows that guiding ADEs to adjust their business models towards a transition model would be in-line with the commitment made in the Australian Government 2023-24 Budget to assist the supported employment sector to evolve to better meet community expectations.

The Commonwealth, State and Territory Supported Employment Plan (DSS 2024) includes the establishment of the Structural Adjustment Fund. The fund will provide grants to enable supported employment services (such as ADEs and social enterprises) to evolve their business models, including to increase supported employee's choice and control and reduce segregation. The plan also introduces the Youth Employment Framework to improve employment outcomes for young adults. Overall, this Framework aims to increase the number of young adult NDIS participants gaining employment in a setting of their choice.

The NDIS review (2023c) recommends actions to improve integration across the disability support ecosystem including education, the NDIS and the extension of supports available to people with disability outside of the NDIS. According to the Review report, these supports should be foundational and include capacity building supports to assist people to get ready for employment and explore their employment options.

## **4.2 Our research extends the research literature**

Generally, our research findings align with the recent research literature. Alignment is most obvious in the articulation of barriers to obtaining and maintaining open employment. These barriers have been well-established, and the literature and our research highlights that they remain despite years of policy and advocacy work.

In line with recent research, we found that increased independence in daily living skills was associated with a higher likelihood of transitioning to open employment (Chan et al. 2018; Engeland et al. 2020, 2021). We also identified the important role that families play in supporting open employment aspirations (Park and Park 2021) and that open employment opportunities were often found through community and family social networks (Chan et al. 2018, Spencer et al. 2021, Ramsey et al. 2022).

Previous research has indicated that the level of family income is associated with obtaining open employment (Chan et al. 2018; Park and Park 2021). Our research found that some families are aware about how their socio-economic status impacts how much time and energy they can contribute to finding and supporting open employment opportunities. In turn, they are aware that this can lead to unequal employment opportunities and outcomes. Relatedly, families, carers, and ADE employees were concerned about losing the DSP if they transitioned from an ADE to

open employment in our research and the recent literature (Soeker et al. 2021, Spencer, Van Haneghan and Baxter 2021).

The literature we reviewed had inconsistent results about the relationship between age and segregated or open employment (Chan et al. 2018, Engeland et al. 2021). By contrast our research found that young NDIS participants with high support needs were less likely to work in ADEs and more likely to transition to open employment than older NDIS participants.

Overall, our research departs from the previous literature in its focus on NDIS participants and the specific conditions that foster transitions from ADEs to open employment within the context of the NDIS as well as mainstream and informal supports. As such, we have attempted to explore potential solutions to the well-known barriers explored above and throughout this report.

### **4.3 Linking the research findings to the ICF**

The ICF describes the impact of disability and environmental and personal contexts on individuals' participation in daily and social activities. Using the ICF structure, we aligned our research findings to the ICF domains. Further, the ICF provides a standardised and internationally recognisable terminology about health and disability. This helps researchers, policy makers, and healthcare professionals communicate about health and disability functioning.

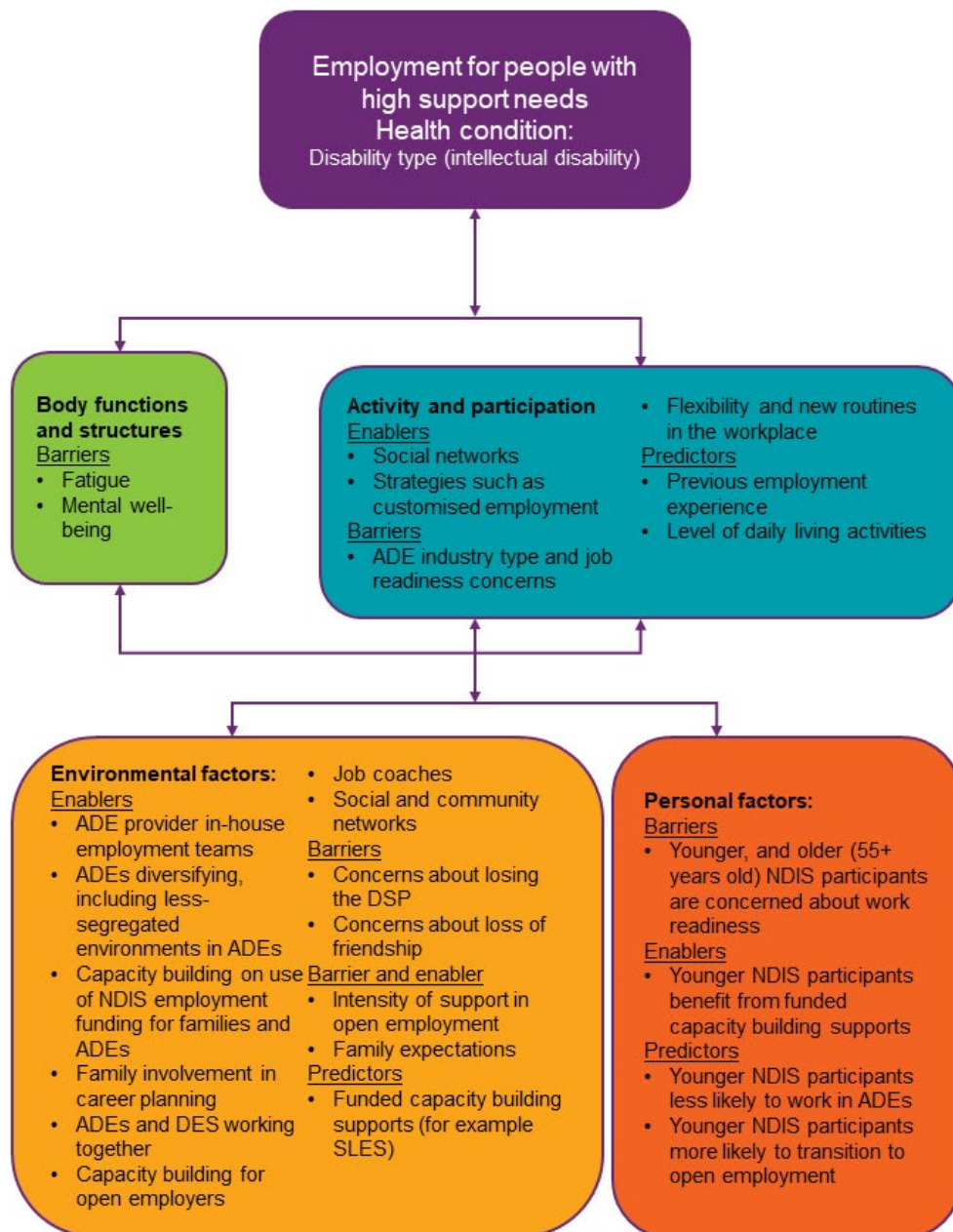
In doing so, we found that many of the barriers and enablers that support the transition from ADEs to open employment were influenced by participation and environmental factors, rather than body functions or impact of disability. All the identified participation and environmental factors are modifiable suggesting that changes can enable greater transition rates and more successful open employment experiences for people with high support needs.

We identified barriers in the body functions and structures domain of the ICF (mental health, well-being and fatigue) that are not worsened through employment. Similarly, the research finding about the impact of age on the likelihood of transitioning to open employment suggests that age does influence outcomes. It may also suggest that further research could shed light on age specific barriers for those aged 25 years and older.

**Figure 3: Summary of research findings against the ICF.**

**Notes: Identified barriers and enablers by ICF categories, for NDIS participants who obtained open employment.**

**Source: WHO 2001.**



## **4.4 Considerations for supporting participant pathways to open employment**

In this section, we provide the NDIA and other government agencies with considerations that could reduce multisystem barriers and facilitate pathways to open employment. We have aligned these considerations within the broader disability support ecosystem, more specifically, to the NDIS Review (the Review) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023c), and The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the Commission) (Commonwealth of Australia 2023b) recommendations and the Commonwealth, state and territory supported employment plan.

### **4.4.1 Young people are more ready for open employment.**

We identified young participants are more ready to start considering and preparing for their careers in open employment. To enable this further the research highlighted that the following could increase open employment outcomes for young people:

- Planners routinely introduce employment goals in planning conversations while participants are still at school in preparation for future employment.
- SLES is routinely offered to NDIS participants with high support needs aged 24 years and younger with an opt-out function.
- Family and carers are included in an employment planning conversation with young people, to provide consistent advice and time for questions and answers.
- Focus on community and social participation goals when participants are young. This may help to avoid employment being the only source of social participation outside of family and therefore potentially becoming a barrier to leaving segregated employment or changing jobs.

### **4.4.2 Building employment literacy increases the likelihood of transitioning into open employment**

Our research showed that there was an association between purchasing of capacity building supports and transitioning to open employment. Despite this positive outcome, all research participant groups indicated that usage was trial and error and more needed to be done to build awareness and understanding to ensure that participants could maximise the use of these resources. Families also expressed their willingness to learn but needed resources that are accessible to do this.

## **Support to become employment ready**

Our research found that NDIS participants with high support needs wanted support to get ready for open employment. Open employers also wanted more support and information about how to support participants with high support needs in the workplace.

Support to increase work readiness for NDIS participants includes:

- Participating in discovery processes to identify interests, strengths, and career goals.
- Building daily living and independence skills including travel training and activities of daily living.

Factors to increase work readiness for open employers includes:

- Information about how to gain organisational buy-in throughout all levels of employees.
- Support to up-skill the natural supports in the workplace such as coworkers without disability and identify coworker mentors.
- Specific information and coaching about navigating requirements such as the DSP and the supported wage system.

The NDIS review (2023) recommends an increased focus on the role of capacity building to support people with disability on their pathway to employment and making these more accessible.

## **Participant support to engage in the workplace**

ADE supported employees identified that they would feel more confident if they could build skills and techniques in communicating with co-workers and employers and how to respond to change in workplace conditions and demands in potential open employment opportunities. The research also highlighted that employment literacy was needed to better understand workplace rights, including workload restrictions and scheduled breaks, and having opportunities to make workplace decisions led to increased self-determination.

Additional capacity building supports could focus on self-efficacy, including through supported decision making around career goals, identifying strengths and capabilities, and understanding of workplace rights, including the right to an inclusive workplace.

#### **4.4.3 Informal support (family or carer) is associated with successful transitioning into open employment**

Our research found that family and carers of NDIS participants with high support needs are heavily involved in their lives. As such, family and carers can influence participants' own work goals, dreams, and aspirations including lifting or limiting what people think they are capable of in the workplace. DES, ADEs, NDIA planners, and LACs can bring family and carers along the employment journey and help to counter low expectations and harness high expectations. Lifting self-efficacy and expectations can begin from an early age as well as at key life stages such as before the transition to post school activities.

Families and carers can also play an important role by identifying employment opportunities through their own social networks. However, they may require support about how to leverage and grow their community and social networks as well as information about how individual and mainstream supports can facilitate successful open employment experiences.

Given these findings, the NDIA could consider:

- Encouraging the contribution of family and carers in planning conversations about employment goals and supports.
- Including informal and mainstream supports for identifying open employment opportunities in participants' plans.
- Improving access to information and resources that compliment NDIS planning conversations about employment.

#### **4.4.4 Innovative approaches to supporting transitions to open employment**

As noted previously, a review of the outcomes expected from ADE's is required, as it was apparent that there were differing views between ADE's regarding their role servicing and supporting participants to achieve open employment outcomes. This led to mixed experiences and outcomes.

Drawing on these findings, the following could further build employment skills and literacy:

- Provide easy to understand information about the NDIS employment funding and how it can be used to purchase support for employment customisation.
- Evaluating the implementation of existing resources and materials for NDIA planners and LACs for use in planning conversations about employment goals and appropriate employment support through NDIS funding such as on-the-job supports or employment capacity building supports, as well as informal and mainstream supports that can facilitate open employment.

- Encouraging ADEs to employ supported employees in open employment roles in the ADE or wider ADE provider organisation and to partner with local DES or NDIS employment providers to build relationships and smooth transitions from ADEs to open employment.
- Ensuring DES providers offer microenterprises or self-employment as part of the array of employment options available to NDIS participants with high support needs.
- Encouraging ADEs to diversify their businesses to include less segregated workplace options where supported employees can work with people without disability or in customer-facing roles with the general public. The Commonwealth, state and territory government plans for the new Structural Adjustment Fund will enable supported employment services to change their business models (DSS 2024b).
- Build the capacity of ADE staff to identify and support NDIS participant employees who want to transition to open employment.



## 4.5 A model to promote participant pathways to open employment

This research identifies the actions needed to promote pathways to open employment. The model (Figure 4) shows how a participant's journey can be individualised so it is reflective of their needs, wants and desires. It also illustrates the role of ADEs, the NDIS and other mainstream services in supporting these pathways. The open employment pathway model is underpinned by the UNCRPD. It asserts that people with disability have the right to work on an equal basis with others including the right to work environments that are open, inclusive and accessible (United Nations 2006).

The pathway to open employment identifies opportunities to support young people as they transition to adulthood. When participants with high support needs are turning 16 an employment specific planning meeting could be used to build employment aspirations. This employment specific planning conversation could include:

- Mainstream, informal, and individual supports to facilitate discovering interests, skills, and employment goals.
- Initiating employment capacity building supports (including SLES) in plans at the right time.
- Alternative pathways to employment including further education and training.
- Family and carers should be present to bring participants along on the journey.

The pathway also highlights how the NDIS, families and mainstream supports can expose participants to open employment experiences through:

- Gaining work experience in open employment while at school.
- Gaining part-time work in open employment settings whilst still at school.
- Using customised employment approaches such as discovery, job customisation and job development.
- Building the capacity of open employers to offer more open employment opportunities.

Throughout the participant pathway to open employment, governments, disability organisations, and the NDIS can help empower participants to seek employment opportunities by building their knowledge and understanding about:

- Employment options including microenterprises.
- Workplace rights and financial literacy.
- NDIS funded and mainstream employment supports.

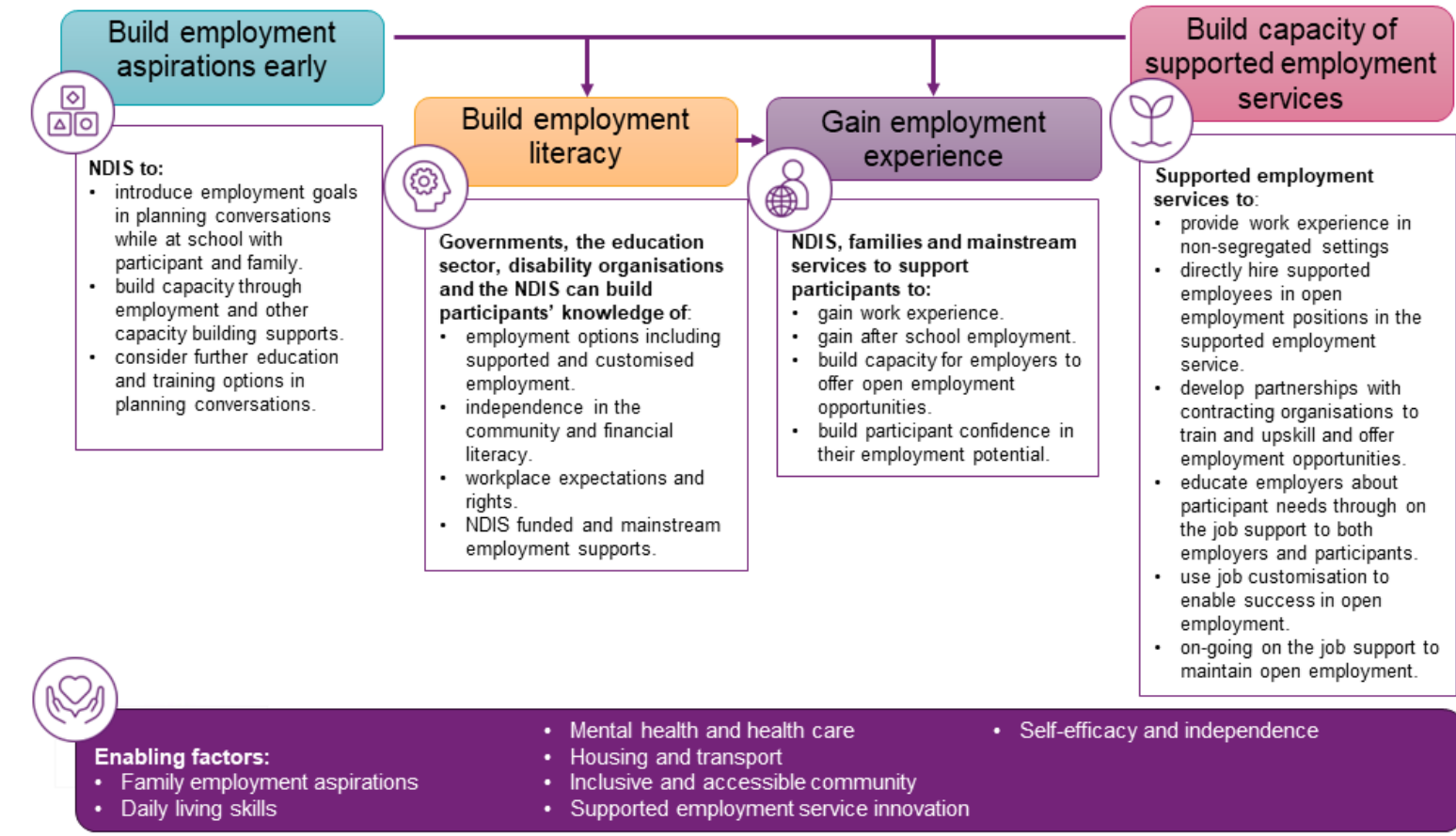


Seven enabling factors can support pathways to open employment regardless of which route participants and their families take. These are:

- Opportunity to develop and enact self-efficacy and independence.
- Family aspiring to open employment for the NDIS participant.
- Support to build capacity in daily living skills.
- Access to mental health and health care.
- Access to housing and transport.
- Inclusive community attitudes about disability.

To date, very few NDIS participants have transitioned from an Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE) to open employment since joining the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). With multiple system action, NDIS participants with high support needs can aspire to, gain, and maintain employment suited to their interests, skills and abilities.

Figure 4: A model to promote open employment



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# Appendix A: Detailed survey and interview/focus group methods

## A.1 Survey data collection

We invited NDIS participants who had ever received any supports in employment payments to participate in an online survey. Participants were invited. They could complete the survey with or without support and someone who knew them well could complete it on their behalf.

We focused on participants who were older than 18 years and who had autism or an intellectual disability. We also recruited participants through ADE providers and disability service organisations and peak bodies.

The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete and asked about current employment status, past employment status, industry, wage type, and demographic details. The Work Readiness Inventory (WRI) to identify respondent's readiness for employment or areas for development. These include being responsible for themselves, equipment, and the organisation, being flexible to work-related changes, understanding their skills and abilities, communicating effectively, understanding their personal views on work, and maintaining good health and safety practices<sup>19</sup>.

## A.2 Survey data analysis methods

We used means, standard deviations (the spread of the numbers from the mean), frequencies (how many), and percentages to describe participants' demographics, employment information, and living arrangements. For the Work Readiness Inventory, we compared how participants in different age groups rated their readiness to work. We report those findings where we detected a significant difference between the age groups.

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<sup>19</sup> Brady, R P (2010) Work readiness inventory. Indianapolis: JIST Works.

## A.3 Interview and focus group data collection

NDIS participants, families, ADE managers and open employers were invited to participate in qualitative interviews or focus groups. NDIS participants who require support at work (and their families) were invited to participate via direct email with a link to an Expression of Interest (EOI) form. They were also invited via the Participant First e-newsletter, on NDIS social media and website, and through disability service organisations, advocacy and peak bodies.

ADE managers were invited to register their interest in participating in an interview in an EOI.

All names have been changed to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all interviews and focus group participants. Other identifying details, such as disability service names have also been removed.

Interviews and focus groups with NDIS participants lasted 1–1.5 hours and explored:

- current and past work experiences
- current and desired support at work
- changing jobs
- skill and capacity building for employment
- working with co-workers with or without disability.

Parents participated in either a 1-hour focus group or 30-minute interview. These explored:

- customised employment
- role of family in employment
- social networks
- discovery processes
- role of NDIS funding.

The seven organisations offered a range of services and advocacy including Disability Employment Services (DES), ADEs, customised and job carving services, job coaches and mentors, capacity building supports to help people find and maintain employment, and information and resources about customised employment. Interviews with ADE managers and disability service and advocacy organisations lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. They explored:

- ADE industry, job tasks, and support type and intensity
- pathways to, and supports in, open employment
- NDIS funding changes



- supporting ADE employees to transition to open employment.

Interviews with open employers lasted 30 minutes and explored:

- barriers and strategies for employing people with disability
- inclusive workplaces
- pathways to open employment
- job carving and customisation.

## **A.4 Interview and focus group data analysis**

Interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed by a transcriber who has signed a confidentiality agreement. Identifying information (such as name and location) were removed and the transcripts were coded either in Microsoft word (ADE managers) or a qualitative data analysis software, NVivo. Main themes were identified by two coders. The main themes were discussed among the researchers and with the research consultants and internal stakeholders.

## Appendix B: Detailed statistical method

Appendix B explains how we analysed the NDIS participant data for this research.

### Primary outcome

The primary outcome we were interested in was whether NDIS participants were employed in an ADE or open employment. To understand this, we coded the employment type at the time of plan assessment as zero for Australian Disability Enterprise and 1 for open employment market with full award wages, open employment market at less than minimum wage, Australian apprenticeship, or self-employed. We labelled the two categories for this variable as 'Australian Disability Enterprise' and 'open employment.'

### Candidate predictor variables

A predictor variable is a variable (or feature) that predicts whether a participant is in an ADE or working in open employment. We reduced the number of predictor variables in consultation with the Market Innovation and Employment Branch to ensure we examined only those factors that are likely to be associated with the participants' employment status.

There are two types of predictor variables that we need to consider when we examine employment outcomes. The first type are demand-side factors, which focus on the participant and their willingness or ability to work in open employment. These can include their age, disability type, and the types of supports they receive. The other type are supply-side factors, which are factors that may make it more difficult for a participant to find and remain in open employment. These can include the unemployment rate or the time of the financial year.

### Demand-side factors

For the demand-side variables, we used demographic, disability, daily living activities, health and wellbeing, work, social, community and social participation, and plan features. We provide more information about these below.

We coded participants' age and primary disability differently for the two cohorts. For the 15 to 24 cohort, we coded age as a binary variable (15–18 or 19–24 years) and disability type as a three-level categorical variable (intellectual disability, autism, or other disability). For the 25+ cohort, we coded age as a five-level categorical variable (25–34, 35–44, 45–54, or 55+ years) and primary disability type as a four-level

categorical variable (intellectual disability, autism, psychosocial disability, or other disability). The coding for the remaining variables was the same for the two cohorts.

The other disability variable was the normalised severity score, which ranges from 1 to 15, where higher scores are suggest of greater disability severity.

We created a three-category variable for living arrangements (that is, with whom the participant lives) consisting of alone, family (parents, spouse/partner, spouse/partner and child(ren), child(ren), and other family members), or other (people not related to me and other).

We counted the number of daily living activities that a participant needs support with, including domestic tasks, personal care, travel, and transport, communicating with others, leaving the house, dealing with finances, reading and/or writing, and using technology. Therefore, the range of this variable is 0 to 8, where higher values indicate a greater need for support with daily living activities.

For the health and wellbeing domain, we used the self-rated health variable. We coded this as a three-category variable comprising poor, fair or good, and very good or excellent.

For the work domain, we used a dichotomous variable indicating whether participants were currently working in an unpaid job or not (that is, yes or no).

We used three variables for the social, community, and civic participation domain. The first is current volunteering status, which comprises of three categories: (1) yes, (2) no, but I would like to, and (3) no, and I don't want to be. The second variable is community, cultural or religious group involvement in the past 12 months, which we collapsed into a three-level categorical variable: (1) yes, disability or general community (that is, a yes, a general community group or yes, a group for people with a disability group), (2) no, but I would like to, and (3) no, and I don't want to be. The final variable whether the participant knew people in their community (yes or no).

For the plan features we used eight variables:

- The increasing number of months a participant was in the NDIS at each plan assessment. If the model did not come together with this variable, we used plan duration in number of days instead.
- Whether a participant had an employment or work goal in their plan (yes, or no).
- Whether the participant received any ADE support in employment payments in their plan (yes, or no).
- Whether the participant was receiving any capacity building (CB) supports in employment payments in their plan (yes, or no).

- Whether the participant was receiving a school leaver employment support (SLES) payment in their plan (that is, yes, or no).
- A variable about plan utilisation comprising of (1) no utilisation or underutilisation or (2) on track or overutilisation.
- The average monthly annualised adjusted total budget.
- A variable to indicate whether the participants' plan came into effect after the funding model change on 1 July 2020 (yes, or no).

## **Supply-side factors**

We included the unemployment rate and seasonality (for example, fiscal year quarter) at the time of the plan's effective date as supply-side factors. For the former, we used the quarterly local area government (LGA) unemployment rate when this data was available or the monthly state unemployment rate if it was not available.

## **Variable types**

Primary disability and normalised severity score were time-invariant (that is, their values remained consistent across plan assessments) variables, while the remaining variables were time-variant (that is, their values changed across plan assessments).

## **Dataset**

We used routinely collected data that spanned from the 1 September 2017 to 28 February 2023 inclusive.

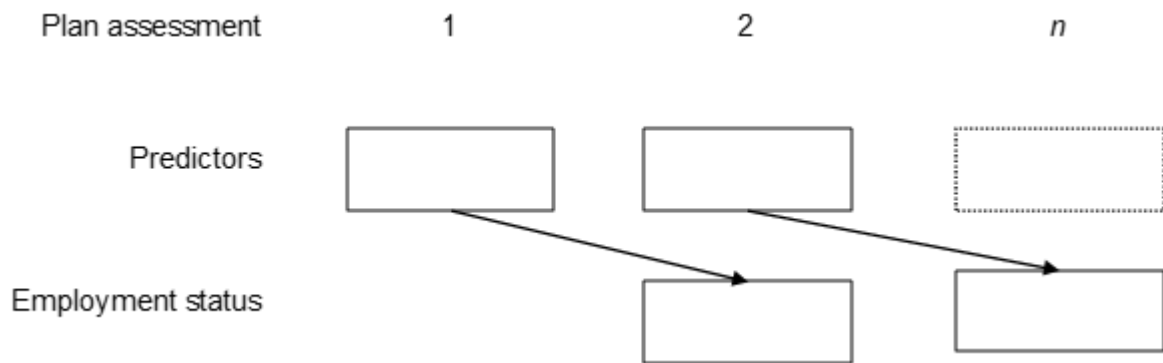
## **Analyses**

We used means, standard deviations (the spread of the numbers from the mean), frequencies (how many), and percentages to describe the demand-side and supply-side factors for participants who were working open in employment and for participants in an ADE.

We wanted to know which, and how strongly, demand-side and supply-side factors predicted if an NDIS participant was working in an ADE or open employment. To do this we used a statistical analysis method called logistic generalised estimating equations (GEE). We examined whether these factors at one plan assessment predicted participants' employment status at their next plan assessment (see Figure

B 1). We used several methods to ensure we had the most accurate results for our analyses<sup>20 21 22</sup>.

**Figure B 1: Illustration of the GEE analysis as it applies to the prediction of employment status**



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<sup>20</sup> Geroldinger A, Blagus R, Ogden H et al. (2022) An investigation of penalization and data augmentation to improve convergence of generalized estimating equations for clustered binary outcomes. *BMC Med Res Methodol* 22, 168.

<sup>21</sup> Kuhn M and Johnson K (2013) *Applied Predictive Modeling*, New York: Springer.

<sup>22</sup> Lunardon N and Scharfstein D (2017) Comment on ‘Small sample GEE estimation of regression parameters for longitudinal data’. *Statist. Med.*, 36: 3596–3600

## Appendix C: Full results of statistical data

**Table C 1: Logistic GEE odds ratios and confidence intervals for open employment transitions for NDIS participants aged 15 to 24 years**

Source: NDIS Administration data.

Variable	OR	(95% CI)	p-value
Age: 15 to 18			
Age: 19 to 24	0.97	(0.42, 2.24)	0.941
Intellectual disability			0.556
Autism	1.05	(0.56, 1.97)	0.873
Other disability	0.56	(0.17, 1.85)	0.341
Normalised severity score	0.95	(0.82, 1.11)	0.529
Living alone			0.004
Living with Family	0.14	(0.04, 0.44)	0.001
Living with non-family/Other	0.17	(0.04, 0.69)	0.013
Number of DLA supports	0.80	(0.65, 0.99)	0.042
Self-rated health: Poor			0.132
Self-rated health: Fair or Good	2.18	(0.21, 23.0)	0.518
Self-rated health: Very good or excellent	1.03	(0.09, 11.7)	0.98
Volunteering: No, it doesn't interest me			0.339
Volunteering: No, but I would like to	0.82	(0.40, 1.68)	0.587
Volunteering: Yes	0.56	(0.17, 1.85)	0.346
Involved in community groups: No and I don't want to be			0.923
Involved in community groups: No, but I would like to be	0.95	(0.61, 1.48)	0.821
Involved in community group: Yes, disability or general community group	1.03	(0.70, 1.50)	0.885
Knows people in the community: No			
Knows people in the community: Yes	2.2	(1.02, 4.73)	0.045
Time in the NDIS (months)	0.99	(0.98, 1.01)	0.431
Employment goal in plan: No			
Employment goal in plan: Yes	0.8	(0.19, 3.41)	0.767
ADE payment: No			
ADE payment: Yes	0.55	(0.27, 1.09)	0.086
Capacity building payment: No			
Capacity building payment: Yes	2.58	(1.18, 5.64)	0.018
SLES payment: No			
SLES payment: Yes	3.38	(1.59, 7.19)	0.002
Plan underutilisation			
Plan on track or overutilisation	1.81	(0.79, 4.15)	0.163
Average monthly annualised adjusted total budget	0.66	(0.38, 1.16)	0.151
Funding model change: No			
Funding model change: Yes	0.67	(0.33, 1.39)	0.284

Variable	OR	(95% CI)	p-value
Financial year quarter 1 (1 July to 30 September)			0.045
Financial year quarter 2 (1 October to 31 December)	3.13	(1.19, 8.23)	0.021
Financial year quarter 3 (1 January to 31 March)	1.78	(0.65, 4.86)	0.261
Financial year quarter 4 (1 April to 30 June)	1.2	(0.38, 3.79)	0.761
LGA/state unemployment rate at time of plan	0.97	(0.88, 1.08)	0.617

**Table C 2: Descriptive statistics of candidate predictor variables by employment status at last plan assessment for participants aged 15 to 24 years.**

Source: NDIS Administration data.

Variable	ADE	Open employment
Intellectual disability	658 (47.5%)	21 (44.7%)
Autism	555 (40.0%)	22 (46.8%)
Other disability	173 (12.5%)	4 (8.5%)
Capacity Building supports in employment payment: Never	1,199 (86.5%)	37 (78.7%)
Capacity Building supports in employment payment: Ever	187 (13.5%)	10 (21.3%)
ADE supports in employment payment: Never	200 (14.4%)	16 (34.0%)
ADE supports in employment payment: Ever	1,186 (85.6%)	31 (66.0%)
SLES payment: Never	1,120 (80.8%)	29 (61.7%)
SLES payment: Ever	266 (19.2%)	18 (38.3%)

**Notes: Descriptive statistics are the mean (standard deviation) or *n* (%). Column percentages are reported. These descriptive statistics are for all plans combined. DLA = Daily living activities. LGA = Local government area.**

**Table C 3: Descriptive statistics of candidate predictor variables by employment status at last plan assessment for participants aged 25 years or older.**

Source: NDIS Administration data.

Variable	ADE	Open employment
Intellectual disability	8,240 (55.8%)	9,433 (13.0%)
Autism	1,370 (9.3%)	18 (10.8%)
Psychosocial disability	1,534 (10.4%)	22 (13.3%)
Other disability	13,051 (25.8%)	53,385 (73.4%)
Capacity Building supports in employment payment: Never	13,296.0 (90.0%)	141.0 (84.9%)
Capacity Building supports in employment payment: Ever	141 (84.9%)	25 (15.1%)
ADE supports in employment payment: Never	272 (1.8%)	22 (13.3%)
ADE supports in employment payment: Ever	14,498 (98.2%)	144 (86.7%)
SLES payment: Never	144 (86.7%)	144 (86.7%)
SLES payment: Ever	183 (1.2%)	3 (1.8%)

**Table C 4: Logistic GEE odds ratios and robust confidence intervals for open employment transitions for NDIS participants aged 25 years or older.**

Note: DLA = Daily living activities. LGA = Local government area.

Source: NDIS Administration data.

Variable	OR	(95% CI)	p-value
Age: 25 to 34 years			<0.001
Age: 35 to 44 years	0.63	(0.43, 0.92)	0.017
Age: 45 to 54 years	0.45	(0.29, 0.70)	<0.001
Age: 55 and older years	0.29	(0.17, 0.50)	<0.001
Intellectual disability			0.678
Autism	0.85	(0.51, 1.43)	0.536
Psychosocial disability	1.26	(0.77, 2.06)	0.353
Other disability	1.05	(0.72, 1.53)	0.788
Normalised severity score	0.97	(0.88, 1.08)	0.619
Living alone			0.109
Living with Family	0.67	(0.46, 0.97)	0.035
Living with non-family/Other	0.76	(0.46, 1.26)	0.288
Number of DLA supports	0.91	(0.84, 0.98)	0.017
Self-rated health: Poor			0.055
Self-rated health: Fair or Good	1.26	(0.63, 2.52)	0.510
Self-rated health: Very good or excellent	0.80	(0.37, 1.72)	0.570



Variable	OR	(95% CI)	p-value
Volunteering: No, it doesn't interest me			0.339
Volunteering: No, but I would like to	1.17	(0.79, 1.73)	0.436
Volunteering: Yes	1.36	(0.88, 2.10)	0.165
Involved in community groups: No and I don't want to be			0.923
Involved in community groups: No, but I would like to be	0.95	(0.61, 1.48)	0.821
Involved in community group: Yes, disability or general community group	1.03	(0.70, 1.50)	0.885
Knows people in the community: No			
Knows people in the community: Yes	1.35	(0.94, 1.94)	0.109
Time in the NDIS (months)	1.00	(0.99, 1.01)	0.942
Employment goal in plan: No			
Employment goal in plan: Yes	1.93	(0.91, 4.07)	0.087
ADE payment: No			
ADE payment: Yes	0.38	(0.22, 0.64)	<0.001
Capacity building payment: No			
Capacity building payment: Yes	2.26	(1.33, 3.83)	0.002
SLES payment: No			
SLES payment: Yes	1.13	(0.25, 5.06)	0.877
Plan underutilisation			
Plan on track or overutilisation	0.48	(0.29, 0.80)	0.005
Average monthly annualised adjusted total budget	0.96	[0.95, 0.97]	<0.001
Funding model change: No			
Funding model change: Yes	0.86	(0.55, 1.34)	0.493
Financial year quarter 1 (1 July to 30 September)			0.174
Financial year quarter 2 (1 October to 31 December)	1.48	(0.95, 2.29)	0.080
Financial year quarter 3 (1 January to 31 March)	1.50	(0.95, 2.36)	0.082
Financial year quarter 4 (1 April to 30 June)	1.59	(1.03, 2.47)	0.037
LGA/state unemployment rate at time of plan	1.06	(1.01, 1.11)	0.013

## Appendix D: Research participants

**Table D 1: Survey respondents demographics**

**Note:** M = Mean, SD = Standard deviation.

**Source:** Online survey.

Demographic	n (%)
Age (M [SD])	35.03 (13.26)
Lives alone in your own home (rented or owned)	12 (14%)
Lives with family home	55 (64%)
Lives in group home (from a disability service provider)	10 (12%)
Lives in share house (not with family)	3 (3.5%)
Live in other arrangement	6 (7.0%)
Man	58 (67%)
Woman	28 (33%)
Transgender or gender diverse	0 (0%)
Speaks a language other than English at home	5 (5.9%)
First Nations (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander)	1 (1.1%)
LGBTIQA+	2 (2.3%)
Currently has a job	78 (89%)
Has one employer	69 (88%)
Has two employers	6 (7.7%)
Has more than two employers	3 (3.8%)

**Table D 2: Employment characteristic by employment type**

**Note: All results statistically significant difference between ADE and open employment p<.05.**

**Source: Online survey.**

Employment characteristic	ADE n (%)	Open employment n (%)
Worked for employer less than 1 year	7 (11%)	5 (38%)
Worked for employer 1–4 years	12 (19%)	6 (46%)
Worked for employer 5–9 years	17 (27%)	2 (15%)
Worked for employer 10–19 years	13 (21%)	0 (0%)
Worked for employer 20 years and over	14 (22%)	0 (0%)
Farming, fishing, or mining (for example, picking fruit)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Plants and gardening (for example, working in a plant nursery)	8 (13%)	0 (0%)
Packaging, manufacturing, or warehousing (for example, working in a factory)	37 (60%)	1 (7.7%)
Recycling, electricity, gas, water, and waste services (for example, collecting rubbish)	6 (9.7%)	0 (0%)
Construction (for example, working on a building site)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Retail (for example, working in a clothes shop)	1 (1.6%)	2 (15%)
Education and childcare (for example, working in a school)	0 (0%)	1 (7.7%)
Accommodation and food services (for example, working in a fast-food restaurant)	4 (6.5%)	2 (15%)
Administration (for example, answering phones in an office)	2 (3.2%)	2 (15%)
Health care and social assistance (for example, working as a therapy assistant)	0 (0%)	2 (15%)
Arts and recreation (for example, working in an art gallery)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Other	4 (6.5%)	3 (23%)
I am paid a full award wage	1 (1.6%)	10 (77%)
I am paid a supported wage	57 (92%)	3 (23%)
Other employment	4 (6.5%)	0 (0%)

**Table D 3: Survey respondents living arrangements by employment type**

Source: Online survey.

Living arrangements	ADE n (%)	Open Employment n (%)
Alone in your own home (rented or owned)	9 (15%)	1 (7.7%)
Family home	37 (61%)	9 (69%)
Group home (from a disability service provider)	8 (13%)	2 (15%)
Share house (not with family)	1 (1.6%)	1 (7.7%)
Other	6 (9.8%)	0 (0%)

Table D 4 shows the characteristics of the NDIS participants who participated in interviews or focus groups. Table D 5 shows the pseudonym of the parents who participated in interviews and focus groups and the characteristics of their adult children. Table D 6 details the characteristics of ADE managers and their ADE. Table D 7 details the characteristics of open employers who participated in interviews.

**Table D 4: Cohort 1, NDIS participants characteristics**

Notes: NA = not available. NSW = New South Wales; Vic = Victoria; Qld = Queensland; WA = Western Australia; Tas = Tasmania; ACT = Australian Capital Territory.

Pseudonym	Disabilities	Employment	Age	Gender	State
Suzie	Intellectual disability, autism, Other	Open employment	44	Female	Qld
Ruby	Intellectual disability, autism, Other	Open employed	28	Female	Qld
Becci	Intellectual disability	Current ADE and open employment	45	Female	NSW
Connie	Autism	Unemployed	31	Female	Vic
Jane	Psychosocial disability	Past ADE, current open employment	46	Female	NA

Pseudonym	Disabilities	Employment	Age	Gender	State
Tom	Psychosocial disability, other	Past ADE, current open employment	58	Male	NA
Drew	Intellectual disability, cerebral palsy,	Current ADE and open employment	41	Male	Vic
Felix	Intellectual disability	Current open employment	38	Male	WA

**Table D 5: Parent research participants and adult child's characteristics**

**Notes: NP = NDIS participant. NSW = New South Wales; Vic = Victoria; Qld = Queensland; WA = Western Australia; Tas = Tasmania; ACT = Australian Capital Territory.**

Pseudonyms	Disabilities	Employment	Age	Gender	State
Silvia (mother), Francis (NP)	Intellectual disability, autism, psychosocial disability, other	Current ADE and current Open employment	20	Male	WA
Grace (mother), Zac (NP)	Autism Psychosocial disability	Open employment	21	Male	ACT
Sian (mother), Noah (NP)	Down syndrome	Open employment	23	Male	ACT
Annette (mother), Lucy (NP)	Intellectual disability	Open employment	18	Female	ACT
Melissa (mother), Asha (NP)	Intellectual disability	Open employment	20	Female	ACT
Fleur (mother), James (NP)	Autism	Open employment	24	Male	ACT

Pseudonyms	Disabilities	Employment	Age	Gender	State
	Intellectual disability Psychosocial disability				
Vera (mother), Dante (NP)	Intellectual disability Other	Current ADE	42	Male	WA
Margaret (mother), Ian (NP)	Intellectual disability	Current ADE	42	Male	NSW
Margaret (mother), Jonathan (NP)	Intellectual disability	Past ADE, unemployed	38	Male	NSW
Sue (mother), Fred (NP)	Autism Other	Past open employment, current unemployed	36	Male	Qld

**Table D 6: Characteristics of ADE manager interviewees**

**Notes:** NSW = New South Wales; Vic = Victoria; Qld = Queensland; WA = Western Australia; Tas = Tasmania; ACT = Australian Capital Territory. n = number.

Pseudonym	Main ADE industry	ADE employees (n)	State
Sally	Processing and packing of goods	60	NSW
Jenny	Manufacturing	105	NSW
David	Recycling, catering, horticulture	130	NSW
Hannah	Packaging, catering, horticulture, data entry	1000	SA
Dina	Packaging, gardening, document destruction	28	NSW

Pseudonym	Main ADE industry	ADE employees (n)	State
Samantha	Packing, lawn maintenance, car washing	200	NSW
Phill	Packing, document management and administration, fleet washing, manufacturing	100	Vic
Ainsley	Packing, nursery, food room and plastic	141	Vic
Connie and Tina	Packing, labelling, light assembly, manufacturing, e-waste, cafes and retail shops, labour hire employees	200	NSW
Johanna	Packing, destruction, making candles, customer service	121	NSW
Rose	Sign making, procures doc destruction and recycling, grounds maintenance, business support unit	80	Vic
John	Recycling	40	Tas
Nina	Recycle and retail and food and cleaning, training	73	Vic
Stuart	Timber production, beehive, lawn mowing paper, recycling, plant nursery, commercial laundry, op shop, café	130	NSW
Katie	Gardening, recycling	72	Vic
Simon	Gardening, contract cleaning, car detailing, plant hire, hospitality	70	SA

Pseudonym	Main ADE industry	ADE employees (n)	State
Anne	Theatre company	3	Vic
Graham	Wine packaging, timber manufacturing, display boxes	80	SA

**Table D 7: Open employer characteristics**

**Notes:** NSW = New South Wales; Vic = Victoria; Qld = Queensland; WA = Western Australia; Tas = Tasmania; ACT = Australian Capital Territory. n = number.

Pseudonym	Open employment industry	Employees with disability (n)	State
Sara	Aged care	2	NSW
Ivy	Health care	2	Vic
Terrence	Education	8	Vic



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