

**Submission
No 27**

SKILL SHORTAGES IN NSW

Organisation: National Disability Services

Name: Mr Scott Holz

Date Received: 21/06/2013

Inquiry into skill shortages in NSW

Background information

National Disability Services (NDS) would like to thank the Legislative Assembly - Committee on Economic Development for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into Skill Shortages in NSW.

NDS' response addresses the key focus areas provided by the Committee, in considering the value and contribution of skilled migration into NSW, making particular reference to regional communities and professional shortfalls in the disability sector.

The disability sector in Australia is experiencing a significant and systematic reform through the commencement of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), also known as DisabilityCare Australia, in July 2013. The reform aims to ensure that more services will be available to more people with disability, and that these services will be high quality, appropriate to each individual's needs, and efficiently run¹.

The rollout of the full scheme across NSW will see the number of people with severe and profound disability receiving support grow from around 50,000 in 2012 to 140,000 by 2018².

It is estimated that as DisabilityCare Australia rolls out, the current formal disability support workforce will need to double. It is estimated that the growth in the NSW disability sector will create in excess of 30,000 new jobs by 2018, with just over 30,000 people currently working to support people with disability.

The NSW disability sector is in the unique position of having growth funding for disability services still to roll out under state disability reforms, a commitment made prior to the DisabilityCare Australia agreement. Stronger Together 2³ will see more than \$2 billion in new funding for disability services across NSW in preparation for the transition. This will mean significant workforce growth across NSW prior to the full roll out of DisabilityCare Australia.

¹ Cortis, N., Meagher, G., Chan, S., Davidson, B., and Fattore, T. (2013) 'Building an Industry of Choice: Service Quality, Workforce Capacity and Consumer-Centred Funding in Disability Care', Final Report prepared for United Voice, Australian Services Union, and Health and Community Services Union, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney.

² Minister for Disability Services, The Hon Andrew Constance MP (2013) Media release - 'Next steps for DisabilityCare Australia in New South Wales', accessed 31 May 2013
http://www.adhc.nsw.gov.au/about_us/media_releases/ministerial/next_steps_for_disabilitycare_australia_in_new_south_wales

³ NSW Government (2011), Stronger Together: A new direction for disability services in NSW - The second phase, accessed 31 May
http://www.adhc.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/file/0014/234212/898_StrongerTogether_20102016_web_071211.pdf

DisabilityCare will significantly increase service delivery and investment in disability services and support across Australia. Although there are variations in demand forecasts and implications for workforce supply, there is widespread consensus that successful implementation of DisabilityCare requires urgent attention to service models and a comprehensive consolidated tackling of workforce challenges⁴.

The introduction of DisabilityCare Australia will present opportunities but also some big challenges for the disability support workforce⁵. Improvements and recommendations for immigration must respond quickly and take immediate action to consider the future workforce needs of the disability sector.

Identifying gaps and areas of need in particular industries, professions and communities

Under DisabilityCare Australia, the focus is on staff delivering front line, personalised services. The disability sector can reasonably expect the workforce to expand to support the large number of new service users. This will create many and varied career opportunities for people in the disability sector to meet the vast increase in demand. Governments and the sector will need to facilitate prospects and make sure that resources are available to help grow the workforce⁶.

Providing personalised services and placing more emphasis on supporting independence and early intervention is often more labour intensive in the early stages of a new scheme and demands new and different skill sets. Specific estimates of the timeframes surrounding the increase required will be subject to the preferences and pace at which people with disability adopt control over their support packages.

Personalisation embodies notions of self-determination by the people who use services rather than the prescriptive services approach where individuals are passive recipients of care⁷.

Research conducted in the UK exploring the workforce implications of personalisation in the voluntary sector, found organisations reported significant employment implications to achieve personalisation. Changes required ranged from recruitment and selection, employee skills and training, performance management, to health and safety, and pay and conditions⁸.

⁴ National Disability Services (2011) Workforce Strategy - Victorian Disability Services Transition Plan

⁵ Australian Government (2013) 'Budget 2013-14: DisabilityCare Australia', accessed 31 May 2013 http://www.budget.gov.au/2013-14/content/glossy/NDIS_policy/html/NDIS_overview_01.htm

⁶ ibid

⁷ Cunningham, I. and Nickson, D. (2010) Personalisation and its implications for work and employment in the voluntary sector, Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit

⁸ ibid

There is widespread agreement that there will be very significant increases in workforce demand at a time when the existing workforce is already under pressure. There are many reasons skills shortages and increasing demands on the workforce already exist. These include but are not limited to:

- recruitment and retention issues for the disability workforce;
- the demographics of the disability workforce;
- competition for skilled workers, including allied health professionals, with the aged, health and community care sectors and / or private practice;
- low community awareness of the range of job types available in the disability sector; and
- challenges associated with attracting skilled workers to regional areas.

There is a range of evidence, as well as experience from the disability sector, available to support each of these points. Additional information for each is expanded on below.

DisabilityCare Australia is being introduced in a context in which there is already strong evidence of recruitment and retention difficulties stemming from decades of under-investment, low pay, and insecure working conditions. Without recognition of the role of the workforce in a quality service system and initiatives to ensure workforce planning and appropriate models of regulation, it is unlikely that either goals of national system expansion, or standards of service continuity and quality for consumers, will be met⁹.

The Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) resulting from the national equal pay case is expected to make a significant contribution to improving the attractiveness of jobs in the disability sector in the longer term. The ERO, as well as the Modern Award and salary packaging arrangements go a way to addressing the comparatively lower wages experienced by workers in the disability sector.

It is important to note that workers still have eight years of gradual increases before the full implementation of the ERO, and unless work continues in this area it is likely the wage gap will continue to be a barrier to recruiting and retaining skilled workers.

The current workforce is predominantly mature aged, female and working in part time or casual jobs. It is a workforce that lacks cultural and linguistic diversity and is unreflective of the client population. Data also suggests that employees enter the disability sector at later ages¹⁰.

⁹ Cortis, N., Meagher, G., Chan, S., Davidson, B., and Fattore, T. (2013) 'Building an Industry of Choice: Service Quality, Workforce Capacity and Consumer-Centred Funding in Disability Care', Final Report prepared for United Voice, Australian Services Union, and Health and Community Services Union, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney.

¹⁰ National Disability Services (2011) Workforce Strategy - Victorian Disability Services Transition Plan

The combination of an aging workforce and competition with the aged care, health and community sectors means that the current challenges for attracting and retaining workforce in the disability sector will intensify. The age profile of the workforce means that an estimated 20% will retire within the next decade. The disability sector directly competes with the aged care sector for many skills. Aged care anticipates a 200-300% increase by 2050¹¹.

Allied health professionals such as Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and Speech Pathologists are employed in a variety of settings in the disability sector, with early childhood intervention services having a high demand for such practitioners in their workforce, along with a number of adult disability services where there is a strong focus on therapy intervention¹².

More intensive 'front end' service models are also expected to translate into additional demand for allied health roles¹³. Although only a relatively small component of the total disability workforce, these roles are crucial and are in chronically short supply.

NDS members have repeatedly and increasingly expressed concern about a shortage of allied health professionals, particularly in regional areas. When specialist workers are unavailable, clients and staff risk missing out on vital supports. People with disability, families and carers need and expect professionally qualified staff.

In addition to these complexities, a qualitative research report that was conducted for the NDS Workforce Recruitment Project in NSW, found current perceptions of the sector and the type of work offered within it are a key challenge.

The overall perceptions of work within the disability sector was found to be 'nurse care by another name, admirable but far from desirable work, and a job for the selfless and therefore not for them'¹⁴.

Students struggled to describe the role beyond that of a voluntary, caring role. The sector was perceived to offer 'low-skilled, task-orientated roles and the perceptions of those who work within the sector were that they had to be caring, compassionate, nurturing people with strong morals'¹⁵.

NDS members report ongoing challenges with regard to recruitment in regional areas. One early intervention provider expressed significant difficulties in finding qualified educators (i.e. teachers) with experience in Special Education, a specific gap being Aboriginal/CALD educators. There is also a distinct shortage of advocates, as well as skilled Social Workers, Family Support Workers and Counsellors.

¹¹ Australian Productivity Commission (2011) Caring for older Australians

¹² Becker, S. (2011) Critical shortage of allied health professionals in the disability sector, Lifestart Cooperative Ltd

¹³ DHS Workforce Gap Analysis Project, Precision Consultancy, April 2011

¹⁴ The Campaign Palace (2009) NDS – Workforce Recruitment Project: Qualitative Research report

¹⁵ ibid

Case Study – Skills Shortages and DisabilityCare

Auslan Interpreting is an area of skills shortage which provides a useful case study for the likely impact of the implementation of DisabilityCare on skills shortage areas. It is a profession with a long lead-time, high and rising demand, and a history of patchy investment in training.

Auslan is the language of the Australian Deaf Community. It has its own grammar and vocabulary and is different to other signed languages, although related to British Sign Language and New Zealand Sign Language. It is not a signed form of English, but a language in its own right.

As participation opportunities for deaf people have increased, so has the demand for Auslan interpreting. One example is Sign Language Communications NSW/ACT, the interpreting department of the Deaf Society of NSW. The introduction of the Employment Assistance Fund saw steep rises in demand for this service.

These sharp rises have left the interpreting workforce stretched. Currently, SLC NSW/ACT recommends clients make bookings at least two weeks in advance. The shortage threatens the ability of deaf people to get timely access to critical areas of life such as justice and employment opportunities. The situation is particularly difficult in regional areas, including large regional centres like Newcastle.

The introduction of DisabilityCare is likely to follow a similar pattern, and to increase the pressure on this already over-stretched workforce as deaf people use interpreters to access assessment and supports under the scheme.

Identifying strategies for government to assist in addressing skill shortages

Current activities

The health and community services workforce will need to respond to the significant challenges presented by DisabilityCare reforms as the industry moves towards a client-led model of funding and care¹⁶.

Responding to the industry's skills needs in a timely manner will require adaptations to the existing Training Packages, with a greater emphasis and sophistication in workforce development, evaluation of successful approaches, coordinated planning and strategy, and adoption of a systems approach¹⁷. NDS recognises this and is actively involved in training package reforms that are currently underway.

¹⁶ Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (2013) Environmental Scan

¹⁷ *ibid*

Workforce planning and development can either be augmented or frustrated by related policy and regulatory settings. This includes policies that shape disability services, education and training markets and industrial arrangements, and immigration. The government plays a central role in coordinating a coherent and consistent government policy framework.

The Australian Government has committed that, through DisabilityCare Australia, it will develop a Workforce Plan that includes strategies such as the introduction of local training and development initiatives, and ways of attracting and recruiting employees and volunteers¹⁸.

In 2011, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the high-level principles contained in the Productivity Commission's report into disability care and support to guide the design and implementation of DisabilityCare. This included a recommendation to establish a national workforce strategy to ensure that there is a skilled and responsive workforce available to meet the care and support needs of people with disability. NDS is currently working on a conceptual framework to structure the key elements of such a strategy and to provide the basis for further dialogue with sector stakeholders.

NDS is very aware of the current and future workforce needs of the disability sector and has a number of other relevant initiatives in place or under development. The NSW Industrial Relations and Workforce Development Project aims to develop and implement a range of tools and resources to prepare and develop a workforce that is responsive to the changing needs of the sector. These tools will assist disability organisations to attract, recruit and retain a quality workforce, and develop solid human resource and management practices. The key objective is that all initiatives contribute to the disability sector being recognised as a 'sector of choice'.

carecareers is one of the long term strategic initiatives NDS has developed, aimed at addressing the current and predicted workforce shortages in the sector. carecareers has been in place since 2010. It was established in NSW and commenced expanding nationally in early 2013. This is a mechanism to recruit and expand workforce however it is still not sufficient in attracting enough people to fill workforce gaps.

The carecareers website provides opportunities for potential employees to learn about options, make contact with people in the sector, and participate in forums and events as well as offering a job listing and search function. It also offers basic HR advice together with short case studies on attracting and retaining talent. In future it will feature a number of the resources developed for employees out of the NSW Industrial Relations and Workforce Development Project.

¹⁸ Australian Government (2013) 'Budget 2013-14: DisabilityCare Australia', accessed 31 May 2013 http://www.budget.gov.au/2013-14/content/glossy/NDIS_policy/html/NDIS_overview_01.htm

projectABLE is part of the carecareers initiative and encourages NSW high school and university students to consider a career in disability and community services. Funded by the NSW Government, projectABLE offers students half-day workshops involving expert trainers, staff, clients and hands-on exercises that help build skills and knowledge of disability awareness and the variety of careers available.

Another NDS project, Aboriginal Jobs Together, involves case managing Aboriginal cadets and trainees within disability organisations through a comprehensive package of individualised support. The program also includes assisting disability organisations in building a culturally appropriate workplace in which Aboriginal people want to work.

Aboriginal Jobs Together has proven not only to provide employment opportunities for Aboriginal people and address skills shortages in the disability sector, but to address the barriers for Aboriginal people with disability in accessing vital supports and services.

Case Study - Aboriginal Jobs Together

The Aboriginal Jobs Together (AJT) Program supported Kurrajong Waratah to employ an Aboriginal person, Jayla, at Kurrajong Early Intervention Service (KEIS). The AJT Program has benefited KEIS, families and children accessing the service, the community in addition to the personal gain Jayla has achieved through the involvement in this program.

Through the employment of an Aboriginal person it encouraged KEIS to reflect on Aboriginal culturally appropriate practices. Staff completed cultural competence training, having ongoing discussions with Jayla about the suitability of practices to each Aboriginal family and becoming far more flexible in service delivery.

Through the reflection in practice and Jayla's insightful contribution Aboriginal families have increased their access to early childhood intervention. Three families that were previously disengaged now are committed and comfortable to access KEIS support for their child's developmental needs. Jayla has supported the broader team to use appropriate language and use strategies that are reflective of Aboriginal culture.

This has resulted in a 300% increase of Aboriginal children and families accessing KEIS, ie. at the commencement of Jayla's employment we had six Aboriginal children and at the completion of her traineeship we had increased this to twenty-five children.

The AJT Program has built KEIS' capacity to engage with the community and promote supports that are available to Aboriginal families and their children. Jayla along with the manager of KEIS have met with Elders to inform them about the importance of Early Childhood Intervention and KEIS supports.

Jayla and the manager regularly attend Aboriginal interagency groups and from this have increased knowledge about the community and share information about KEIS services.

Jayla has learnt to work within a team and has embraced the role of being an advocate for families. Through Jayla's employment at KEIS she has had the opportunity to attend training relevant to child development and increase her leadership skills. Jayla was supported with her studies and quickly realized she was capable to complete study independently.

The Aboriginal Jobs Together project demonstrates how the disability sector can be greatly advantaged by recruitment of skilled, culturally competent workers. As previously stated, the current disability workforce lacks skilled culturally diverse workers. Through the employment of skilled migrants and an increase in the diversity of the workforce, the disability sector may be better equipped to support people with disability from a CALD background.

Sector feedback

NDS members report that recruiting skilled workers from overseas is difficult for not-for-profit organisations. NDS members cite that excessive requirements in regard to sponsorship obligations are a significant barrier. Time-consuming administrative requirements present challenges for the disability sector. Other members report a desire to do more in this area, however are discouraged as it is considered a costly exercise, a key barrier for many not-for-profit organisations.

Another area that causes concern for the not-for-profit disability sector is the lack of flexibility around the need for 457 visa employees to be engaged in full-time work and to receive a minimum wage. In a sector where there are chronic wage issues and significant numbers of part-time and casual employees, many jobs would fail to meet the requirements.

Despite these challenges, some organisations have sponsored staff from overseas, and many report that the staff members have contributed valuable skills to the organisation.

'Having worked in HR in both metro and country [areas], there is significantly more difficulty attracting skilled candidates for middle management roles in regional areas. The regional migration scheme has certainly helped us fill some gaps. The current system is extremely stringent. I can understand it is that way to ensure migrants aren't exploited in industries such as agriculture, but I think that the disability sector that generally pays award rates and is very well scrutinised by funding bodies could be granted some exemptions.'

NDS member

Greater diversity in the workforce is needed in response to the DisabilityCare reforms and the changing nature and requirements of roles. Not only does the sector need to increase the size and diversity of its workforce, it also needs to attract people whose values and behaviours are aligned to client needs and expectations. This may provide a greater range of opportunities for skilled migrants including areas such as change management, marketing and finance, in addition to existing role shortages such as allied health professionals, social workers, educators (early intervention teachers) and case managers.

'We are based in Northern Rivers and have sponsored two staff through the regional scheme. They are in the final stages of the process. In both cases, they were appointed to roles that required flexibility or supervisory skills.'

NDS Member

Recommendations

There are a number of ways government can support the workforce needs of the disability sector. These strategies may be applied to the attraction and recruitment of skilled migrants to address significant workforce shortages. Strategies may include:

1. Easing of the skilled migrant worker requirements and costs for the disability sector.
2. Speedier and priority processing of visa applications.
3. Clearly defined areas of need including experienced disability support workers in regional areas.
4. Increased options for part time workers to be considered for 457 visas, i.e.: 25-30 hours per week employees with pro-rata salaries.
5. More attractive terms as an incentive for skilled migrants to work in the disability sector, such as a faster way to achieve permanent residency but with stronger requirements relating to the worker staying in the disability sector for a certain number of years after securing permanent residency.

Other ideas presented through this paper vary in their current applicability to skilled migrants. Some initiatives identified are currently used to attract workers to regional areas, for example, without necessarily focusing on skilled migration as the key mechanism.

NDS suggests that many of the learnings and/or findings from these projects could be considered when making recommendations to government as to the value of skilled migrants in the disability sector. Beyond that, NDS would like to make clear that all the development opportunities and supports available are targeted to the disability sector workforce as a whole, including skilled migrants. The existing and future workforce will be beneficiaries of improvements in practice and progress achieved.

There is widespread recognition of the need for a range of information to be provided to all stakeholders. From a workforce perspective, relevant information needs to reach the current and potential workforce to ensure that all stakeholders understand new opportunities and also rights and responsibilities under DisabilityCare Australia. Government could support NDS and other stakeholders to deliver targeted campaigns through existing avenues such as carecareers.

Government can also identify and support the coordination of research and other initiatives, and disseminate and fast-track learning in the sector and support initiatives that leverage off previous investment and success, and that contribute to an evidence base for the value and role of skilled migrants in the disability sector.

'I would like to draw attention to an amazing initiative, the Brolga project. The funding is about to run out and organisations are working locally to set up a not-for-profit to carry it on. Unfortunately, the funding is ending at a time when the project is gaining momentum.

It would be wonderful if one of the Inquiry's initiatives was to support the Brolga project across the state - it is a proven formula and it is already in place.'

The Brolga Project is an initiative which strives to place final-year and graduate university students into rural and regional businesses for a period of work experience. The goal of the project is to introduce students to the excellent quality lifestyle and career opportunities available in regional centres, and encourage them back to a full time regional career after they've graduated. The Brolga project <http://www.brolgaproject.com.au/>

NDS Member

Recently in Victoria, NDS put forward a Workforce Strategy paper towards the Victorian Disability Services Transition Plan. Immigration was proposed by some stakeholders as an option for recruitment. While disability support worker roles were not eligible under the current eligibility criteria (designed to facilitate skilled migration), the paper suggested the option of skilled migration is currently more relevant to attracting allied health roles. There is scope to investigate how this could assist the disability sector to fill these positions¹⁹.

Looking to other jurisdictions, the Productivity Commission recognised that several countries, particularly in Europe, have used immigration to ease shortages for long-term care workers. Canada has a specific program aimed at attracting foreign workers to the disability sector.

¹⁹ National Disability Services (2011) Workforce Strategy - Victorian Disability Services Transition Plan

The Canadian Live-In Caregiver Program allows entry by foreign workers to provide care and support for children, the aged, and people with a disability. The experience of the Canadian Caregiver Program could provide a useful lesson for Australia in implementing any similar program to encourage supply of foreign workers in the sector²⁰.

Conclusion

It is estimated that the growth in the NSW disability sector will create in excess of 30,000 new jobs by 2018. This is a direct result of funding investment by the NSW Government and the implementation of DisabilityCare Australia. The disability sector requires a speedy resolution as the need to address workforce shortages is immediate.

DisabilityCare Australia is being introduced in a context in which there is already strong evidence of recruitment and retention difficulties. The disability sector faces very significant increases in workforce demand together with significant impediments to the supply of an adequate, skilled and responsive disability workforce.

To increase the numbers and diversity of the workforce in the limited time available, and avoid jeopardising the delivery of a key social reform, recognition is needed of the importance of workforce planning and further investment in initiatives.

About National Disability Services

National Disability Services is the Australian peak body for non-government disability services. Its purpose is to promote and advance services for people with disability. Its Australia-wide membership includes around 800 non-government organisations, which support people with all forms of disability.

Contact

Scott Holz
State Manager NSW
National Disability Services

████████████████████
████████████████

²⁰ Productivity Commission (2011) Disability Care and Support p. 719-720