

Disability Services



About the Disability Services Sector

Queensland has one of the highest rates of disability per capita in Australia. Disability services are operated in every Department of Education and Training (DET) region and in every community across the state. Over 9,230 participants completed Disability qualifications in Queensland in 2009. Disability is the fourth largest subsector of Community Services VET delivery with more than 2,300,000 AHC in 2009. Disability sector workers are also represented in other Community Services, Health and Business Services VET delivery in Queensland.

The most recent traineeship data made available (2008/09) showed a 62% increase in the number of commencements in Certificate III Disability Work traineeships compared to the previous period. In the same period, the Certificate IV level traineeship was introduced as an unfunded traineeship and in the first year achieved 82% more commencements than the Certificate III (funded) traineeship (360 commencements compared with 181 for the Certificate III). This rapid increase in demand is expected to continue in the short to medium term.

The disability sector has experienced workforce recruitment and retention issues and is likely to continue to experience a shortage of appropriate workers that is greater than in other Community Service sectors. This is due to the size of the sector, the level of growth, the nature of the work and the number of current workers who are expected to move into retirement within the next 10 years. Aged and Disabled Carers is a recognised skill shortage occupation in Queensland. As of July 2010, the Certificate III in Disability is a Priority 1 traineeship for User Choice funding and the Certificate IV is Priority 4.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are 1.4 times more likely to have a disability and twice as likely to have a profound or severe core activity

limitation than non-Indigenous Australian adults. In total, one-third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians report they have a disability or long term health issue. The disability sector will be increasingly required to identify and develop workers' skills to provide service provision to the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The disability sector in Queensland has seen a significant increase in overall investment. In 2008, an agreement to provide a \$1.8 billion funding boost to deliver 24,500 additional disability places statewide, as well as \$100 million in capital funding for 300 new supported accommodation places. This increased investment has achieved increased service delivery but has not relieved the severe financial pressure being experienced by most services, particularly the smaller and not-for-profit services that characterise a large proportion of the sector.

The sector is also experiencing significant changes in the areas of policy and models of service, including:

- Growing Stronger — reforms that aim to provide simpler and fairer access to disability services by new processing and assessment systems.
- 10-Year Plan for Supporting Queenslanders with a Disability. Consultation phase has recently been completed.
- Output-based funding models and reporting
- Increased compliance with the legislation on service provision and practice, including restricted practices.
- New service models required to increase the provision of specialist disability services related to population ageing with an associated increase in care complexity.

Other key issues include:

- General lack of community awareness about the nature and diversity of work within the sector.
- Limited career opportunities and poor working conditions in the disability sector.
- High proportion of casual and part-time roles in disability sectors and shift work.
- Increasing intensity and complexity of work and rapid changes in services and jobs.
- Skill development and training have service and community costs.
- Increased competition for labour and skills.
- Limited capacity for workforce planning.
- Limited availability of workforce to deliver care which is culturally aligned to a diverse population.
- Smaller not-for-profit NGOs at a disadvantage to larger organisation due to limited scope and economies of scale that can be achieved.
- Insufficient engagement between training and education system and Disability Services sector.
- Changing profile of parents and unpaid carers including ageing, young and carers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Workforce Implications

The Disability Services sector continues to have difficulty attracting new entrants to the industry and experiences high turnover of staff, with a large proportion of staff exiting the sector every year. Increased service demand along with skill and labour shortages create increased workload and worker stress. Employers have limited resources available to invest in training and workforce development, and often do not have the funds and/or available staff to backfill positions while workers are in training. The high proportion of casual workers receive less support for training and development, and all workers in rural and remote locations suffer increased costs and poor access to training opportunities.

Like most Community Services sectors, disability services are requiring new and different skills, along with new and redesigned roles, to respond to a range of service and policy changes:

- Increasing emphasis on person-centred planning and inclusive practices.
- Requirement for higher level skills for more complex care needs.
- Increasing specialisation and qualifications to meet changing service models.



- Greater skill depth required at workforce entry and throughout professional working life.
- Growth of new roles to meet an increasing broad base of clients' needs.

The severe skill and labour shortages in the sector, along with growth in service demand and rapid changes in policy and service delivery, require high level human resource management skills and systems. The sector currently has limited capacity for workforce planning and has traditionally underinvested in leadership and management development.

Key Actions

National Disability Services, the sector peak, has been very active at a Queensland and national level in focusing on workforce planning and workforce development issues. The Community Services Skilling Plan has a strong focus on the Disability Sector, and the Health and Community Services Workforce Council has a number of projects, including the Disability Sector Training Fund, RSP and P300 skills development projects which focus on worker and unpaid parent carer development in the Disability Services sector. More recently, Endeavour Foundation has established a College in partnership with a small number of RTOs and they, along with the other large employers in the sector, are taking a strategic approach to workforce development and access to training programs.

The Queensland Compact Governance Committee — a collaboration between the Queensland Government and the not-for-profit human services sector — has been conducting a statewide workforce initiative during 2010 and will identify strategic responses in their meeting at the end of November 2010. The lead sponsors of this project have been the Department of Communities and the Health and Community Services Workforce Council. It is anticipated that the outcomes from the initiative will align with Skills Alliance priorities. Disability services are a key part of the target for this initiative.

The 2010 User Choice reforms recognised Aged and Disabled Carers as a skill shortage occupation in Queensland. The sector welcomes

this recognition and commits to playing its part in addressing these shortages. Under the new User Choice 2010-2015, the Certificate III level Disability Worker traineeship has been awarded priority level 1 for User Choice funding (100% for new and existing workers) while the Certificate IV level traineeship is priority level 4 (25% for existing workers). These arrangements should be promoted to the sector to facilitate improved uptake of these traineeships.

The Workforce Council proposes to pilot a promotional strategy in partnership with National Disability Services, Community Services Skilling Plan, Training Queensland and Skills Queensland to raise awareness across the Disability Services sector of the range of funding and support available. In addition to User Choice, this would include Commonwealth incentives, Skilling Solutions Queensland, Productivity Places Program, Skilling Queenslanders for Work and other relevant programs. This promotional strategy may also form the basis of improved collaboration between the sector, training providers, government agencies and funded programs at the local level.

Other key actions recommended in relation to skilling and workforce development in the Disability Services sector include:

- Improve and expand delivery focus on recognising and increasing the skills of the existing workforce, including more flexible arrangements and better integration of training and assessment into the workplace.
- Improve accessibility of training for rural and remote workers, shift workers, casual workers and workers currently in a highly intensive work environment.
- Greater use of skill sets to augment current qualifications and support work across client groups and career paths across sectors. This should include the range of Disability skill sets, Chronic Disease Self-Management skill set, Case Management skill set, Team Leadership skill set and Medications Assistance skill set.
- Develop strategies to improve the effectiveness and credibility of RPL in the sector, for example: inclusion of industry-employed assessors in RPL processes; focus on RPL tools, processes,

assessments and human resources in audit and regulation processes, and in RTO continuous improvement processes; review requirements for RTOs to be included on Skilling Solutions Queensland to ensure only quality services are funded through SSQ.

- Skilling programs to recognise the increased support and development that new entrants require, and VET practitioners to be supported and trained to meet this need.
- Provide opportunities for existing workforce to gain skills to remain engaged in broad range of roles within sector including professional roles (e.g. occupational therapy).
- Ensure delivery of Certificate IV in Training and Assessment includes literacy and numeracy support electives where appropriate.
- Explore and invest in funding models that remove the common barriers to access to training including backfill, travel and accommodation and related costs.
- Support the promotion of the Disability Services sector and roles within the sector to potential new workers including school leavers and those considering a career change.
- Support industry employers to understand the complex training system and the range of funding supports available, as well as understand their role in negotiating the training services provided and the products they purchase. There may be a role for industry-RTO partnership brokers for this purpose.

- Develop promotion and career pathways initiatives to attract and retain workers from marginalised and under-represented populations including skilled and unskilled migrants, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, young people and people with a disability.
- Implement prolongation and participation programs for the ageing workforce such as re-entry programs, skill updates and mentoring programs.
- Support local clusters of employers, industry bodies, education and training providers, government agencies and other stakeholders to develop collaborative responses to key workforce issues locally.
- Increase focus on development of management and leadership capacity, including human resources, workforce planning, job redesign, partnership development, change management and business development skills and systems.
- Improve policy responsiveness to emergent workforce needs of new models of service delivery so that a workforce is available and has access to appropriate training to implement these new models.
- Build capacity of carers and link to workforce planning processes.
- Improve data collection, reporting, access and analysis related to workforce and training in the sector to support collaborative workforce planning and improve return on investment.

