

AUSTRALIAN DISABILITY ENTERPRISES

What are Australian Disability Enterprises?

Australian Disability Enterprises employ people with a disability who find it difficult to work or maintain employment in the open labour market or who choose to work in an Australian Disability Enterprise. They have a dual focus of providing employment for people with a disability and operating a commercial business. Having evolved from Sheltered Workshops, Australian Disability Enterprises have their legislative basis and broad role defined in the Disability Services Act 1986.

In June 2007 there were 211 not-for-profit organisations operating 415 Australian Disability Enterprise outlets across Australia.¹ They are funded by the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) to provide training, assistance and support to job seekers and workers with disability. Funding levels are determined by the individual support requirements of each worker.

Australian Disability Enterprises produce good quality products and services. Australian Disability Enterprises produce some of Australia's best-known products and services.

The organisations vary substantially in size. Most operate from factory outlets, while others provide work and training in the community or at the work sites of mainstream employers. The latter are known as mobile work crews and enclaves.

Because of their dual focus, Australian Disability Enterprises have to manage a complex range of factors. Unlike commercial businesses which recruit employees with the skills and qualifications required to respond to market opportunities, Australian Disability Enterprises:-

- build their business around the skills and competencies of their workforce;
- construct jobs which entail a level of technology and processes that reflect their workforce's capabilities;
- are not always able to exploit new market opportunities because of the skills base of their workforce and the resources required to develop and/or re-train workers;
- have a reduced range of options to increase productivity - operating multiple shifts and importing sophisticated technology may not be options;
- provide a diverse range of care and support services (often including transport, counseling and help with income support matters) that far exceeds the normal obligations of an employer.

Who is able to work in an Australian Disability Enterprise?

Any person who is in receipt of a Disability Support Pension is able to work in an Australian Disability Enterprise and, under current arrangements, can directly register with an Australian Disability Enterprise.

¹ Australian Government Disability Services Census, 2007

Other job seekers may be referred to an Australian Disability Enterprise by a Job Capacity Assessor (JCA) when it is considered the most suitable employment option.

Apart from disability support positions, Australian Disability Enterprises employ people without a disability in various management, administrative, production and operational roles.

What employment conditions and standards apply in Australian Disability Enterprises?

All disability employment services are required by law to meet 12 National Disability Service Standards. These standards relate to areas such as service access; the exercise of choice and decision-making; the protection of employees' rights and their valued status; complaints handling; service management; skill development, community participation, privacy and employment conditions (including the transparent assessment of productivity-based wages).

The system of certification in relation to these standards is robust and requires regular audits by a Quality Assurance Auditor who is independent of both the service provider and the funder (government) and who is accredited by the international body JASANZ. The system ensures that service organisations treat job seekers and workers fairly and in accordance with the values and rights that are important to the disability sector.

Australian Disability Enterprises must comply with general Safety and Industrial Relations legislation and provisions. From January 2010 a significant segment of the Australian Disability Enterprises sector has been covered by the new [Supported Employment Services Award 2010](#). This new Award is intended to cover all Australian Disability Enterprises and their employees. Not all Australian Disability Enterprises are currently covered by the new Award as some Australian Disability Enterprises retained coverage by their existing industrial agreements. The wages of employees with disability employed in the Australian Disability Enterprises sector must be based on a transparent assessment of a worker's productivity. These assessments are conducted using one of thirty formally recognised Wage Assessment Tools identified in the new Award.

What type of work and training is available in Australian Disability Enterprises?

There is a variety of tasks and learning opportunities which employees with a disability may undertake in Australian Disability Enterprises, in a wide range of commercial and industrial operations. Some of the main examples include:

- Packaging and Assembly – including the collating, packing, assembly & shrink wrapping of products such as cutlery, wine, supermarket goods, books and brochures and the assembly of electrical and mechanical products.
- Horticulture – plant nurseries, gardening and garden/ground maintenance, including the use of equipment such as mowers, brush cutters, chainsaws and vacuum/blowers as well as tasks such as weeding, raking, planting, irrigation work and landscaping.
- Timber and Furniture Manufacture – handling & loading timber into machines, and using hand tools and equipment to make furniture, pallets, boxes and crates, survey pegs and various other timber products
- Hospitality – preparation and presentation/serving of foods in conference centres, canteens, cafes & coffee shops
- Printing and Distribution Services – including photocopying, mail-outs, assisting with print runs, screen printing, using forklifts,
- Recycling & salvaging
- Assembly of electrical and mechanical products

There are also a number of miscellaneous industry activities in which Australian Disability Enterprises may be involved, including sewing, laundry work, commercial and domestic cleaning and car detailing. Other Australian Disability Enterprises provide opportunities in retail, clerical and administrative work, data entry, transport services and driving/courier work.

Australian Disability Enterprises usually provide a variety of work experience & training options, including nationally accredited training & traineeship programmes, courses on safety awareness, work preparation & work behaviors and with “on” and “off the job training” for vocational skill development. Australian Disability Enterprises may also arrange or conduct other training on various topics such as communication and interpersonal relationships, budgeting and obtaining a Forklift or Learner’s Driver’s license.

Profile of Australian Disability Enterprises and their employees²

- The 415 Australian Disability Enterprises across Australia employ approximately 22,000 people with disability, 74% of whom have an intellectual or learning disability and 12% a psychiatric disability.
- Most employees (64.2%) are engaged on a permanent part-time basis and 31.2% are employed in permanent full-time positions.
- Currently 91% of people working in an Australian Disability Enterprise receive the Disability Support Pension, as well as their wages.

Where can I find out more about Australian Disability Enterprises?

Contact details of most Australian Disability Enterprises, as well as the range of products and services that they offer, may be located on the website:

www.australiandisabilityenterprises.com.au.

Enquiries direct to Australian Disability Enterprises are more than welcome. Alternatively, Centrelink and/or Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) providers can also provide contact details of services that are in your local area.

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About National Disability Services

National Disability Services is the national industry association for disability services, representing over 650 not-for-profit organisations. Collectively, our members operate several thousand services for Australians with all types of disability. NDS’s members range in size from small support groups to large multi-service organisations, and are located in every State and Territory across Australia.

NDS defines its purpose under two broad categories. Firstly, it works to increase the capacity of its members to operate efficiently and effectively through provision of information, networking opportunities, and corporate partnerships. Secondly, NDS exists to make the voices of people with disabilities and their service providers heard by governments at both state/territory and federal levels. By so doing, NDS influences public policy to deliver outcomes that are responsive to the needs of people with disabilities and their providers.

NDS has a National Secretariat in Canberra and offices in every State and Territory.

More information:

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² Australian Government op.cit.