# NDIS workforce research findings

## Slide 1

**Title slide**

NDIS Workforce research findings: Findings from the NDIS workforce survey and focus groups

4 July 2023

## Slide 2

**Who are we?**

BETA: Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government

Our mission: Improve the lives of Australians by generating and applying evidence from the behavioural and social sciences to find solutions to complex problems

Insights

* Conduct research and provide advice on how people interact with programs and policy issue

Evidence

* Design and test evidence-based solutions to complex policy problems
* Evaluate and measure the impact of programs

Capability

* Uplift APS capability to apply evidence from the behavioural and social sciences to public policy

## Slide 3

**Divider: NDIS Workforce Retention**

## Slide 4

**Project context and scope**

**Current challenge:** The NDIS workforce has an annual turnover rate of 17-25%. This is notably high compared to the average turnover rate across all sectors (12%) and other comparable sectors (e.g., 12% for retail, and 7% for health care and social assistance).

**Research scope:** BETA partnered with the Department of Social Services to conduct research on NDIS workforce retention.

The research seeks to understand why worker turnover in the NDIS workforce is high and what predicts intentions to leave the NDIS workforce.

**Key research questions**

1. Why are workers leaving the NDIS workforce? What influences intentions to leave the workforce?
2. What are the barriers (job demands) and drivers (job resources) associated with retaining NDIS workers?
3. Who is most likely to leave the NDIS workforce?

## Slide 5

**Research methodology**

BETA gathered data from a desktop review, and qualitative and quantitative research

Desktop research

* BETA conducted a literature review to identify common barriers and facilitators affecting worker decisions to remain in the NDIS workforce.

Interviews

* BETA interviewed NDIS care and support workers who had left the NDIS workforce some time in the last 12 months

Survey

* BETA designed an online survey to dig deeper into the experience of the NDIS workforce and understand intentions to leave.
* (Focus of this presentation)

Intervention

* Insights from the interviews and survey may be used to design and test intervention/s to better retain current NDIS workers.
* (Next steps)

## Slide 6

**BETA surveyed 768 workers in the NDIS workforce**

BETA applied an evidence-based model to survey design and analysis

Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R model):

* Job demands: Aspects of the job requiring sustained effort or skills and are associated with a cost. For example, high workload, administration and red tape and job insecurity
* Job resources: Aspects of the job helping to achieve organisational goals or reduce burdens. For example, Pay and conditions, organisational commitment and training

When burn out is high and job engagement is low people are more likely to intend to leave the NDIS workforce. When burn out is low and engagement is high, people are more likely to intend to stay in the NDIS workforce.

## Slide 7

**Intentions to leave job**

71% of respondents reported they had a positive experience working in the NDIS workforce. Allied health professionals and fixed contract workers were the most likely to report a negative experience in the NDIS workforce.

42% of NDIS workers plan to leave their current job sometime within the next 3 years

* 58% - no plans to leave my current job within the next 3 years
* 6% - plans to leave my current job as soon as possible
* 7% plan to leave my current job within the next 6 months
* 8% plan to leave my current job within the next 12 months
* 21% - plan to leave my current job within the next 1 – 3 years

## Slide 8

**Of the NDIS workers who do plan to leave their current job, about 1 in 2 intend to leave the NDIS workforce**

Table 1 - Intention to leave the NDIS workforce

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Leave the NDIS workforce - Total** | **48%** |
| Pursue a job outside the care and support sector | 22% |
| Pursue a job in the wider care and support sector | 11% |
| Retire | 13% |
| Pursuing further education or temporarily leaving workforce e.g. maternity leave or travel (no intention to return to the sector) | 2% |

Table 2 - Intention to stay in the NDIS workforce

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Stay in the NDIS workforce - Total** | **27%** |
| Pursue another job within the disability sector | 25% |
| Pursuing further education or temporarily leaving workforce e.g. maternity leave or travel (with intention to return to the sector) | 1% |

Table 3 - Undecided

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Undecided** | **25%** |

Base n=314

## Slide 9

**High levels of burnout and low job engagement are associated with intentions to leave**

BETA found that these job experiences were significantly associated with intentions to leave the NDIS workforce: burnout, job engagement

Many NDIS workers feel burned out

* 43% of respondents feel burned out at least half the time, including 12% who feel burned out almost always in their job
* About 1 in 3 feel emotionally drained, physically exhausted and frustrated in their jobs most of the time or almost always.

… and engaged in their job

* Over 65% of respondents were satisfied with their job
* Between 72-87% agreed their job was interesting, enjoyable and they were enthusiastic about their job
* As burnout and job engagement have a moderate correlation, it is possible for NDIS workers to feel both simultaneously, or one but not the other

Footnote: Intentions: 1 = intention to stay, 0 = intention to leave, retire or undecided

## Slide 10

**BETA identified which job demands are associated with high burnout and low job engagement**

BETA found these five job demands were associated with increased burnout, decreased job engagement, or both:

* Having a workload above capacity
* Experience of health and safety risks
* Personally confronting work
* Administration and red tape
* Working more than desired hours

BETA did not find a statistically significant relationship between these three job demands and burnout/job engagement:

* Experience of discrimination
* Job insecurity
* Experience of workplace abuse

## Slide 11

**Exploration of job demands**

|  | **% of respondents** | **Who is most affected** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Personally confronting** | 86% are confronted with things that affect them personally, at least some of the time | Sole traders are the most likely to report confronting situations |
| **Admin and red tape** | About 1 in 2 believe they have too much paperwork and they are blocked by red tape. | Sole traders report the most paperwork and red tape. Allied health professionals report the most paperwork |
| **Health and safety at risk** | 73% reported their health and safety is at risk working in their job, at least some of the time. | Allied heath (26%) and disability support workers (27%) were more likely to report WHS risks |
| **Workload above capacity** | 86% reported their workload was either at capacity or above capacity in their current roles. | Management roles and full-time workers were the most likely to be above capacity |
| **More than desired hours** | 51% wanted the same number of hours and 33% wanted less hours. | Half of allied health workers and management roles want less hours |

## Slide 12

**There were variations in workload and desired hours between employment contracts**  
Table 1 - Having a workload above capacity

| **Contract type** | **% above capacity** | **% below capacity** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Full-time | 71% are above capacity | 5% are below capacity |
| Part-time | 46% are above capacity | 17% are below capacity |
| Casual | 20% are above capacity | 38% are below capacity |
| Sole trader | 69% are above capacity | 17% are below capacity |

Table 2 – Working more than desired hours

| **Contract type** | **% Prefer more hours** | **% Prefer less hours** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Full-time | 3% prefer more hours | 42% prefer less hours |
| Part-time | 26% prefer more hours | 22% prefer less hours |
| Casual | 43% prefer more hours | 13% prefer less hours |
| Sole trader | 15% prefer more hours | 60% prefer less hours |

Casual workers appear to be experiencing underemployment.

## Slide 13

**BETA identified which job resources are associated with decreased burnout and high job engagement**

BETA found that these three job resources were significantly associated with lower burnout, higher job engagement, or both:

* Healthy work practices
* Feeling committed to the organisation
* Work that is valuable to the community

There were many job resources which did not have a statistically significant relationship with burnout or job engagement:

* Organisation’s ethical standards
* On boarding experience
* Training satisfaction
* Opportunities for growth
* Pay and conditions
* Relationship with colleagues
* Relationship with supervisor
* Inclusivity of work environment
* Sense of control over work

## Slide 14

**Exploration of job resources**

|  | **% of respondents** | **Who is most affected** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Healthy work practices** | About 1 in 2 are satisfied with their work life balance and the work practices in place to help manage mental and physical health | Disability support workers reported a healthy balance between work and personal life. Sole traders reported low levels of healthy work practices. |
| **Organisational commitment** | 64% feel committed to their organisation and 72% agreed the organisation has values that align well with their own values | Part-time or casual contracts and disability support workers were the least likely to feel committed to their organisation, or agree that the organisations values align with their own |
| **High job value** | 88% feel they provide a valuable contribution to the community, but 30% of don’t believe people think highly of disability support workers | Sole traders were more likely to agree that they find the work personally fulfilling. |

## Slide 15

**Spotlight: Impact of COVID-19**

Most NDIS workers feel the pandemic negatively impacted their work, but this did not translate into intentions

* 52% of respondents reported the COVID-19 pandemic made their work experience worse.
* 31% felt COVID-19 made no difference
* 16% felt it made their work experience better

Table 1 - Reasons why COVID-19 made their work experience worse

| **Reasons** | **%** |
| --- | --- |
| Created more stress | 81% |
| Difficult to provide care | 67% |
| Increased my workload | 66% |
| Comply with COVID-19 requirements | 59% |
| Limited supervision/support available | 35% |
| It had a negative financial impact | 26% |
| Decrease my workload | 8% |
| Decrease my career prospects | 7% |
| Other | 7% |

Base: Respondents who had a worse experience due to COVID-19, n=351

Table 2 - The pandemic has not impacted intentions to stay or leave the NDIS workforce

| **Impact of COVID-19 on plans** | **%** |
| --- | --- |
| Plans have not changed | 85% |
| Planning to retire but will now stay in the sector | 1% |
| Planning to stay in the sector but will now retire | 1% |
| Planning to leave the sector but will now stay | 1% |
| Planning to stay in the sector but will now leave | 7% |
| Other | 4% |

Base: n=669

## Slide 16

**Challenges of working in the NDIS workforce**

Survey respondents were given the opportunity to comment on any additional challenges of working in the NDIS workforce

Respondents reported a range of challenges about working in the NDIS:

* NDIS systems and funding
  + Difficulty navigating the system
  + Insufficient funding and pricing changes
  + Systemic barriers affecting participant outcomes
* Lack of skilled staff
* Administrative burden and high workloads

Quotes:

* *“Extremely frustrated with the current NDIS communication system.”*
* *“The insecurity of [them] constantly changing the price guide and rules is by far the most stressful part of my role.”*
* *“Management with no disability experience. Being rostered on with clients with needs that I haven't trained in. Working with clients without proper training resulting in an injury with long term impacts.”*

## Slide 17

**What does all this mean?**

How can we support workers to stay in the NDIS workforce?

**Focus on boosting job engagement and decreasing burnout:**

* Interventions designed to target one or more of the following four areas will have the greatest positive impact on burnout and job engagement:
  + Managing workload and work hours
  + Reducing administrative burden and red tape
  + Improving workplace health and safety practices
  + Increasing feelings of job value and commitment

**Support unique needs of sole traders and casual workers:**

* Sole traders more commonly experienced personally confronting situations, have increased paperwork, higher workloads and lower healthy work practices.
* Casual workers felt less committed to their organisation and would prefer to work more hours.
* These workers may require a higher level of support or targeted assistance to stay in the sector.

**Prioritise allied health and disability support workers:**

* Allied health professionals had higher levels of paperwork, more experiences of health and safety risk and greater workloads.
* Disability support workers more commonly experienced health and safety risks, and were less likely to feel committed to their organisation.
* Workers in these roles experience specific challenges that may require additional support.

## Slide 18

**Divider: NDIS Workforce Underemployment**

## Slide 19

**Is there underemployment in the NDIS workforce?**

Table 1 – Preferred number of hours per week

| **Preferred hours** | **%** |
| --- | --- |
| A lot less hours | 7% |
| A few less hours | 26% |
| The same number of hours | 51% |
| A few more hours | 12% |
| A lot more hours | 3% |

Table 2 - Key underemployed cohorts

| **Contract type** | **% Prefer more hours** | **% Prefer less hours** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Full-time | 3% prefer more hours | 42% prefer less hours |
| Part-time | 26% prefer more hours | 22% prefer less hours |
| Casual | 43% prefer more hours | 13% prefer less hours |
| Sole trader | 15% prefer more hours | 60% prefer less hours |

* Disability support workers (28%)
* Day programs (27%) and in-home support (25%)
* Younger workers (18-30 years; 23%)
* Workers with less experience in the disability sector(Less than 1 year; 30%)

**The NDIS workforce as a whole are not underemployed**, as there are more workers who want to work less hours than more hours. But, there might be key cohorts experiencing more underemployment than others.

## Slide 20

**Why is underemployment occurring?**

The challenge of balancing the needs of NDIS participants, workers and providers contributes to underemployment

* The dynamic nature of care and support work
  + Quote: *“[The participant] could cancel today. Then if they stay for three months in a hospital, we'll be out of work.”*
* Finding the best fit between participants and workers
  + Quote: *“Workers are different with each client, and they treat each client differently. So it's just a matter of trying to find the right person…”*
* A worker’s location and personal commitments
  + Quote: *“Sometimes it’s hard with kids. I need to drop my daughter to my friends house for two days.”*
* Mismatch with peak service times and worker availability
  + Quote: *“Most supports are required at 5pm to 7pm at night – assistance for the evening meal. So you’ve got a whole stack of staff in demand at 5 o’clock for two hours.”*

## Slide 21

Peak daily service times and worker availability do not match

Graphic: Shows peak participant demand in the mornings and evenings and low participant demand during the day. Peak worker availability during the day and low availability during the mornings and evenings

## Slide 22

**The challenge of balancing the needs of NDIS participants, workers and providers contributes to underemployment**

* Rostering workers with multiple jobs
  + Quote: *“So they have either got a second job or a third job and we're maybe second or third down the line.”*
* Workers adapting to provider work practices
  + Quote: *“You find out basically two days ahead of when you're meant to work. There's no guarantees if they want to change my roster…”*
* Different motivations behind worker and provider contract preferences
  + Quote: *“They said they can't give more hours. It's all overtime and they don't want to spend more money.”*
* The upfront cost of efficient rostering systems
  + Quote: *“We deliberately targeted and had to pay a lot more for [rostering] staff. See, the rostering teams become the profit or loss of the business.”*

## Slide 23

**Divider: Next Steps: Admin Process Mapping**

## Slide 24

**Intervention scoping: Reducing admin burden**

Step 1: Process mapping

To understand key friction points, BETA will conduct a process mapping exercise. This involves three main steps:

1. Develop a survey to assess where admin burden is coming from
2. Conducting interviews with NDIS workers
3. Running multiple workshops with NDIS providers, NDIS workers, and NDIS government agencies (e.g. NDIA, NDIS commission)

Following these discussions, BETA will develop a step by step overview of the administrative process for the scope chosen, highlight key points of friction and potential solution.

Example process map:

1. Finish shift with client
2. Open and log into app (!)
3. Find a client profile and click new case note (!)
4. Provide information about client and session (!)
5. Save report
6. Report reviewed by relevant manager, team leader or support coordinator

## Slide 25

**Process mapping**

BETA conducted further research into admin burden

What is causing admin burden?

* NDIS compliance and regulation requirements (e.g. compliance record keeping for audits), as well as NDIS processes (e.g. making claims for payment, report writing) contribute the most to admin burden
* The main causes of burden include: repetitive information or processes, missing or slow feedback responses (e.g. from management or NDIS agencies), and constantly changing requirements.
* Admin burden is perceived to originate from NDIA and NDIS Commissions

Who is experiencing admin burden?

* Interviews found thatdisability support workers mostly only completed case notes after each session, and incident reports when needed. These case notes generally take 5-15 minutes, depending on the complexity of the participant.
* Interviews found that allied health professionals are often required to complete assessments for their clients.
* Part of the purpose of the assessment/reassessment is to secure funding for participants. Allied professionals described spending up to 5 hours completing these reports to ensure they are comprehensive.

As providers, what is your role with plan assessment or reassessment reports?

## Slide 26

**Intervention Development**

BETA will conduct workshops with NDIS workers, providers and NDIS agencies.

* BETA will finalise the process map which will outline pain points and potential solutions and recommendations.

BETA will design an intervention in partnership with DSS to address admin burden issues in the NDIS workforce.

BETA will implement and evaluate the intervention and publish a report on the findings.

## Slide 27

**Thank you**

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