

Down Syndrome Australia, Employment Connections Service:

*Investigating costs, revenue and
sustainability in the Australian
employment services system*

Prepared by the Centre for Social Impact Swinburne and

Down Syndrome Australia

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Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, who are the Traditional Owners of the land on which the Centre for Social Impact Swinburne is located on in Melbourne's east, and pay our respect to their Elders past and present. We are honoured to recognise our connection to Wurundjeri Country, history, culture, and spirituality through these locations, and strive to ensure that we operate in a manner that respects and honours the Elders and Ancestors of these lands. We also respectfully acknowledge Swinburne's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students, alumni, partners and visitors.

We also acknowledge and respect the Traditional Owners of lands across Australia, their Elders, Ancestors, cultures, and heritage, and recognise the continuing sovereignties of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations.

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CSI Swinburne is focused on people and technology working together for a better world, exploring the intersection between social entrepreneurship and technology, in areas such as social enterprise, social business and social finance; community services innovation; employment access and equity; and impact and evaluation and measurement.

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GLOSSARY

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACNC	Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission
ASA	Australian Spatial Analytics (social enterprise)
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (Commonwealth government)
DES	Disability Employment Service
DSA	Down Syndrome Australia (peak body)
DSS	Department of Social Services (Commonwealth government)
ECS	Employment Connections Service
ESA	Employment Services Area
IEA	Inclusive Employment Australia (the new name for DES)
ILC	Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (grant program)
MID	Moderate Intellectual Disability (IQ \leq 60)
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NDS	National Disability Services

THE REPORT ON A PAGE

What Employment Connections Service does: Down Syndrome Australia's Employment Connections Service (ECS) provides tailored, evidence-aligned employment services to jobseekers with Down syndrome (and, more recently, people with other intellectual disability) and to employers. The model has four key areas of service activity: discovery/vocational profiling, job development and customised placement, intensive job-site training, and ongoing support. These reflect the current international research and practice evidence about the key ingredients of 'what works' to support the employment of people with intellectual disability and show strong alignment with international models driving best practice.

What ECS has achieved: over three years, ECS supported more than 140 people with Down syndrome and other intellectual disability to enter open employment at award wages. Placements commonly are for low hours (average 6.3 hours/week), reflecting both participant preference/capacity and employer onboarding approaches.

What this report assesses: the delivery model, cost, and financial sustainability of ECS, and how (or whether) existing Commonwealth funding mechanisms can support it at scale.

Indicative cost per employment placement (including ongoing support within year 1): \$30,111 (metropolitan), which includes \$8,313 in year 1 of ongoing support, and \$39,625 (regional/rural focus) including \$11,093 of ongoing support in year 1.

Ongoing support cost per placement per annum (from Year 2 onwards): estimated at \$5,668 (metropolitan) and \$7,720 (regional/rural), highlighting the much lower cost of maintaining employment outcomes once a role has been secured.

Funding feasibility: modelling indicates that, under current rules and typical utilisation, neither of the key Commonwealth funding mechanisms of NDIS and Inclusive Employment Australia (IEA) revenue will cover the full cost of delivering ECS – particularly for participants working <15 hours/week, and especially <5 hours/week. There is scope for modest cost reduction through scale efficiencies and alternative operating models supported by long term funding, such as shared cross-state overheads or more efficient approaches to rural and regional delivery, but these efficiencies alone are insufficient to close the financial sustainability gap. However, taken together, existing allocations of NDIS Core and Capacity Building funding related to employment would appear to be sufficient if able to be used for the ECS.

Core sustainability risk: without reform to pricing/authorisation settings and/or a blended funding approach, specialist evidence-based services like ECS are likely to remain dependent on time-limited grants and philanthropy, constraining continuity and scale.

Immediate areas for reform:

1. Clarify the opportunity to blend IEA and NDIS funding in the delivery of employment services.
2. Target an increase in the allocation of Capacity Building employment funding across cohorts with low assessed work capacity.
3. Encourage and protect utilisation of Core 'Assistance with social, economic and community participation' funding for employment service delivery, such as ECS.
4. Review program and funding guidelines in IEA to ensure providers are incentivised to support people with low assessed work capacity (0-7 hours per week).
5. Extend Moderate Intellectual Disability payments (a component of IEA) to job outcomes below 15 hours per week.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Employment Connections Service (ECS): model and results

ECS is a specialised employment service designed and implemented by Down Syndrome Australia and delivered locally through state/territory Down syndrome associations. It acts as a trusted employment service for jobseekers, families and employers. It is comprised of four phases of activity

1. **Discovery / personalised client assessment:** home and community conversations and activities to identify strengths, conditions for success, vocational themes, and targeted employer leads.
2. **Job development and placement:** proactive employer engagement, job carving/customisation, recruitment support for employer and jobseeker, and workplace preparation (including developing accessible materials where needed).
3. **Intensive job-site training:** early-stage onsite training and support (including task breakdown, task cards, structured check-ins with employer/family and other supports).
4. **Ongoing support:** tapered but continuing support (workplace check-ins, additional training, addressing issues as they arise, and supporting role growth).

The model is underpinned by a range of indirect and enabling activities including employer communications and relationship-building, family education, and broader awareness-raising—activities that make placements possible but are often difficult to fund through individualised payment mechanisms.

Over its first three years, ECS supported more than 140 people into open employment at award wages. Initial placements frequently commence at low weekly hours (average ~6.3 hours/week, noting data available for a subset only). The Employment Connections Service attains meaningful employment outcomes for a group of people who are significantly marginalised from open employment, and who have largely been left out of other employment services.

Purpose and scope of the study

This report was commissioned to determine whether the Employment Connections Service can be sustained beyond its time-limited establishment funding (via the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building program) and to identify what changes – within funding settings, revenue strategies, or service delivery arrangements – would be required to maintain and expand a

model that is demonstrably effective for people with Down syndrome. Specifically, the study focused on:

- **Cost:** What does it cost to deliver ECS (metropolitan and regional/rural)?
- **Revenue and sustainability:** What funding sources can reasonably be accessed — particularly the NDIS and Inclusive Employment Australia (IEA) — and do they cover the cost of delivering an evidence-based model for a cohort whose typical starting hours are low?

The study documented and standardised ECS service activities; assessed alignment with international evidence on supported/customised employment; built a cost model; mapped activities to NDIS and IEA revenue; and tested multi-year scenarios including the provision of multi-year ongoing support and re-placement into additional employment when initial placements end. This is the first time that we know of that anyone in Australia has detailed the costing of the delivery of an employment service that is consistent with the international evidence on the Supported Employment model.

Evidence base: alignment with supported and customised employment

A review of the international and Australian evidence concludes that the ECS approach is strongly aligned with the elements most consistently associated with successful mainstream employment for people with intellectual disability. These include: establishing high expectations for employment among family members and mobilising their support; individualised discovery and vocational profiling; job development and customisation; structured job-site training; and sustained, flexible ongoing support. Durable employment outcomes require the delivery of this 'package' of supports via a long-term support relationship that can respond to change (for the worker, the workplace and the broader support network). The ECS model has strong alignment with the UK Supported Employment Quality Framework (British Association of Supported Employment, n.d.); a model of supported open employment (Kregel et al., 2020) and the Discovery Fidelity Scale (Hall et al., 2022), all of which are underpinned by international research.

What it costs to deliver ECS

The cost modelling estimates an average cost per Year 1 placement of \$30,111 for metropolitan delivery and \$39,625 for a regional/rural delivery. These costs are made up of an initial placement cost of \$21,798 (metro) and \$28,532 (regional/rural), plus post-placement support in year 1 of \$8,313 (metro) and \$11,093 (regional/rural). From Year 2 onwards, the ongoing

support required for a participant to maintain employment is estimated at \$5,668 per year, for metropolitan delivery, and \$7,720 per year, for a regional/rural delivery. The regional/rural cost estimates are higher due to travel time and the greater effort required to develop, secure and maintain employment opportunities when employer density is lower and service catchments are broader. Modelling is based on a single Down syndrome association delivering in one state with placement of eight participants per annum. Compared with limited evidence on costs of other employment services in Australia, this is less costly than Disability Employment Services (averaged at \$38,400 per 26-week outcome by Boston Consulting Group, 2020) and at the lower end of the range of costs for other programs in Australia. Other evidence highlights that models such as ECS are more cost effective than those based on sheltered workshop approaches (Taylor et al., 2021).

Revenue pathways: NDIS and Inclusive Employment Australia (IEA)

The report examines whether ECS can be funded through either: (1) NDIS participant plans (using relevant employment-related Core and Capacity Building support items); and/or (2) the payments available through Inclusive Employment Australia (IEA). In both cases, revenue was insufficient to cover the costs of delivery of ECS, despite the overall cost of the program being lower than other similar employment services (such as Disability Employment Services).

The NDIS was found to be able to fund 60% of the 1 year ECS model activities and costs (metropolitan), but some activities were not eligible for funding. In the main, the model's underpinning enabling activities (e.g., broad employer development and service operations) did not translate into claimable items. Similarly, the IEA program was found to be able to cover 29% of the 1 year ECS model costs, noting that this revenue would be further decreased when applying a fee-splitting arrangement with an IEA provider. The low extent of IEA revenue coverage was largely due to the cohort of the ECS model who are likely to gain employment at levels less than 15 hours, or even 8 hours per week thereby limiting the IEA payments available for these outcomes. A key example is the lack of outcomes payment in the IEA program for people attaining work below 5 hours per week, which was 44% of the Employment Connections Service cohort (averaged across ECS program data).

What the modelling shows: the sustainability gap

Across the scenarios tested, there is a consistent sustainability gap: the revenue that can realistically be generated under current NDIS and IEA settings does not reliably match the cost of delivering ECS at the intensity required for people with Down syndrome and intellectual disability – particularly where participants work fewer than 15 hours per week, and most acutely below 5 hours per week. Despite these low hours of employment, the service effort to achieve and

sustain employment for this cohort is significant. In other words, the model that best reflects evidence on “what works” for this cohort is not well matched to the way mainstream funding is currently structured.

The gap persists because the revenue is constrained by: (a) what is authorised in individual plans, with low numbers of people with Down syndrome having Capacity Building employment-related funding; (b) price limits and claimability boundaries – for example, restrictions on utilising Employment Related Assessment and Counselling funding related to workforce qualifications; and (c) IEA outcome payments that are weaker for low-hours jobs as well as Moderate Intellectual Disability payments only being available for outcomes of 15 hours per week or more.

While the current match between revenue and delivery costs is poor, there appears to be scope within the current funding levels of the NDIS to unlock existing funding for utilisation in services such as ECS. The total quantum of employment-aligned funding in the NDIS for people with Down syndrome and intellectual disability, across Core and Capacity Building funding, appears to be sufficient to meet the costs of ECS delivery. For example, people with Down syndrome average a total of \$57,822 per annum in Core (Community) supports and \$17,074 of Capacity Building (Employment) funding per annum (i.e. a total of \$74,896 in funding compared to the cost of ECS of \$30,111 in Year 1 and diminishing thereafter). The difficulty appears to be unlocking this available funding for use by these participants to fund the full range of activities within the Employment Connections Service. The analysis undertaken in this study highlights that only a portion of activities are eligible to be funded by the NDIS, hence leaving a substantial funding shortfall and, more importantly, a program where only a portion of evidence-based activities are eligible for funding.

Why this matters: employment exclusion and the ‘low-hours’ reality

People with Down syndrome experience significant exclusion from open employment. NDIS administrative data indicates that, among NDIS participants with Down syndrome aged 15–64 who are in the labour force, where open employment occurs, weekly hours are typically modest: many participants work 15 hours or less, and a material proportion work 0–8 hours per week (i.e. 44% in ECS working less than 5 hours per week). However, when people with disability are employed, they gain substantial benefits including enhanced wellbeing, independence and social inclusion outcomes along with material outcomes such as income and housing (Devine et al., 2022; Suchowerska, et al., 2026; Buckland et al., 2024; Riesen and Snyder, 2024).

However, this ‘low-hours’ reality has major implications for service sustainability because policy and funding, such as IEA outcomes payments, are shaped around assumptions of higher weekly hours of employment. For people with Down syndrome (and those with other intellectual disability) the pathway to sustainable work often requires intensive discovery, employer engagement and job customisation, followed by structured job-site training and long-term support. The report positions ECS as a specialist response designed around these evidence-based requirements, rather than around the constraints of existing payment systems.

Implications for policymakers

Funding systems should not penalise low-hours jobs: for people with Down syndrome and other intellectual disability, low-hours employment can be an appropriate and sustainable outcome. Funding settings that tie value primarily to hours worked risk incentivising providers away from the cohort most in need of specialised support and de-values important outcomes for people most marginalised from the labour market.

Blended funding is likely required: there is a need to utilise both IEA and NDIS funding to deliver evidence-based employment services at the intensity and longevity required by many people with disability. An explicit authorising environment for this is needed.

Employer development is essential infrastructure: building and maintaining employer relationships, job carving and customisation are central to award-wage placements but are not always well accommodated by individualised funding. In general, further work on funding mechanisms to resource the essential activities of employer development and capability building is needed. A key result is that increased employer capability is likely to lower service delivery costs as it reduces the need for employer capability building activities over time.

Funding and pricing settings need to better reflect evidence-based practice: align NDIS and IEA pricing and guidelines with evidence-based employment support activities.

Strengthen pathways into NDIS employment supports: develop consistent processes and documentation to support participants to secure plan funding for employment-related supports.

Immediate areas for reform

1. Clarify the opportunity to blend IEA and NDIS funding in the delivery of employment services.
2. Target an increase in the allocation of Capacity Building employment funding to cohorts with low assessed work capacity.

3. Encourage and protect utilisation of Core ‘Assistance with social, economic and community participation’ funding for employment service delivery, such as ECS.
4. Review program and funding guidelines in IEA to ensure providers are incentivised to support people with low assessed work capacity (0-7 hours per week).
5. Extend Moderate Intellectual Disability payments to job outcomes below 15 hours per week.

Overall conclusion

ECS is an evidence-aligned specialist employment model that delivers award-wage open employment for people with Down syndrome and other intellectual disability. However, the report concludes that under current funding arrangements — particularly where participants work low weekly hours — ECS is unlikely to be financially sustainable without a blended funding approach and/or policy and pricing reforms that recognise the true cost of achieving and maintaining high-quality outcomes for this cohort.

PART 1: CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

Background

Down Syndrome Australia (DSA) is the peak body for people with Down syndrome in Australia. Informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, DSA works collaboratively with members and partners to target social and policy change and provide a national voice for people with Down syndrome.

DSA was funded under the Australian Government's Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Program (Department of Social Services) to deliver its "Employment Connections for People with Down Syndrome" project, providing an Employment Connections Service that is run locally by member and partner organisations, and coordinated nationally (discussed below).

While the Employment Connections Service has achieved substantial employment outcomes for those it has supported, the ILC funding is limited in term and amount. In order to sustain this successful program, Down Syndrome Australia needs to identify alternative revenue/funding. The purpose of this study is to explore options for future financial sustainability of the Employment Connections Service as an important piece of Australia's employment ecosystem. In particular, this focuses on the potential utilisation of the two main employment service funding sources provided by the Commonwealth government: National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) individualised funding and funding via providers delivering the Inclusive Employment Australia program (formerly, Disability Employment Services).

This study provides a unique insight into the viability of employment services that are fit for purpose for disability cohorts, such as people with Down syndrome, who are significantly marginalised from the labour market and where many will have a very limited capacity to work (for example, seeking/being able to work less than 8 hours per week). To date, there is little documented evidence about the costs of employment services and supports generally, the alignment of specific intervention types to costs, nor examination of revenue and its match to actual costs of delivering an effective and evidence-aligned employment service, particularly for those with substantial barriers to employment. There is no published research that does this in the context of employment services for people with Down syndrome. It is likely that these findings will have additional relevance to similar cohorts such as people with Intellectual Disability and others with lower work capacity assessments and similar barriers to employment.

Employment participation for people with Down syndrome

People with Down syndrome experience significant marginalisation from the Australian labour market.

There are approximately 337,900 people with Intellectual Disability (including Down syndrome) aged between 15-64 in Australia, and around 39% in the labour market (AIHW, 2024). In 2018, only 32% of people with Intellectual disability in the labour market were employed with most (18%) working part time (AIHW, 2024). People with learning and understanding restrictions, along with people with psychosocial disability, have the highest median gross income gap (of \$605 per week) when compared with the incomes of those without disability¹.

Data from the National Disability Insurance Agency [NDIA] (2025) indicates that there are approximately 13,000 people with Down syndrome in the NDIS, with approximately 9,000 of these being of working age. The latest data (2025–26 Q1)² from Australia’s Disability Strategy shows that the proportion of NDIS participants with Down syndrome aged 15–64 in the labour force who are in open employment at full award wage is the lowest of all disability cohorts at 7% (compared to an average across NDIS participant cohorts of 25%). 2025 data from the NDIS shows that 26% of participants aged 15-64 with Down syndrome are employed³. Previous NDIS data indicated that 33% of NDIS participants (25-64 years) with Down syndrome were in paid employment of any type, and only 9%, of people with Down syndrome (25 -64 years) were in open employment at full wage (NDIA, 2022). The data also showed that 71% of NDIS participants with Down syndrome (25-64 years) who have a paid job are working in ADEs (NDIA, 2022). This has decreased to 69% in 2025.⁴

NDIS participants with Down syndrome aged 25 years and over who are working in open employment typically work 15 hours a week or less (NDIA, 2022). Forty one percent (41%) work 8-15 hours per week, and 18% 0-8 hours per week. Younger NDIS participants with Down syndrome aged under 25 years have a similar experience in open employment: 39% work 8-15 hours per week and 29% work 0-8 hours per week (NDIA, 2022). In general, NDIS participants aged 15–24 have lower weekly work hours than those aged 25+ (NDIA, 2020; 2022). Overall,

¹ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/australias-disability-strategy/outcomes/employment-and-financial-security/median-gross-income-gap>

² <https://www.aihw.gov.au/australias-disability-strategy/outcomes/employment-and-financial-security/ndis-participants-in-full-award-wage-employment>

³ <https://dataresearch.ndis.gov.au/media/4515/download?attachment>, Table 22.

⁴ <https://dataresearch.ndis.gov.au/media/4515/download?attachment>, Table 28.

more than half to two thirds of NDIS participants with Down syndrome work 15 hours or less per week in open employment.

NDIS participants with Down syndrome generally work more hours when employed in ADEs compared to non-ADE settings. Older participants (25+) in ADE employment are more likely to work 30+ hours/week whereas only around 10% of people who work at this level are aged 15–24 years (NDIA, 2020; 2022). Older individuals and those who work for a longer period in ADEs are less likely to transition to open employment (NDIA, 2023). The NDIA suggests that “ADEs helped participants understand their work tasks and roles and provided reassurance” (NDIA, 2022, p.81) which may contribute to the increased work hours in these settings. Employment in non-ADE settings for people with Down syndrome who are working 30 hours or more per week is far lower: this accounts for only 5% of people aged 15–24 and 9% of people aged 25+ with Down syndrome who work in non-ADE settings (NDIA 2020; 2022).

Data from the NDIS (2020, 2022) shows that participants with an intellectual disability (including Down syndrome) are highly likely, compared to all other conditions, to receive the DSP (86.3% in 2020 and 87.4% in 2022). Working in ADEs does not affect Disability Support Pension (DSP) payments, hence there is not as much financial disincentive to work in this setting.

While employment outcomes for people with intellectual disability in Australia remain low, as at end of February 2026, there are 8,600 people with intellectual disability (inclusive of people with Down syndrome) in Inclusive Employment Australia (the new Disability Employment Services), totalling 3.5% of the caseload⁵. This is lower than the early years of the DES program that had 11,667 people with intellectual disability in DES in 2011, with 8,304 of these having a primary disability of intellectual disability (DEEWR, 2013). In 2024/25, only 930 people with intellectual disability achieved a 52 week employment outcome with the support of Disability Employment Services (now Inclusive Employment Australia)⁶. A 2020 report found that the average 52 week employment outcome rate for people with intellectual disability in DES was 20%, with variability between providers of between 10-67% (Centre for International Economics, 2020). Earlier evaluations of DES performance for people with moderate intellectual disability highlight that this group experiences ‘longer than average time to outcome’ (DEEWR, 2013, p.6).

⁵ IEA monthly profile 28 February 2026, <https://data.gov.au/data/dataset/iea-inclusive-employment-australia-monthly-profile>

⁶ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/australias-disability-strategy/outcomes/employment-and-financial-security/disability-employment-services>

The low numbers of people with intellectual disability and the high prevalence of people with Down syndrome in ADE settings, rather than open employment, is strongly linked to prior policy settings, particularly as set by the Commonwealth's Disability Services Act 1986. Despite the Act being replaced in 2023, existing employment service systems have not adequately addressed the exclusion of people with Down syndrome from open employment and full award-wage work, particularly where people with Down syndrome have an assessed work capacity of 0-7 hours per week (Wilson et al., 2022).

'What works' to support the employment of people with Down syndrome

People with intellectual disability and Down syndrome face a range of barriers to employment. While some of these relate to personal or environmental contexts such as having high support needs (Long et al., 2025; NDIA, 2020; 2022) or facing transport barriers (in getting to and from work) (Devine et al., 2021; Jacob et al., 2023; Long et al., 2025; Taubner et al., 2022; Ting et al., 2024), many are employer-related obstacles. A fundamental barrier has been the limited job opportunities made available to people with intellectual disability (Jacob et al., 2023; Meltzer et al., 2020; Ting et al., 2024). This is coupled with and driven by low employer expectations, for example of productivity, or linked to concerns about support needs. There is a link between poor quality jobs and low pay with employer attitudes or low expectations (Helena et al., 2023; Jacob et al., 2023). Evidence highlights the lack of suitable job fit for people with intellectual disabilities, characterised by inflexible hours, mismatched roles, and unsuitable locations (Helena et al., 2023; Meltzer et al., 2020; Ting et al., 2024). The lack of financial incentives or support to offset the extra time needed for employees who have extra needs is both a disincentive to employers and a barrier to potential employees (Helena et al., 2023; Jacob et al., 2023). While the literature is scarce, in the Australian context researchers found that people with intellectual disability found it difficult to get NDIS-funded support in open employment to help them become independent at work (Joyce et al., 2025) and to maintain (and gain) employment (Devine et al., 2021). The lack of availability of NDIS funding to support employment transitions (from ADEs or social enterprises for example) was found to be a barrier to employment in multiple recent studies (Joyce et al., 2025; Suchowerska et al., 2026; Elmes et al., 2025).

Despite poor employment outcomes for people with Down syndrome and intellectual disability, there is consistent and high quality evidence about 'what works' for these cohorts.

Facilitators of Employment

Evidence about 'what works' to support people with intellectual disability in open employment has been well known in Australia for several decades. In 2014, the evaluation of the new Disability Employment Services program summarised evidence from Wehman et al. (1999) identifying eight strategies to support people with significant intellectual disability to succeed in open employment:

- 'specialist job coach
- instructional strategies specifically designed for people with intellectual disability, for example, prompt sequences, positive reinforcement, task analysis and modification
- compensatory strategies
- natural employer workplace supports
- assistive technology
- workplace modifications
- long term support
- community supports' (DEEWR, 2014, p.122).

In their review of evidence to date, Wilson and Campain (2020) identified a further set of evidence-based factors that contribute to positive employment outcomes for people with intellectual disability. These include:

- having early experiences to develop a view or vision of one's self as a worker
- having work experience, including a 'typical' pathway of work experience and paid work as the person grows up through teenage and adult years
- parental expectations
- expectations and support of family and friends (and accessing their social capital)
- effective transition support
- completing secondary school
- participating in post-secondary education
- customised employment
- individualised placement and support
- mentoring to support employment
- self-employment through microenterprise

- interagency collaboration’ (p.12).

As summarised by Wilson and Campain (2020), family play a key role in supporting employment outcomes. Having high expectations of employment among family members with intellectual disability is one of the key predictors of later employment. A range of research also documents the importance of family members in providing support to find and maintain a job (Loveall et al., 2022; Taubner et al. 2022; Ting et al., 2024).

For people with intellectual disability, on-the-job training and support following job placement is a key aspect of vocational skills acquisition. Work-related skills are typically gained through direct experience in the workplace and include preparation for future career opportunities (Devine et al., 2021; Helena et al., 2023; Joyce et al., 2025; NDIA, 2023). Systematic instruction is a key approach to skills acquisition and involves structured methods to teach tasks step by step in the workplace (Alexander and Zhang, 2026). Given the importance of this in-situ mode of learning and skills development, work experience has been found to be a major predictor of later employment for people with intellectual disability (summarised in Wilson and Campain, 2020).

Employers play a key role in not only creating customised and tailored job opportunities for people with intellectual disability, but also in being the main provider of on-the-job supports. For example, the NDIA (2020) reports that ‘Participants most commonly received support to do their job from their employer’ (p.19). This was true for 85% to 89% of people with Down syndrome (depending on age bracket) (NDIA, 2020).

Alexander and Zhang (2026) in their meta review of ‘what works’ in employment supports for people with intellectual disability identify five overarching points that draw together these themes and address the known barriers to employment discussed earlier:

- ‘People with intellectual disability achieve the best employment outcomes when support is delivered as a coordinated package, not as isolated activities.
- Employer-facing support such as job redesign, supervisor coaching, and inclusion strategies is essential for both job attainment and job quality.
- Ongoing support is critical. Employment outcomes are weaker when assistance stops too soon or is too low in intensity.
- Workplace design matters. Clear instructions, predictable routines, and supportive supervision improve job satisfaction and retention.
- Many employment challenges arise from a mismatch between the workplace and the person’s strengths. Adjusting tasks and environments is often more effective than focusing solely on individual skill-building’. (p.6).

Economic and social benefits of employment of people with disability

Despite lack of employment services for people with Down syndrome in Australia, investment in employment services and initiatives to increase the employment of people with disability has a substantial economic and social return. The evidence for this return on investment is long standing.

International evidence suggests that ‘there is a clear economic incentive to promote labour market participation among those with a disability’ (Devine et al., 2022, p.9). In 2011, Deloitte Access Economics conducted analysis to assess the economic benefit of increased employment of people with disability in Australia, They found that ‘if the gap between the participation rate and unemployment rate for people with and without disability could be reduced by just one-third [i.e. an increase of labour force participation of 10 percentage points], phased in over the next decade, the cumulative impact on GDP over the next decade would be \$43 billion’ (p.25). More than a decade later, Buckland et al. (2024, p. 13) conclude that, in the Australian context, ‘increasing the number of people with disability who are employed by 10 per cent would raise national economic output by \$16 billion per year’. This excludes additional cost savings from income support and reduced need for services.

While investment in delivery of employment services and supports that increase employment yields a clear economic return, it also yields a social and wellbeing return for individuals with disability. Benefits have been found to include increased access to secure housing, reduced poverty, increased social inclusion and physical and mental health (Devine et al., 2022; Suchowerska, et al., 2026). Similarly, through analysis of recent ABS data, Buckland et al. (2024) conclude that there is strong evidence for a causal link between employment or education and self-assessed life satisfaction and wellbeing. In short ‘labour market and education inclusion enhance the wellbeing of people with disability’ (p. 80).

Finally, international studies have assessed the costs and benefits of investing in the delivery of employment services for people with intellectual and developmental disability that focus on ‘mainstream’ integrated employment outcomes (such as the Employment Connections Service) rather than those available in segregated settings such as sheltered workshops (in Australia, previously known as Australian Disability Enterprises [ADEs]). A review of published research by Taylor et al. (2021) found that employment services based on models similar to that used by the Employment Connections Service were more cost effective than those based on sheltered workshop approaches. In addition, evidence pointed to decreasing costs over time for such models (as the provision of supports lessened alongside longer-term employment) while the costs of other models, such as sheltered workshops, remained both higher and static. Of equal

importance is a wide range of evidence about the broader outcomes of competitive integrated employment (rather than segregated work environments) which shows that such 'open' employment yields increased engagement in community activities, increased hours of employment, increased personal independence and self-determination (Riesen and Snyder, 2024).

EMPLOYMENT CONNECTIONS SERVICE

Overview

The Employment Connections Service commenced in 2022. It connects employers to people with Down syndrome, and provides support with recruitment, job carving and mentoring. The focus of the Employment Connections Service is on providing tailored supports to people with Down syndrome and employers to enable the development of meaningful, well-paid employment in community-based workplaces. The program addresses barriers to employment by identifying suitable employers and providing bespoke information and support to them to enable creation of an employment opportunity for a person with Down syndrome. The Employment Connections Service then connects the employer to young people seeking employment. Finally, the service actively engages family members to support the employment pathway and maintenance of the job opportunity. The Employment Connections Service predominantly uses a ‘place-train-maintain’ approach consistent with literature about ‘what works’ for employment support for people with intellectual disability. This literature identifies the importance of in-situ or on-the-job learning, rather than a readiness approach with a prelude of vocational training (Alexander and Zhang, 2026). This set of ingredients is strongly resonant with the literature about facilitators of employment for people with intellectual disability discussed above.

In an evaluation of the program, six ingredients were identified that enabled the Employment Connections Service success (Crosbie, McNaught, Wilson, 2024).

Figure 1: The six ingredients of success of the Employment Connections Service



1. *Specialisation* – Tailored employment support that leverages extensive knowledge about people with Down syndrome, ensuring strategies align with unique individual needs.
2. *Presence of a trusted intermediary* – Employment Connection Service acts as a trusted link between people with Down syndrome, employing organisations and families. Trust is built on the Down Syndrome Association’s strong community ties and a reputation for flexible, individualised support.

3. *Support for Employers* - Engaging employers about the capabilities of people with Down syndrome and providing ongoing assistance, resulted in committed and skilled employers offering inclusive job opportunities.
4. *Building deliberate support systems* – Placing the person with Down syndrome at the centre, establishing shared vision and values among an effective support system involving family, employers and the respective Down Syndrome Association.
5. *Flexible delivery of the program* - Adapting support to the specific needs of each person-and-employer relationship.
6. *A growth mindset* – Employing organisations, families and Employment Connections Service staff hold a growth mindset for people with Down syndrome and enable opportunities to learn new skills (Crosbie, McNaught, Wilson, 2024, p. 7-8).

The Employment Connection Service was delivered locally by state and territory based Down Syndrome Associations who were enabled to deliver the Employment Connection Service in a way that suited their local circumstances.

Capturing the activities of service delivery

While the ingredients of the service match those highlighted in the literature, the current study also sought to provide a more detailed capture of the activities of service delivery so as to better understand their type, quantum and alignment with existing evidence.

In order to provide some high level categories within which to organise activities, CSI researchers used material provided in the earlier evaluation of the Down Syndrome Association's Employment Connections Service (Crosbie, McNaught, Wilson, 2024) to identify key clusters of activity. In consultation with DSA and the State and Territory associations, researchers then re-named and organised the main categories of delivery around an evidence-based model for effective employment support for people with intellectual disability (Kregel et al., 2020), discussed below. The model was strongly resonant with the service model and therefore was used as a base. The four categories of the model were further expanded with more detailed activity descriptions of delivery through discussion with DSA and State/Territory associations.

The resultant service delivery model is summarised below with further detail provided in Appendix A:

Table 1: Service delivery model for Employment Connections Service

<p>Engagement with people with disability*</p> <p>Occurs via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSA membership and networks (this is not a costed element within the model, i.e. unfunded as part of original trial) • Explicit and new connections with key stakeholders such as ADEs, school leavers
<p>Discovery/ Personalised Client Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home and community visits and conversations • 3-5 Discovery activities with client • Development and documentation of client’s vocational themes • 2-4 informational interviews with employers • Development of 20 business leads relevant to each client
<p>Job Development and Placement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue expressions of interest by potential employers via conversations and site visits with employers • Identify job opportunities and support targeted recruitment process with employers • Support employer and jobseeker with interview readiness • Interviewing support • Deliver Disability Awareness Training in the workplace • Job customisation • Assist employer with Easy Read version of contract • Pre-commencement check in with all parties – establish communication protocol between parties
<p>Intensive Job Site Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day 1 check-in with all parties • Accompany client on job (ongoing) • Accompany family members to on-site visit • Prepare task cards detailing job tasks (including photos) • End of week 1 check-in with all parties (employer, client, family, IEA, NDIS support worker) • End of week 2 and 3 check-in with all parties • Record keeping
<p>Ongoing support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further Disability Awareness Training (to deal with issues or new staff) • Accompany client on the job (once per fortnight months 2-7 and once per month for months 8-11, faded over 1st 12 months) • Deliver further onsite training to client fortnightly for six months, then monthly (as required), including additional task cards relevant to role growth • Check-ins with all parties • Placement case study • Record keeping

Indirect activities (spread across the elements above)

- General employer engagement (online, email, phone, in person)
- Communications and marketing to employers (via social media)
- Developing partnerships/ talking to IEA providers
- Educating families about ECS (including newsletters)
- Employers network
- Meetings with prospective employers
- Interviewing people with Down syndrome about their stories
- Project and operational management (reporting, financials, quality, CRM)

* This introductory stage of the model is not included in the ECS Costs model developed later.

Assessing the alignment of the model with evidence on effective employment service design

The Employment Connections Service was analysed in terms of its alignment with the evidence-base for employment services suitable for people with Down syndrome and intellectual disability. This aimed to ensure that the model was likely to be effective over time as it was well aligned with an evidence base for effective employment service delivery for similar cohorts of people with disability.

Three related models were used for assessing alignment with the evidence base. Each of these are related and based on similar literature and research.

1. An open employment model for jobseekers with intellectual disability by Kregel et al. (2020).
2. The Supported Employment Quality Framework from the UK (British Association for Supported Employment, n.d), an evidence-based approach for a similar cohort.
3. The Discovery Fidelity Scale (Hall et al., 2022) which offers evidence for a sub-set of Employment Connections Service activities (i.e. the 'personalised client assessment' component).

Discussion of alignment with the models is provided below.

Alignment with a model of supported open employment

This model synthesised elements of effective service delivery from a review of international research on successful employment programs for individuals with intellectual disability (Kregel et al., 2020). This model proposed four main clusters of activity:

1. Personalised client assessment

2. Job development and placement
3. Intensive job site training
4. Ongoing support.

These elements are consistent with those commonly associated with the ‘Supported Employment’ model as defined in the international literature, though in the context of Australia Kregel et al. have used the term ‘Open Employment’ model to differentiate it from language used in Australia. Kregel et al. (2020) describe these four elements as follows:

‘Personalized client assessment – Assessment is individualized and is based on individuals’ employment goals, skills, strengths, and support needs. Most assessment activities occur in local job sites and other community settings. The assessment process helps individuals to become confident in their ability to succeed in employment, refine their employment preferences, and identify the training and support necessary for success.

Job Development and Placement – An employment specialist implements an individualized job search plan on behalf of a single client. Job search strategies are based on effective marketing strategies. Job placements reflect a match between an individual’s preferences and choices and a customized job rather than readily available jobs in the local market.

Intensive Job Site Training – Job site instruction is based on the principles of learning theory and applied behaviour analysis. The employment specialist provides training and support to ensure that all work tasks are completed to the satisfaction of the employer.

Ongoing Support – Open employment services are not time-limited. Ongoing support services are provided to both the individual and the employer throughout the employment process. Specific services are based on each individual’s needs and requests, and fluctuate over time in frequency and intensity, while continuing as long as the individual remains employed.’ (Kregel et al., 2020, pp. iii-iv)

The model strongly aligns with the activities delivered within the Employment Connections Service and therefore, as described above, was used as the ‘base’ model for the Employment Connections Service.

Alignment with the Supported Employment Quality Framework (UK)

The Supported Employment Quality Framework from the UK offers a similar model and captures five stages of supported employment, as described by the British Association for Supported Employment. This is a model based on evidence and adopted by the UK Government. It includes

five stages as described by BASE (n.d.) below, including an additional preliminary 'Engagement' stage:

1. Engagement

With a starting point of assuming everyone can work, supported employment proactively engages with individuals and communities to promote high aspirational careers for all. Supported Employment doesn't wait for people to come to them, instead they take Supported Employment to the people.

2. Vocational Profiling

This is a process of getting to know an individual well, by building a rich profile of everything that you need to know, in partnership with the person, to help match them to the right career. The profile is strengths based, so is not only about finding a job someone is good at but a job where both the individual and employer can flourish.

3. Employer Engagement

Employers are valued as equal partners within the Supported Employment Model and their business requirements need to be at the heart of all conversations. Just as with individuals, supported employment proactively works with Employers to understand their workforce development needs and develop strong partnerships to embed inclusive recruitment into both early careers and workforce retention planning. Completing a Job analysis, you will build of a rich picture of their business needs.

4. Job Matching

Using the vocational profile and Job analysis supported employment matches the right person into the right role, based on the aspirations of the individual and the business needs of the employer. Supported Employment will look at every aspect of the match including workplace cultures to provide the best opportunity to meet all needs.

5. In-Work Support and Career Development

Getting a job is the very beginning of everyone's journey and in work support focuses on providing a personalised support to enable individuals to learn and integrate into every aspect of their job and providing the support the employers need to feel Disability Confident in Action. This support will be over and above the reasonable adjustments needed and will help to address and overcome barriers throughout the lifecycle of an employee. Trained Job Coaches are the heartbeat of the Supported employment model and builds the confidence and competence of the whole partnership. Career progression is an important part of the model, so people continue to flourish and grow.' (British

Association for Supported Employment, n.d., <https://www.base-uk.org/page/about-supported-employment>).

These stages align strongly with the Kregel et al. (2020) model described above.

Alignment with the Discovery Fidelity Scale

The Discovery Fidelity Scale (Hall et al., 2022) provides guidance on the activities to be conducted and the time to be allocated to Discovery activities clustered in the stage of Personalised Client Assessment (in the model of Kregel et al., 2020) or Vocational Profiling (in the model of BASE, n.d.). Discovery is the first phase of a Customised Employment approach. Customised Employment is a type of approach within the international evidence base of Supported Employment. Customised Employment is most commonly used with people with intellectual disability including people with Down syndrome.

The 'Discovery' phase of Customised Employment is the first of several stages. This phase has been the subject of a high degree of academic and practitioner attention. The term 'discovery' has come into common usage in the disability employment sector but can mean many things. As a result, there has been an international move to clarify the required elements of Discovery as they relate to effectiveness. Hall et al. (2022) have built a Discovery fidelity model, the 'Discovery Fidelity Scale', based on five years of implementation research. This model details the required activities and provides guidance on the expected quantum of delivery.

The Discovery stage requires between 24-60 hours over 6-12 weeks. The activities of Discovery are organised into parts including:

Discovery: Conversations, Observations, Activities and Informational interviewing

1. Personalised home and community visits and conversations

The employment specialist meets with the person with disability to learn about their interests, routines, skills, supports needed, how the person learns etc. Community and wider visits build familiarity with local businesses, the person's transportation modes, key relationships etc. A range of other conversations occur with those familiar to the person.

2. Discovery activities

3-5 activities over 2-3 weeks to accompany the job seeker on familiar then unfamiliar activities to build a deeper understanding of skills, modes of learning, support needs.

3. Informational interviews

Documentation of the job seeker's vocational themes and preferences leads to interviews with employers and business owners. Interviews canvas the business setting, careers/jobs, workplace, business culture, tasks etc.

Linking Discovery to Job Development

4. Vocational profile narrative

A vocational profile is developed that documents the information collected and draws on this to build a picture of the ideal conditions for the job seeker, matching their vocational themes.

5. Employment plan.

An employment plan is built from the vocational profile and planning meetings with stakeholders. The employment plan includes lists of potential matched business for the job seeker's vocational profile.

The Fidelity scale aims to drive consistent and thorough implementation in a manner that is evidence-based to maximise outcomes. The authors assert that 'States and providers of Discovery Services that practice Discovery with fidelity to this scale can expect more stable employment of citizens with significant disabilities at higher annual incomes' (Hall et al., 2022, p.4).

Comparing the models: assessment of alignment with evidence base

The three models are all compatible which is unsurprising as each relies on a similar evidence base from the international research on Supported Employment including Customised Employment. Each tends to add more or less detail to various components.

The below table aligns the components discussed within each model, including the Down Syndrome Australia Employment Connections Service model. Overall, the Employment Connections Service strongly reflects the evidence base for effective employment service design and delivery for people with intellectual disability and Down syndrome.

In the table below, the far-right column for the Employment Connections Service model details the activities included in service delivery (as per Table 1). These are the activities that are used elsewhere in this report for both costing and revenue analyses.

Table 2: Comparison of three evidence-based Supported Employment models with Employment Connection Service model

Kregel et al. (2020). Open employment model (pp.iii-iv)	Hall et al. (2022) Discovery model	BASE Supported Employment. ⁷	DSA Employment Connections model
		<p>1. Engagement</p> <p>With a starting point of assuming everyone can work, supported employment proactively engages with individuals and communities to promote high aspirational careers for all. Supported Employment doesn't wait for people to come to them, instead they take Supported Employment to the people.</p>	<p>Engagement with people with disability occurs via:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. DSA membership and networks (this is not a costed element within the model, i.e. unfunded as part of original trial) 2. Explicit and new connections with key stakeholders such as ADEs, school leavers
<p>'Personalized client assessment</p> <p>Assessment is individualized and is based on individuals' employment goals, skills, strengths, and support needs. Most assessment activities occur in local job sites and other community settings. The assessment process helps individuals to become confident in their ability to succeed in employment, refine their employment preferences, and identify the training and support necessary for success.</p>	<p>Discovery: Conversations, Observations, Activities and Informational interviewing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personalised home and community visits and conversations - during first two weeks of the 6-12 weeks, 25-60 total hours. Conversations takes place to learn what is important to the employment seeker and to learn new information about the employment seeker. Through community and wider area visits, the Employment Specialist becomes familiar with area businesses, available transportation, and the employment seeker's personal 	<p>2. Vocational Profiling</p> <p>This is a process of getting to know an individual well, by building a rich profile of everything that you need to know, in partnership with the person, to help match them to the right career. The profile is strengths based, so is not only about finding a job someone is good at but a job where both the individual and employer can flourish.</p>	<p>Discovery/ Personalised Client Assessment</p> <p>Home and community visits and conversations</p> <p>3-5 Discovery activities with client</p> <p>Development and documentation of client's vocational themes</p> <p>2-4 informational interviews with employers</p> <p>Development of 20 business leads relevant to client</p>

⁷ This text was from the British Association for Supported Employment website <https://www.base-uk.org/page/about-supported-employment> that has since been updated and replaced. The content is consistent with resources available through BASE as at 21 June 2026.

	<p>connections, relationships, and use of community places.</p> <p>2. Discovery activities- 3-5 activities over two to three weeks. Following the Home Visit, the Employment Specialist, along with other team members invested in the job seeker's success, identifies and schedules three to five activities, beginning with those the employment seeker is familiar with, and moving to activities or places that are related but less familiar to the employment seeker.</p> <p>3. Informational interviews- 3-5 activities over two to three weeks. The Employment Specialist documents the employment seeker's vocational themes and preferences and conducts two or more informational interviews for each of the employment seeker's vocational themes. Based on these themes, the Employment Specialist schedules appointments with businesses owners or managers to do informational interviews</p>		
<p>Job Development and Placement</p> <p>An employment specialist implements an individualized job search plan on behalf of a single client. Job search strategies are based on effective marketing strategies. Job placements reflect a match between an individual's preferences and choices and a</p>	<p>Linking Discovery to Job Development</p> <p>4. Vocational profile narrative- completed in one or two weeks. The Discovery Staging Record or Vocational Profile documents a review of information, revisiting or redoing past steps, adding additional Home or Community visits, Interviews, less familiar Discovery Activities, and additional Informational Interviews as</p>	<p>3. Employer Engagement</p> <p>Employers are valued as equal partners within the Supported Employment Model and their business requirements need to be at the heart of all conversations. Just as with individuals, supported employment proactively works with Employers to understand their workforce development needs and develop strong partnerships to embed inclusive recruitment into both early careers and workforce retention planning.</p>	<p>Job Development and Placement</p> <p>Pursue expressions of interest by potential employers via conversations and site visits with employers</p> <p>Identify job opportunities and support targeted recruitment process with employers</p> <p>Support employer and jobseeker with interview readiness</p>

<p>customized job rather than readily available jobs in the local market.</p>	<p>necessary. The Vocational Profile Narrative Review includes all information to date, providing a narrative analysis all Discovery processes, and concludes with the reasoning behind the ideal conditions for the employment seeker's employment and choice of particular vocational themes.</p> <p>5. Employment plan- completed in one or two weeks. The Employment Seeker and the Employment Specialist have individual planning discussions with team members and/or conduct a formal planning meeting, to review the information gathered during Discovery, generating specific businesses to contact for CE Job Development that align with the employment seeker's identified and potential skills and vocational themes.</p>	<p>Completing a Job analysis, you will build of a rich picture of their business needs.</p> <p>4. Job Matching</p> <p>Using the vocational profile and Job analysis supported employment matches the right person into the right role, based on the aspirations of the individual and the business needs of the employer. Supported Employment will look at every aspect of the match including workplace cultures to provide the best opportunity to meet all needs.</p>	<p>Interviewing support</p> <p>Deliver Disability Awareness Training in the workplace</p> <p>Job customisation</p> <p>Assist employer with Easy Read version of contract</p> <p>Pre-commencement check in with all parties – establish communication protocol between parties</p>
<p>Intensive Job Site Training Job site instruction is based on the principles of learning theory and applied behavior analysis. The employment specialist provides training and support to ensure that all work tasks are completed to the satisfaction of the employer.</p>	<p>N.A. as this is included in later stages of Customised Employment not in Discovery phase</p>		<p>Intensive Job Site Training (approximately 4 weeks)</p> <p>Day 1 check-in with all parties</p> <p>Accompany client on job (ongoing)</p> <p>Accompany family members to on-site visit</p> <p>Prepare task cards detailing job tasks (including photos)</p> <p>End of week 1 check-in with all parties (employer, client, family, IEA, NDIS support worker)</p> <p>End of week 2 and 3 check-in with all parties</p> <p>Record keeping</p>

<p>Ongoing Support</p> <p>Open employment services are not time-limited. Ongoing support services are provided to both the individual and the employer throughout the employment process. Specific services are based on each individual's needs and requests, and fluctuate over time in frequency and intensity, while continuing as long as the individual remains employed.'</p>	<p>N.A. as this is included in later stages of Customised Employment not in Discovery phase</p>	<p>5. In-Work Support and Career Development</p> <p>Getting a job is the very beginning of everyone's journey and in work support focuses on providing a personalised support to enable individuals to learn and integrate into every aspect of their job and providing the support the employers need to feel Disability Confident in Action. This support will be over and above the reasonable adjustments needed and will help to address and overcome barriers throughout the lifecycle of an employee. Trained Job Coaches are the heartbeat of the Supported employment model and builds the confidence and competence of the whole partnership. Career progression is an important part of the model, so people continue to flourish and grow.</p>	<p>Ongoing support</p> <p>Further Disability Awareness Training (to deal with issues or new staff)</p> <p>Accompany client on the job (once per fortnight months 2-7 and once per month for months 8-11, faded over 1st 12 months)</p> <p>Deliver further onsite training to client fortnightly for six months, then monthly (as required), including additional task cards relevant to role growth</p> <p>Check-ins with all parties</p> <p>Placement case study</p> <p>Record keeping</p>
			<p>Indirect activities (spread across the elements above)</p> <p>General employer engagement (online, email, phone, in person)</p> <p>Communications and marketing to employers (via social media)</p> <p>Developing partnerships/ talking to IEA providers</p> <p>Educating families about ECS (including newsletters)</p> <p>Employers network</p> <p>Meetings with prospective employers</p> <p>Interviewing people with Down syndrome about their stories</p> <p>Project and operational management (reporting, financials, quality, CRM)</p>

Evolution of the program

From mid 2024, the Employment Connections Service expanded its focus to people employed in Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs), helping them to transition out of an ADE setting and into open employment. This change in focus was most commonly met with significant barriers from the ADEs themselves and also from family members, who were concerned about impacts to their adult child's NDIS funding should the transition occur. In 18 months, the Employment Connections Service has successfully placed 4 ADE employees into open employment and has provided information in relation to the transition to numerous families and ADEs.

From mid 2025, the Employment Connections Service expanded its reach to people with intellectual disability, inclusive of people with Down syndrome. This responded to both unmet need as well as seeking to test this expanded reach as a mechanism of increased financial sustainability for the program. As at 31 December 2025, 3 people with intellectual disability other than Down syndrome have been placed in open employment through the Employment Connections Service, demonstrating the model's effectiveness to broader cohorts.

A further area of evolution is intentional work with large national employers to explore opportunities to scale employment opportunities. This, as yet, is in its early stages, however work with one large national employer and smaller state-based employers indicates significant opportunity to scale employment opportunities in a resource efficient matter, suggestive of reduced costs of service delivery.

Outcomes of the program

Outcomes between 2022-2024

Over two and a half years, 2022-2024, the Employment Connections Service proved to be a successful model for placing people with Down syndrome into open employment at award wages, with over 84 people with Down syndrome placed in employment.

Data available for 25 of these, across four States and Territories, shows that their weekly hours of work ranged from 2-12 and averaged 6.54 hours per week, noting that commencing hours can initially reflect the desire from employer, employee or both to start at a low base. Overall, 32% were working less than 5 hours per week on commencement, 20% were working 5 -7.5 hours per week, and none were working 15 hours or more a week. These outcomes highlight the ability of the program to attain employment outcomes for people with significant work restrictions.

This service has demonstrated the ability to effectively bridge the gap between employers who are keen to employ someone with Down syndrome, and people with Down syndrome who want employment.

Outcomes 2024-2025

Over the 18 months, from June 2024 to December 2025, the Employment Connections Service has continued to be a successful model for placing people with Down syndrome and other intellectual disability into open employment at award wages (as discussed above). During this time 57 people with Down syndrome or other intellectual disability have been successfully placed into open employment.

Average hours of work for ECS participants 2022-2025

Utilising available data (n=43) across the life of the program to date, the average hours of work is 6.3 hours per week. Data available for 43 outcomes, shows that 19 or 44% were working less than 5 hours per week.

Due to the limitations of the 12-month funding cycles underpinning the ECS, it was not possible to focus on initiating a job placement at low hours with a view to increase hours worked over time. Future funding and program design could support this approach.

OVERVIEW OF FUNDING AND REVENUE FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DOWN SYNDROME IN AUSTRALIA

Employment service/support initiatives for people with disability are typically funded through a range of sources. Major funding is provided by the Commonwealth Government through various initiatives. These are outlined below to provide a context for exploring revenue options for the Employment Connections Service.

It is important to note that, due to the historic exclusion of people with Down syndrome from mainstream employment service programs, philanthropy has played a role in supporting the development and testing of employment service initiatives for cohorts such as Down syndrome. There is no accurate data available about the quantum of philanthropic funding available to initiatives such as the Employment Connections Service or whether this would be available for such purposes in the future.

The information below summarises the dominant funding or revenue opportunities relevant to employment service initiatives for people with disability in Australia currently.

Commonwealth government investment

Inclusive Employment Australia program

The Inclusive Employment Australia (IEA) program (formerly Disability Employment Services [DES]) is the main service provider for people with disability. Whereas in the past, the DES program was not well designed to support people with Down syndrome, especially if they had a work capacity of less than 15 hours per week, the new IEA program extends employment services to people who have lower assessed work capacity including 0-7 hours per week, as well as 8-15 hours.

As at 28 February 2026, the IEA program included 3,020 people with a work capacity of 0-7 hours per week (1.2% of the caseload), and 34,315 people with a benchmark of 8 hours per

week (13.9% of the caseload).⁸ It is not clear how many of these are people with intellectual disability or Down syndrome, noting that as at end of February 2026, there are 8,600 people with intellectual disability in IEA across the range of work capacity benchmarks⁹.

The IEA includes ‘specialist’ service providers with specific knowledge of particular cohorts such as intellectual disability, inclusive of Down syndrome. Five specialist Intellectual Disability providers were successful in the IEA contract (commencing 1 November 2025), including one with a specific focus on Moderate Intellectual Disability. While several of these operate in more than one State, there is limited geographic coverage with provision across only four States, as listed below. In the states where specialist Intellectual Disability services are located, there is limited coverage across the State, and competition between two or three specialist Intellectual Disability providers within the one Employment Service Area (as denoted by the asterisk in the below table).

Table 3: Specialist Intellectual Disability cohort providers and location within the new IEA program

State/Territory	IEA Service Provider	Location (Employment Service Area)
NSW	Civic Disability Services Ltd	Fairfield* Inner Sydney* Liverpool* Shoalhaven St George Sutherland* Wollongong
	Jobsupport (Moderate Intellectual Disability, IQ</=60)	Canterbury/Bankstown Central Western Sydney Eastern Suburbs Fairfield* Inner Sydney* Inner Western Sydney Liverpool* Macarthur Nepean Northern Sydney Outer Western Sydney St George Sutherland*
QLD	Connect2Group Inc	Gold Coast* Ipswich* Logan* South Brisbane*
	Endeavour Foundation Ltd	Cairns Capricornia Fraser Coast

⁸ IEA monthly profile 28 February 2026, <https://data.gov.au/data/dataset/iea-inclusive-employment-australia-monthly-profile>

⁹ IEA monthly profile 28 February 2026, <https://data.gov.au/data/dataset/iea-inclusive-employment-australia-monthly-profile>

		Gladstone Gold Coast* Ipswich* Logan* Mackay North Brisbane* Outer North Brisbane* South Brisbane* Sunshine Coast Townsville
	Jobsupport (Moderate Intellectual Disability, IQ \leq 60)	North Brisbane* Outer North Brisbane* South Brisbane*
South Australia	Endeavour Foundation Ltd	Northern Adelaide Southern Adelaide
Victoria	Ability Works Ltd	Bayside* Calder* Maroondah* Monash Peninsula* Plenty* Westgate* Yarra*
	Endeavour Foundation Ltd	Bayside* Maroondah* Peninsula* Plenty*
	Jobsupport (Moderate Intellectual Disability, IQ \leq 60)	Bayside* Calder* Plenty* Westgate* Yarra*
WA	No specialist ID provider	None
Tasmania	No specialist ID provider	None
ACT	No specialist ID provider	None
NT	No specialist ID provider	None

Note: * Denotes more than one specialist Intellectual Disability provider in the Employment Service Area.

Like the DES program, the IEA program operates through a set of service providers who are remunerated for the provision of employment services to people with disability. Fees paid to providers include: service fees, progress fees, outcomes fees, Moderate Intellectual Disability payment, and ongoing support fees. Outcomes payments for providers are linked to outcome benchmarks of attained/maintained hours per week of employment for participants. As the IEA program is new, there is no available outcomes data to show outcomes related to providers or cohorts.

The revenue model for IEA service providers is outlined later in this report in the section on 'Revenue options for the Employment Connections Service'.

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) employment-related funding

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provides funding to eligible individuals with disability (called 'participants') in the Scheme. Funding is allocated based on individual needs and goals and can include funding to purchase supports and services related to employment. Funding amounts are detailed in a Pricing Arrangements document¹⁰ produced by the National Disability Insurance Agency that details eligible line items and related payments.

Individual funding is based on an individual plan, established with a NDIS Planner. To receive funding related to employment, individual participants need to identify goals related to employment and have funding allocated to support these (at a level matched to individual requirements). However, only an average of 41% of NDIS participants have employment goals in their plan, though a higher proportion of people with intellectual disability/Down syndrome had employment goals (77%) than other cohorts (NDIA, 2022). This higher level is likely due to most people with Down syndrome being employed in ADEs where a higher proportion of people require employment goals (as NDIS Core employment-related funding is frequently allocated to fund the supports provided in ADEs).

However, whilst people with Down syndrome and intellectual disability may have employment goals in their plan, it is likely that their access to specific NDIS employment related funding is still limited. Data about the levels of employment related funding is not readily available and is currently only available for:

- NDIS Core Community (Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation), noting that the line item 'Supports in Employment' is one of the many funding items in this category, and
- Capacity Building – Employment, noting this includes two employment related line items: Employment related assessment, counselling and advice, and Employment assistance.

In Q2 2025/2026, 9,329 people with Down syndrome (and 76,412 people with intellectual disability) had Core Community supports in their plans with an average committed support for people with Down syndrome of \$28,911 for six months (\$57,822) and \$23,014 (\$46,028 for 12 months) for people with intellectual disability. Notably, not all or even none of this funding might

¹⁰ <https://www.ndis.gov.au/providers/pricing-arrangements#ndis-pricing-arrangements-and-price-limits>

be Supports in Employment, though other line items in this broad category can be used for ‘assisting with or supervising a participant to engage in community, social, recreational or economic activities’ (NDIA, 2025, p. 65, underline added).

In Q2 2025/2026, only 738 people with Down syndrome nationally had funding allocated in Capacity Building employment-related funding (and 10,135 people with intellectual disability¹⁴). On average this equated to \$8,537 per person with Down syndrome per six months (or \$17,074 annually), or \$7,028 per person with intellectual disability (\$14,056 annually). Only 345 providers of employment services claimed for services provided to people with Down syndrome in this period, and 1,793 service providers for people with intellectual disability. The average payment expenditure across 6 months for people with Down syndrome in this period was \$4,795 and for people with intellectual disability, \$2,639, highlighting significant under-utilisation of this category of funding.

Combining the two categories of relevant funding, core and capacity building, it appears that there is an average annual total of \$74,896 that could be used to support employment for people with Down syndrome (or \$60,084 for people with intellectual disability), noting that Core funding may not be specifically Supports in Employment, and will also be required to support other activities. It should also be noted that this data is point in time and does not include longevity of funding (NDIS Employment data, Q2 FY2025/2026, <https://dataresearch.ndis.gov.au/explore-data>).

Other government funding

Information, Linkages and Capacity Building grant program

The Employment Connections Service was established with funding from the Commonwealth government’s Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Program (Department of Social Services). This is a grant program that offers time-limited grants (typically one to three years depending on the grant round and opportunities for extension funding).

The Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Program operates with an annual budget of approximately \$132M per year, expended across a range of grant streams with only one of these focused on employment and economic participation of people with disability. Across the

¹⁴ <https://dataresearch.ndis.gov.au/explore-data>. It is unclear if the intellectual disability category is inclusive of participants with Down syndrome or not.

2019-2021 grants investment, only 11% (or \$36M) of the total ILC allocation was made to the employment and economic participation grants stream (Wilson et al., 2021).

While the Department of Social Services commissioned research (Wilson et al., 2021) to inform a new Strategic Plan for the ILC Program, various reform activities, including the NDIS Review, postponed the development/implementation of the strategic plan. In the Commonwealth budget April 2025, a 'reform' of the ILC was finally announced. This committed \$364.5M over five years from 2024/5 with a further \$150M committed annually from 2029/30 for ongoing supports. The reformed ILC grants program offered five grant programs, of which the following may be sources of funding for the Employment Connections Service:

1. Individual Capacity Building: 'empowering individuals with disability by helping them build knowledge and skills to understand their disability, advocate for themselves, build connections and increase social and economic participation'
2. Family Capacity Building: 'Build knowledge and skills of families and carers to increase their ability to support their loved ones with disability and advocate for them'
3. Community Capacity Building: 'Build the capability of community organisations to adapt their services so they are disability-inclusive and accessible'
4. Emerging practice; Independent evaluation: 'Improve coordination and provider capability and build the evidence base' (DSS, 2025a).

However, DSA's Employment Connections Service spans these focus areas as it seeks to build capacity across individuals with disability, their families, supporters and employers, and also seeks to build a new practice approach that translates established evidence-based approaches to the Australian context. This kind of interconnected logic is not well supported by a grant structure that silos or divides focus areas rather than enable interrelationships between them.

The ILC program was transferred to the newly formed Department of Health Disability and Ageing and re-launched in April 2026 as the 'Disability Peer Support and Connections Program'. There are three streams incorporating streams 1-3 above, as well as an Information, Advice and Referral stream. Overall, there is minimal inclusion of employment-related activities with the exception of 'pre-employment support'.

Some prior ILC grant recipients have received extended funding across several years, including some economic participation grants. DSA's Employment Connections Service is expected to receive another funding extension to 30 June 2027.

WorkFoundations program

In the May 2025 Federal Budget, the Federal Government committed \$10M to a new WorkFoundations program, which is part of the Paid Employment Pathways Package. The

WorkFoundations program ‘funds paid employment pathway placements and wrap around supports through social enterprise and value aligned organisations to assist those who have significant or complex vocational and/or non-vocational barriers’ (DSS, 2025b). The program is a grant program of a two year duration to ‘fund paid employment pathways specifically designed to assist eligible job seekers who are not yet competitive in the open labour market and need additional services to enter (or re-enter) the workforce’ (DSS, 2025b). This description suggests that the program could potentially offer a well aligned source of funding to initiatives like the Employment Connections Service. Unfortunately, other eligibility criteria for the program function to largely exclude initiatives targeting people with disability.

In 2025, sixteen organisations were allocated funding of which one, Jigsaw Group, specifically targets people with disability and will offer up to 6 months of paid employment along with support with work skills training, career mentoring and transition into a job on completion of placement. The grant application period is now closed and no future grant rounds are anticipated so there is little opportunity to seek to expand eligibility criteria via negotiation with government in relation to future funding.

Payment By Outcomes

In 2022, the Payment By Outcomes Trial 3 (PBO3), funded by the Department of Social Services under the Social Impact Investing Initiatives, added a new mechanism for payment to participating jobs-focused social enterprises. It aimed to test an outcomes-based funding model to support employment for people facing complex and persistent barriers to work.

PBO3 is the first payment-by-outcomes trial to involve jobs-focused or Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) (discussed below). The Trial responds to evidence that mainstream employment services do not consistently achieve sustained employment outcomes for people facing entrenched disadvantage, highlighting the need to test alternative models (Parliament of Australia, 2023).

This trial includes 17 social enterprises who receive initial bridging funding as well as outcomes payments when eligible participants gain and retain employment (with similar timeframes as seen with DES/IEA). 132 individuals who were eligible for the Disability Employment Services or remote area employment services gained award wage paid employment in social enterprises through which they gained vocational and ‘soft’ skills and work experience. Many were supported to transition to further employment. Overall the PBO3 Trial has been an effective vehicle for evidencing the potential of social enterprise within the employment services system (Suchowerska et al., 2026).

The PBO3 trial has a limited extension until 2027.

Social enterprises in Australia

The social enterprise sector in Australia has provided a strong response to address the employment needs of groups marginalised from the labour market, and particularly people with disability. As such, social enterprise has been a major strategy to increase the employment of people with disability in Australia (Castellas et al., 2017). Social enterprises have been defined as 'organisations that existed to fulfil a mission consistent with public or community benefit, that trade to fulfil their mission, and that reinvest a substantial proportion of their profit or surplus in the fulfilment of that mission' (Barraket, 2016 citing Barraket et al. 2010).

Social enterprises draw on diverse funding and revenue streams to support their model. Typically, this includes revenue from trade, revenue from grants and donations, and revenue from other sources. Data on the viability of social enterprises is patchy and not consistent, using different methodologies to classify revenue and determine viability. The *R/SE* report by Social Traders (Earles et al., 2024) uses data from Social Traders certified social enterprises and other sources (such as the ACNC) to analyse social impact and financial attributes of a subset of social enterprises in Australia. It should be noted that this data is based on a small sub sample of social enterprises in Australia (i.e. 4838 enterprises of a potential 12-20,000 social enterprises, dependent on estimate source). Of these, around 66% generate 80% or more of their revenue via trade. This is consistent with earlier data which highlights that, in addition to trade, around 13% of revenue is from government grants and 8% from philanthropy (Castellas, 2017). On the whole, social enterprises in Australia are financially viable, though around 32% operated with a new deficit in the prior financial year (Earles et al., 2024, p.10).

Overall, social enterprises are frequently characterised by this hybrid revenue model encompassing trade (usually in provision of goods and services to government, industry and other consumers), government and philanthropic grants.

Social Traders (Earles et al., 2024) identify three main types of social enterprise: employment generating (also called Work Integration Social Enterprises [WISEs]) – these create employment and training opportunities for marginalised people (accounting for 50.8% of their small sample); community need – these deliver products and services to meet community needs not met by the market (34.6% of sample); and profit redistribution- these distribute at least 50% of their profit to a charitable purpose (14.6% of sample). Many social enterprises can be classified in multiple categories. Of employment generating social enterprises, the vast majority (140 of 321) focus on employment for people with disability as their primary beneficiary (Earles et al., 2024). Some examples of these can be found in Appendix B. These categories of social enterprise are evolving and further expanded in the academic literature.

Within the employment-focused social enterprises, there are several dominant models with all offering some form of paid employment within the social enterprise and, in this way, differing from the Employment Connections Service model which is job-placement focused. These social enterprises may also support employees to transition to other employment beyond the enterprise, but not all do. The Employment Connections Service does not seek to offer employment through creating jobs within its own organisation.

STUDY PURPOSE AND METHOD

Purpose

As discussed above, DSA has established a successful model for reducing barriers to open employment for people with Down syndrome through working closely with the community and employers. DSA has also identified opportunities to expand the delivery of the service, including to new geographic areas. With ILC grant funding for the project due to end on 31 December 2026, DSA has sought funding to expand the service beyond this time and to work with existing systems such as NDIS and IEA to ensure the long-term sustainability of the service.

DSA aims to ensure that the continued delivery of the Employment Connections Service is financially sustainable. To date, financial support for the Employment Connections Service has been underpinned by ILC and philanthropic funding, supplemented in some cases by NDIS funding from participants' plans and, where necessary, through donation funds from local Down syndrome associations. However, donated funds cannot be relied on for continued sustainability of the Employment Connections Service.

The purpose of this current study is to explore options for future financial sustainability of the Employment Connections Service. In this context, this study seeks to identify:

1. What is the cost of delivering the Employment Connections Service across a 5 year period?
2. What revenue sources are available to fund the service into the future, encompassing expansion of the model?
 - What are the options for Inclusive Employment Australia program funding (including any revenue sharing arrangements with IEA providers)?
 - What are the options for National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) funding?
 - What are the factors (barriers and enablers) affecting utilisation of these revenue sources and how might these be mitigated?

Overall, the purpose of this study is to explore pathways to financial sustainability for the Employment Connections Service including consideration of the barriers and opportunities available.

Overview of methods and stages

This study adopted a collaborative approach where researchers from the Centre for Social Impact Swinburne worked continuously with Down Syndrome Australia (and State and Territory Associations) to share and make sense of data. Intensive specialist financial expertise along with knowledge of the disability employment evidence base was provided via Centre for Social Impact Swinburne.

The study had four distinct phases:

1. Elucidation of a model of service delivery and assessment of the alignment of this model to evidence of effective practice.
2. Development of a standardised costs model for the Employment Connections Services.
3. Identification of potential sources of revenue and financial analysis of potential revenue matched to costs of service delivery.
4. Review and analysis of barriers to revenue, options for mitigating barriers and resulting implications.

These phases were iteratively undertaken with many rounds of review by researchers and Down Syndrome Association staff.

A description of the research methods used is summarised below.

Phase 1 method: Elucidating a model of service delivery

The first stage of the process required the development of a delivery model that described the type and quantum of activities provided.

The initial delivery of the Employment Connections Service was used to identify the key activities of delivery. The State and Territory Down syndrome associations each delivered the Employment Connections Service in similar but slightly different ways using different staffing models. As a result, researchers worked to capture the model used in each instance and then to standardise it, seeking to develop a single standardised service (and costing) model.

To do this, a CSI researcher worked with a representative from each site of delivery to establish the activities of delivery. Interviews and document exchange with each site elicited activities/tasks, and the quantum of activities for each state association. From this data, a detailed service model was developed, identifying activities/tasks required to deliver the ECS program (from start to ongoing) for one participant/job seeker by state association, and iterated for each location. This model was then compared to the evidence-based models discussed earlier.

The resultant model and assessment of alignment was presented in the earlier section 'Employment Connections Service'.

Phase 2 method: Development of standardised cost model

Calculating a standardised costs model

The intention of this stage was the development of a standardised model for calculating current costs of the program for both metropolitan and rural/regional delivery.

Two experienced accountants worked with a representative from each site of delivery (in State and Territory associations) to establish the costs related to each activity of service delivery (hours of paid salary, travel time and cost etc.) that was identified in the model. Direct and indirect costs were identified (including via using current payroll expense reports and current by month Profit and Loss statements for each state association). Assumptions and cost calculations were checked with each site and revised several times.

From this data, a basic costs model was developed, identifying costs matched to activities/tasks required to deliver the ECS program (from start to ongoing) for one participant/job seeker by state association, and iterated for each location. This includes who does the task (job role and level), how long the task takes, how many times the task is carried out, travel time etc. A single, draft 'standardised' model was then created combining common activities used across States/Territories and representing a 'sensible' selection and compilation of necessary activities along with notional (averaged) time and travel allocations associated with them. Assumptions about salary type and level, and other direct and indirect costs were then applied to the model.

The draft standardised costs model was member-checked with Down Syndrome Victoria (as this State provided most data to the model). The first full version of the draft costs model was then checked by Down Syndrome Australia who convened feedback from all associations. Further iterations of the draft standardised costs model included updated salary estimates and operating costs.

The costs model includes:

1. Direct activities (staff time and travel) – itemised into four phases of delivery (as per Table 2). See Appendix A for a detailed breakdown of activities of the Employment Connections Service.
2. Indirect activities (staff time and travel) being supporting activities spread across the direct activity phases. To apply this to a per placement cost, it is assumed that Indirect activities/costs support 8 placements per year (as per the outcomes to date).
3. Organisational/operational overheads of 25%.

Salaries are based on the Social, Home Care And Disability Services Industry Award [MA000100], 2025, utilising different staff classification levels for different tasks (i.e. Levels 1, 2, 5, 7) and assuming the mid-point of each salary range. Staff oncosts of 15% are applied on all roles. It is assumed that staffing for direct and indirect activities involves the following staff in a mix of part time and casual roles equivalent to:

- An Employment Connections Service manager
- A Job Coach
- An Employment Ambassador
- A Communications officer.

The final standardised current costs model is presented in section 'Part 2 Results'.

Calculating costs of future delivery to rural and regional communities

The standardised cost model was used as the basis for calculating a costs model for rural and regional delivery. The standardised model was adjusted via consultation with DSA and the State and Territory associations.

As a result, additional elements and costs were added. These included:

- Increased allocation to Indirect Costs (10 hours) to reflect additional time spent on employer engagement activities (via online, email and phone)
- Increased travel time and costs.

Calculating costs of delivery over a five-year period

Calculating the costs of delivery over a five-year period added a range of other variables to the costing including:

- Assumptions about the number of participants in the ECS in each year of operation
- Assumptions about the number of participants needing support for 're-placement' where the original placement has ended (for a variety of reasons)
- Assumptions about the quantum and duration of post-placement or ongoing support for participants.

To inform these assumptions, data from other similar programs was drawn on and assumptions checked with Down syndrome associations.

Ongoing support

Estimating the quantum of ongoing support drew on existing literature and data. According to The Centre for International Economics, there are three key features of ongoing support relevant

to Moderate Intellectual Disability (MID) (in the context of Australia's Disability Employment Services), including:

- 'First, all persons with MID are likely to require ongoing support;
- Second, ongoing support requirements are unpredictable for any one client; and
- Third, ongoing support requirements are highly variable, even for very long term clients' (Centre for International Economics, 2020, p. 16).

In 2011, DEEWR (2013) found that 65 per cent of Moderate Intellectual Disability participants were requiring High Ongoing Support, 'demonstrating the high and ongoing support needs of this group' (p.8). Data provided by Jobsupport (an IEA provider) in 2026 verified the extreme variability of post placement support over time. According to the Centre for International Economics (2020), factors affecting the variability of ongoing support needs included:

- changes in work (e.g. task and supervision changes)
- personal reasons (e.g. behaviour and work performance), and
- changes outside of work (support worker changes, deaths in family, public transport disruption, changes in residence).

Ongoing support is also influenced by employer needs, including changes in:

- workplace location
- physical work environment
- supervision arrangements or duties (Centre for International Economics, 2020).

The delivery of support ideally varies to match the level of need rather than being a set provision of support or number of contacts or contact hours. In this context, the Centre for International Economics (2020) argued for a funding model based on 'overs and unders' where the higher variable needs of one client are offset by the lower variable needs of another, and the averaged support needs can accommodate this fluctuation. This logic was applied in establishing an average of ongoing support needs per client in this model.

Phase 3 method: Matching revenue sources and levels to costs

This study focused on two main sources of potential revenue to fund the delivery of the Employment Connections Service:

1. National Disability Insurance Scheme
2. Inclusive Employment Australia program (formerly Disability Employment Services).

In each case, an itemisation of relevant payments was undertaken followed by a financial analysis of this potential revenue matched to costs of service delivery. The details of this are described in each section.

The NDIA Employment branch then participated in several sessions to work through the financial model related to NDIS revenue and confirmed or adjusted pricing assumptions and allocations as they related to NDIS line items. The implications of this NDIS validation were further checked with DSA and adjustments made to the model.

Phase 4 method: Identification and review of barriers to revenue and mitigation options

Researchers drew on recent research about disability employment policy and funding reform in Australia and analysed this alongside the results from phases 1-3 described above. The intention was to identify key barriers to a sustainable revenue model along with policy implications related to these.

Researchers also sought to explore evidence that could identify mechanisms to address the barriers identified at Phase 4. In particular, two potential 'solution' areas were targeted:

1. Supporting employees to increase their hours of work per week over time so that they attain 15 hours or more per week (and thereby meet the criteria for both an eligible outcome of 15 hours within the IEA system as well as the criteria for a Moderate Intellectual Disability payment to the provider). This may then unlock potential for DSA to work with IEA providers as a sub-contractor to support attaining and maintaining employment.
2. Assessing the level of interest among and the mechanism for sub-contracting to IEA providers.

Evidence for increasing hours of work

The main method to explore this area was a literature review to identify 'What are the conditions under which people with Down syndrome or similar conditions might extend their part time hours of work?' To understand this topic, CSI researchers searched for high-quality research and trusted sources focused on peer-reviewed studies or information from credible organisations.

The following were prioritised:

- Research about people with Down syndrome (or that included them)
- Research done in Australia, or that included Australian participants
- Review articles, as they bring together a range of research studies in one paper

- Research about people with intellectual disability, if it helped answer the key questions
- Some international research, if it added useful insights.

Little research was available and findings have been incorporated into the earlier section 'Employment participation for people with Down syndrome'.

In addition, researchers reviewed existing data on the average hours worked for people with Down syndrome. This data has been presented earlier in this report and highlights the predominance of lower levels of hours per week, with forty one percent (41%) of NDIS participants with Down syndrome (25 years and over) working 8-15 hours per week, and 18% working 0-8 hours per week (NDIA, 2022). Also reviewed were other data about outcomes for people with intellectual disability in the DES/IEA program and, to support this, information was provided by Phil Tuckerman the CEO from Jobsupport (the only specialist Moderate Intellectual Disability provider in the new IEA program, and historically the highest performing DES for people with intellectual disability).

Assessing interest for sub-contracting among IEA providers

CSI researchers utilised a range of networks to identify current IEA providers or former DES providers who had experience with or an interest in subcontracting arrangements with other organisations where there was a willingness to split outcomes payments between parties. No providers were able to provide information, nor expressed interest in subcontracting.

Limitations

It is important to offer a note of caution in relation to the ambition to cost employment outcomes and the services that provide them. Existing attempts to cost 'outcomes' of employment interventions evidence significant variance in costs across models (Deloitte Access Economics and Paul Ramsay Foundation, 2024). The range of factors that mediate outcomes, both within and between models, is significant. This means it is difficult to anticipate actual costs with a high degree of certainty. Additionally, there are many ways to estimate costs including:

- cost per participant across program duration
- cost per outcome (including or excluding a cost calculation based on share of participants that transition to employment i.e. including and averaging the costs of program delivery where there are no outcomes) (Deloitte Access Economics and Paul Ramsay Foundation, 2024).

The method adopted here seeks to provide a 'standardised' per year per placement cost of service delivery. This uses a model of delivery from commencement through to post employment support, thereby encompassing and going beyond the outcome of employment placement. The 1

Year costing model does not represent ongoing costs beyond year 1 but does include both an employment placement outcome and some level of post-placement support for the remainder of the year of delivery. Thus the 1 Year cost represents a placement outcome *and* some level of job maintenance.

Finally, the costs model represents standardisation across sites and participants based on data from the operation of the Employment Connections Service to date. As identified by Deloitte Access Economics and Paul Ramsay Foundation (2024), 'costs will change as delivery models are refined' (p.7) and the model matures. In this context, this study offers a starting point for costs examination and future planning and model iteration. Importantly, the model does not capture potential efficiencies and cost reduction that can occur as a result of a range of factors, already in evidence in service delivery. For example, when the participant is known to an Employment Connections Service provider, there is less time required in the discovery phase – this is a key advantage of the provider being a disability representative organisation with strong pre-existing connections to the target cohort and their families. Similarly, when employers hire multiple, additional or subsequent employees there is also less time invested in supporting the employer through the process. Additionally, time and costs are also greatly reduced when the employer already has an established inclusive recruitment, hiring and employment process. These factors speak to the potential efficiencies of delivering within an established market of jobseekers and employers, where return on investment is increased by repeat engagement with jobseekers and employers.

PART 2: RESULTS

A 1 YEAR COST MODEL FOR THE EMPLOYMENT CONNECTIONS SERVICE

A standardised cost model - Metropolitan

This model is a one-year model and is based on costs as they are known currently and does not incorporate cost increases over time (due to changes in salary etc). The model offers a per participant cost for the first year of service delivery, noting that participants achieved a placement outcome within the 12 months and follow up support is included in the costing for the remainder of the 12 months. In this context, the cost is from commencement of participant into the program for a period of 12 months. A separate multi-year financial model is included later in this report, this includes ongoing support into subsequent years.

The cost per participant (including employment placement) in the first year is \$30,111. The cost of delivering each of the four stages of service delivery and associated indirect activities are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4: Per year per participant cost - metropolitan

	Personalised client assessment	Job development and placement	Intensive job site training	Ongoing Support	Indirect Activities (supporting 8 placements)	Total Cost Per Placement
Labour costs excl. travel time	\$2,726	\$3,104	\$1,830	\$4,427	\$4,391	\$16,478
Travel time labour costs	\$1,348	\$1,348	\$654	\$1,590	\$536	\$5,476
Travel reimbursement	\$594	\$594	\$317	\$792	\$371	\$2,668
Overheads	\$1,019	\$1,113	\$621	\$1,504	\$1,232	\$5,489
Total	\$5,687	\$6,159	\$3,422	\$8,313	\$6,530	\$30,111

This model is based on 'local' service delivery in metropolitan areas. Travel times and distance per participant are shown below (and included in the above costing model).

Table 5: Per year per participant travel time and cost – metropolitan

	Personalised client assessment	Job development and placement	Intensive job site training	Ongoing Support	Indirect Activities (supporting 8 placements)	Total
Per Placement Travel Time (Hours)	22.5	22.5	12.0	30.0	9.4	96.4
Per Placement Travel Time (FTE)	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.05
Per Placement Travel Distance (Kms)	600	600	320	800	375	2,695

The model excludes tasks carried out by stakeholders like family members, Inclusive Employment Australia staff (if involved), or NDIS plan paid support workers where individuals are separately engaging these to support them whilst at work. CSI evaluation data shows that families of participants provide substantial in-kind support as part of the model. This includes:

- travel training
- transport support
- work preparation
- assistance with Human Resource activities such as managing rostering, timesheets, supporting onboarding training
- managing Centrelink reporting
- acting as key communication point between the employee and employer for day to day communications (such as changes to start times, ad hoc activities)
- support during work orientation (including being available for support in first days)
- supporting the training in ancillary skills (Crosbie, McNaught, Wilson, 2024).

While the model includes the cost of staff time to inform, work with and capacity build families, it does not cost any replacement of in-kind family or other support should this not be available.

The model captures three types of costs: direct activities (i.e. staff time and travel in the four delivery stages), indirect activities (i.e. supporting activities), and organisational/operational overheads. The below table shows the overall distribution of costs.

Table 6: Distribution of costs - metropolitan

Cost type	Proportion of costs model overall
Direct activities (staff time and travel) – itemised into four phases of delivery	64%
Indirect activities (staff time and travel) being supporting activities spread across the direct activity phases	18%
Organisational/operational overheads	18%

A standardised cost model - Rural and regional focus

Based on the standardised cost model for the metropolitan area, a second model was developed to anticipate expansion of operations to rural and regional areas. As described above, additional elements and cost were added. These included:

- Increased allocation to Indirect Costs (10 hours) to reflect additional time spent on employer engagement activities (via online, email and phone)
- Increased travel time and costs.

In this model, the cost per participant (including placement) in the first year is \$39,625 for delivery in rural and regional areas.

Table 7: Per year per participant cost- rural and regional

	Personalised client assessment	Job development and placement	Intensive job site training	Ongoing Support	Indirect Activities (supporting 8 placements)	Total Cost Per Placement
Labour costs excl. travel time	\$2,726	\$3,104	\$1,830	\$4,427	\$4,391	\$16,478
Travel time labour costs	\$2,696	\$2,696	\$1,308	\$3,180	\$1,071	\$10,951
Travel reimbursement	\$1,188	\$1,188	\$634	\$1,584	\$743	\$5,337
Overheads	\$1,356	\$1,450	\$785	\$1,902	\$1,366	\$6,859
Total	\$7,966	\$8,438	\$4,557	\$11,093	\$7,571	\$39,625

This includes travel as calculated below.

Table 8: Per year per participant travel time and cost – rural and regional

	Personalised client assessment	Job development and placement	Intensive job site training	Ongoing Support	Indirect Activities (supporting 8 placements)	Total
Per Placement Travel Time (Hours)	45.0	45.0	24.0	60.0	18.8	192.8
Per Placement Travel Time (FTE)	0.03	0.03	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.11
Per Placement Travel Distance (Kms)	1,200	1,200	640	1,600	750	5,390

The below table shows the overall distribution of costs:

Table 9: Distribution of costs – rural and regional

Cost type	Proportion of costs model overall
Direct activities (staff time and travel) – itemised into four phases of delivery	67%
Indirect activities (staff time and travel) being supporting activities spread across the direct activity phases	16%
Organisational/operational overheads	17%

Comparison of costs with other models

It is difficult to compare models and costs for a variety of reasons including differences across delivery models, cohorts, contexts, maturity of models, and costing methodologies. This is not an area where there is substantial available evidence.

A recent study by Deloitte Access Economics and Paul Ramsay Foundation (2024) reviewed cost and outcomes data from ten organisations delivering 13 employment programs across a range of work integration social enterprises and other employment initiatives to diverse cohorts of people with and without disability in Australia. This study found that the cost per employment outcome varied from \$6,100 to \$83,300 per person (including the cost of attrition where participants did not achieve an outcome).

A further comparison is the cost per outcome for Disability Employment Services. Various analyses were provided by Boston Consulting Group (2020) as part of the Mid Term Review of DES. Boston Consulting Group found that the ‘average total spend per 26-week employment outcome (i.e. total of provider fees paid, divided by the number of 26-week employment

outcomes achieved) was \$38,400. This masks a wide variation in cost related to different participant cohorts. As explained by Boston Consulting Group (2020), the average total spend per 26-week employment outcome varied across funding levels of participants from \$81,000 (March quarter 2020) for the highest funding level to \$17,000 (for the lowest two funding levels). This reflects significant differences in length of time to achieve outcomes for different cohorts. Much earlier data (2011) from DES for Moderate Intellectual Disability (MID) clients found that a 26 week outcome for this group cost between \$40,000 (when delivered by provider Jobsupport) and \$48,000 (for other providers for the same cohort). In this data set, the same outcome for people with intellectual disability (not MID) cost around \$38,000 in DES program payments (DEEWR, 2013).

Finally, data from DEEWR (2013, p.26) shows a level of comparability of hours of delivery across phases between the 2012 model of Jobsupport and the ECS. In this data, Jobsupport provided an average of 140 hours of delivery for assessment/discovery plus job analysis/job customisation stages compared to 142 hours of delivery, including travel, for ECS. Similarly, Jobsupport provided an average of 260 hours of on-the-job training over the 1st six months of job placement, compared to 158 hours from ECS for a mix of 45 hours for on-the-job training and 113 hours for ongoing placement support across a similar timeframe. While there are many unknowns in this data, there appears to be some level of alignment of delivery quantum, with differences in the level of on-the-job training. This may be influenced by the difference in average hours of work per week of placement with Jobsupport being 15 hours or more per week, and ECS being 6.3 hours per week.

This set of evidence (albeit limited) suggests that the Down Syndrome Australia model offers a cost per outcome that is likely to be lower than DES for this cohort and at the lower end of costs across diverse employment initiatives in Australia.

REVENUE OPTIONS FOR THE EMPLOYMENT CONNECTIONS SERVICE

This study focused on two main sources of potential revenue to fund the delivery of the Employment Connections Service:

1. National Disability Insurance Scheme
2. Inclusive Employment Australia program (formerly Disability Employment Services).

In each case, an itemisation of relevant payments was undertaken followed by a financial analysis of this potential revenue matched to costs of service delivery.

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) revenue model

Itemisation of potential revenue sources

There are three sources of NDIS funding specific to employment:

1. CORE: Assistance with social, economic and community participation
 - a. Supports in Employment
2. CAPACITY BUILDING: Finding and Keeping a Job
 - a. Employment Related Assessment and Counselling
 - b. Employment Assistance.

Each has a different focus and some, like Employment Related Assessment and Counselling, can only be delivered by certain types of registered providers.

Providers of these services need to be registered providers with the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. There are three registration groups that specifically apply to employment supports.

0102 Assistance to Access and Maintain Employment or Higher Education
(employment assistance and school leaver employment support)

0133 Specialised Supported Employment (supports in employment)

0128 Therapeutic Supports (employment related assessment, counselling and advice)
(NDS, 2025, p.13).

Core: Supports in employment

This funding is for NDIS participants who need ‘higher intensity support delivered in the workplace to maintain employment’ and include a wide variety of employer types (NDIA, 2025, p.69). Further itemised as ‘Specialised Supported Employment’ this funding is ‘for participants who are employed and who are less independent in performing their work tasks or need frequent prompting and coaching to stay on track, communicate with others, or manage their behaviours’ (NDIA, 2025, p.69).

The NDIA describe supports as including:

- on the job assessments related to the impact of a person’s disability on their ability to work;
- job customisation;
- on-the-job training and intermittent support with daily work tasks;
- direct supervision and/or group-based support to enable meaningful participation at work;
- physical assistance and personal care delivered in the workplace;
- supports to manage disability-related behaviour or complex needs at work; and
- non face-to-face activities that are directly related to supporting a participant’s employment. (NDIA, 2025, p.69).

This funding covers direct support provision, either one on one or in a group, as well as non-direct activities such as non-face to face support provision, provider travel and cancellation fees. Other funding that can be claimed alongside this includes: provider travel (non-labour costs), activity-based transport, and centre capital costs.

The cost of staff time (direct support) is based on the NDIS hourly pricing as determined by the NDIS Disability Support Worker Cost model, and calculated according to the ratio of support staff to NDIS participant (i.e. as a whole or fraction of the hourly rate).

Table 10: Core Supports in Employment

Item Number	Item Name and Notes	Unit	National	Remote	Very Remote
04_801_0133 _5_1	Supports in Employment - Weekday Daytime	Hour	\$70.23	\$98.32	\$105.35

802_0133_5_1	Supports in Employment - Weekday Evening	Hour	\$77.38	\$108.33	\$116.07
04_803_0133_5_1	Supports in Employment - Saturday	Hour	\$98.83	\$138.36	\$148.25
04_804_0133_5_1	Supports in Employment - Sunday	Hour	\$127.43	\$178.40	\$191.15
04_805_0133_5_1	Supports in Employment - Public Holiday	Hour	\$156.03	\$218.44	\$234.05

The National Disability Services (NDS) explain that: ‘The pricing, while determined hourly, should be consolidated by the employer/ provider into a weekly amount known as a typical pattern of support, based on the employee’s support needs, work tasks, goals for future employment and average hours worked per week. This should be agreed with the participant and provided to the NDIA to assist with building a budget in the participant’s plan’ (NDS, 2025, p.11).

Aspects of this funding would appear aligned with the Employment Connections Service model including job customisation, on-the-job training and post placement support.

Capacity building: Employment Related Assessment, Counselling and Advice

The Capacity building category for employment is entitled ‘Finding and Keeping a Job’ and includes two sub categories, the first of which is ‘Employment related assessment, counselling and advice’. According to the NDIA (2025, p.81), ‘This support is designed to provide employment related assessment, counselling and advice to assist participants to successfully engage in work’. Supports can include:

- A vocational assessment
- A functional assessment
- Education and support for the participant, the employer and others in the workplace
- Counselling when a participant’s disability prevents return to their previous occupation, or they have not previously engaged in employment (NDS, 2025, p.10).

As described by the NDIA, this support stream appears particularly relevant for people with Down syndrome and intellectual disability who may have had limited work experience.

‘These assessments can be useful for participants who have limited work experience to assist in identifying their unique barriers to employment and to inform a work goal and development plan. The support may also be used to assist with adjustments to work

processes or workplaces that enable a participant to be productive and work safely' (NDIA, 2025, p.81).

These supports can only be delivered by allied health professionals as described by the NDIA (2025) including registered occupational therapists, psychologists, vocational rehabilitation counsellors, developmental educators or professionals who meet the requirements of the Therapeutic Supports Registration Group of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (NDIS, 2025, p.81).

Therefore, despite the seeming overlap with aspects of the Employment Connections Service model in relation to Discovery/Personalised Client Assessment, unless the ECS staff held the relevant qualifications, this source of funding would not be available for use within the service.

Given the higher level of qualifications required to deliver the item, higher funding is allocated to this type of support. In addition, other costs can be charged including non-face-to-face support provision, provider travel and cancellation fees.

Table 11: Employment Related Assessment, Counselling and Advice

Item Number	Item Name and Notes	Unit	National	Remote	Very Remote
10_011_0128_5_3	Employment Related Assessment, Counselling and Advice – Other Professional	Hour	\$193.99	\$271.59	\$290.99
10_054_0128_5_3	Employment Related Assessment, Counselling and Advice -Psychologist	Hour	\$232.99	\$326.19	\$349.49
10_055_0128_5_3	Employment Related Assessment, Counselling and Advice - Physiotherapist	Hour	\$183.99	\$257.59	\$275.99
10_613_0128_5_3	Employment Related Assessment, Counselling and Advice - Developmental Educator	Hour	\$193.99	\$271.59	\$290.99
10_617_0128_5_3	Employment Related Assessment, Counselling and Advice - Occupational Therapist	Hour	\$193.99	\$271.59	\$290.99
10_622_0128_5_3	Employment Related Assessment, Counselling and Advice – Speech Pathologist	Hour	\$193.99	\$271.59	\$290.99
10_620_0128_5_3	Employment Related Assessment, Counselling and Advice - Rehabilitation Counsellor	Hour	\$193.99	\$271.59	\$290.99

Capacity building: Employment Assistance

The second 'Finding and Keeping a Job' sub category is 'Employment Assistance including youth aged 15-25'. This category provides 'capacity building employment supports [that] enable a participant to successfully obtain or retain employment in a setting of their choice. This support can be supplied to any working age participant with an employment goal' (NDS, 2025, p.8), i.e. 15-64 years. Of all the employment supports funded by NDIS, this is the most relevant to the Employment Connections Service, though Supports in Employment (Core) could be used for on-the-job support, job customisation and on-the-job training.

'This support item enables a participant to successfully obtain or retain employment in the open or supported labour market. This support can be delivered to any **working age participant** with an employment goal. This may include supports to:

- supplement work experience available through the school system
- obtain part time work whilst finishing secondary education
- transition from school into further education or training
- explore what work means (discovery)
- build essential foundation skills for work
- manage complex barriers to obtaining and sustaining employment
- implement specialised job customisation/job carving
- obtain alternative employment following onset or exacerbation of disability
- assist a person to change jobs
- develop a career plan
- obtain employment on completion of a qualification
- transition from a supported employment service (previously known as an Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE)) to open employment
- successfully engage with a Disability Employment Service (DES) provider or other employment service to secure employment and arrange ongoing support on the job if necessary.' (NDIA, 2025, pp.82-3)

The direct support can be delivered one to one or within a group setting (subject to NDIS Pricing Arrangements and Price Limits), and the cost is the total time of support at the allowable rate divided by the ratio support delivered (i.e. number of participants receiving the support in a group).

Table 12: Capacity building – Employment Assistance

Item Number	Item Name and Notes	Unit	National	Remote	Very Remote
10_016_0102 _5_3	Employment Assistance	Hour	\$80.06	\$112.08	\$120.09

In addition, other costs can be charged including non-face-to-face support provision, provider travel and cancellation fees. Other funding that can be claimed alongside this including: provider travel (non-labour costs), and activity-based transport.

Calculating revenue from NDIS

The funding calculation estimates the NDIS funding to be received for one (1) placement in the DSA Employment Connections Service. The funding calculation is based on the NDIA (2025). *National Disability Insurance Scheme. Pricing Arrangements and Price Limits 2025-26.*

The revenue model aligns the activities of the Employment Connections Service to specific line items in the Pricing Arrangements. It is important to note that there is substantial overlap between line items and it is not fixed which one should apply.

The model applies the funding limitations such as maximum travel time and kilometres that can be claimed, even where this is less than the costed element in the standardised costs model.

Validation with the National Disability Insurance Agency

Key personnel from the Employment branch of the NDIA have participated in several sessions to work through the financial model and confirm pricing alignment, assumptions and allocations as they related to NDIS line items. The implications of this NDIS validation have been further checked with DSA. NDIS income assumptions in the model were then updated based on those discussions.

However, despite agreement on potential revenue allocations from an individual's NDIS plan, a key limitation of this type of revenue modelling is that NDIS funding is not available in a standardised way to NDIS participants or even at all. This means that Employment Connections Service clients may or may not have funding, and may have different line items and levels of funding within each.

NDIS revenue model - 1 Year model

Relevant NDIS line items from above were allocated against the standardised 1 Year costs model of the Employment Connections Service. Not all elements of the model were approved as

matching to NDIS funding, typically excluding those activities that are employer-facing such as offering Disability Awareness Training into the new workplace. This highlights that NDIS revenue does not have strong coverage of all elements of the evidence-based Supported Employment model to which the Employment Connections Service aligns.

Overall, permissible NDIS funding across the required mix of Core and Capacity Building supports was insufficient to cover the costs of delivery of the Employment Connections Service, with a funding shortfall of \$12,099 per placement (i.e. NDIS funding covering 60% of total costs). Details are provided below. This is despite the average Core (Community) and Capacity Building (Employment) funding for people with Down syndrome being \$74,896 in a 12 month period (Q2 2025/2026 NDIA data¹²) seemingly more than sufficient to fund the ECS even with all activities being eligible for funding.

Table 13: NDIS revenue per placement, 1 Year model

	Personalised client assessment	Job development and placement	Intensive job site training	Ongoing Support	Indirect Activities (supporting 8 placements)	Total Per Placement
NDIS Funding	\$4,639	\$3,266	\$2,450	\$7,657	\$0.00	\$18,012
<i>Cost Model (Metropolitan) – per placement</i>	\$5,687	\$6,159	\$3,422	\$8,313	\$6,530	\$30,111
<i>NDIS Funding Gap - Metropolitan Model</i>	<i>(\$1,048)</i>	<i>(\$2,893)</i>	<i>(\$972)</i>	<i>(\$656)</i>	<i>(\$6,530)</i>	<i>(\$12,099)</i>

Capacity building funding

In the analysis above, 11 activities of the Employment Connections Service were deemed aligned with Finding and Keeping a Job funding - totalling \$7,514 (or 25% of the total cost of the ECS model). The NDIA data provided in (Q2 2025/2026) highlights that the average Capacity Building ‘Finding and Keeping a Job’ funding package for people with Down syndrome is \$17,074 per annum¹³. This suggest that a portion of the ECS cost could therefore be accommodated within the average funding package for this line item. Additionally, a change in funding guidelines for Employment Related Assessment and Counselling would enable the

¹² <https://dataresearch.ndis.gov.au/explore-data>

¹³ Appendix C provides more detailed data from an earlier quarter.

application of this line item to the Employment Connections Service, thereby increasing the level of NDIS revenue available to the Employment Connections Service.

Core funding

Remaining elements of the Employment Connections Service model were aligned with NDIS Core Supports in Employment funding. A further \$10,498 is required from this line item. No data is currently available to assess whether this is consistent with funding allocated to people with Down syndrome in this NDIS line item, though given many receive this funding to support activity in Australian Disability Enterprises, then it is likely that these funds could be redirected to the ECS program (and are likely to be currently being used within ADEs). Data provided earlier in this report highlighted that in the broader category of Core – Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation, there is more than enough funding (\$74,896 per annum) allocated to people with Down syndrome to cover the cost of the Employment Connections Service.

Items deemed not aligned to NDIS funding rules

Elements of the Employment Connections Service that were not clearly aligned with NDIS funding (and therefore not allocated notional NDIS revenue) included:

- working with employers to translate identified job opportunities into targeted recruitment
- supporting the operation of the targeted recruitment process (including assisting with appropriately worded job advertisements; ensuring participants were informed; assisting the employer with interview question development and process; and assisting the employer with notification of successful and unsuccessful candidates from the service)
- delivering Disability Awareness training in the workplace
- briefing workplace and co-workers
- maintaining case notes and records, including developing case studies for use in future activities with employers and participants
- some aspects of ongoing post placement support such as ad hoc training to support new tasks or prepare task supports (such as task instructions)
- all indirect activities (such as ongoing family education, employer networking, engaging with prospective participants, public awareness communications and expectation building).

Inclusive Employment Australia revenue model

As described earlier in the report, Inclusive Employment Australia (IEA) has replaced the Disability Employment Services program. Part of its new design is to encourage the entry of new providers with specialist cohort expertise into the market. An additional aspect of its design is the inclusion of people with an assessed work capacity of between 0-7 hours per week.

During the pre-bidding phase of the new IEA program, Down Syndrome Australia participated in workshops to support their decision making about applying to enter the IEA market of providers. This process identified a range of barriers to entry for organisations such as DSA, summarised in the 'Barriers to a sustainable business model...' section later in this report. As a result, DSA did not apply to become a provider of IEA. This means that their access to IEA revenue would need to be through a sub-contract arrangement with one or more IEA providers with an agreement for a fee/revenue splitting arrangement. Available data suggests this is not a common arrangement.

Itemisation of potential revenue sources

Within the IEA funding model there are five types of fees that could be applied to the Employment Connections Service:

- Service Fee
- Progress Fee
- Outcome fees at 12, 26 and 52 weeks of employment placement
- Moderate Intellectual Disability (MID) outcomes fees at 12, 26 and 52 weeks of employment placement.
- Ongoing Support fee.

Information about these fees is based on the Department of Social Services (2025c) *Inclusive Employment Australia Deed 2025*, all fees listed are exclusive of GST.

Service Fees

Service fees are paid monthly and based on a per participant basis. Participants are rated at different funding levels or bands determined by the Department.

Table 14: IEA Service Fees

Fee type (ex GST)	Funding Level 1	Funding Level 2	Funding Level 3	Funding Level 4	Funding Level 5
Intensive Service	\$269.42	\$308.65	\$358.91	\$461.21	\$525.15
Flexible Service	\$102.22	\$102.22	\$102.22	\$102.22	\$102.22

Progress Fees

Progress fees are related to service activity to support employment and work experience, gaining qualifications, and other approved vocational activities such as volunteer work. Up to two progress fees can be claimed per participant in any 12 month period.

Table 15: IEA Progress Fees

Fee type	Amount per instance
Progress fee	\$1,006.19 (GST exclusive)

Outcome Fees

Outcome fees are payable once a participant has gained employment. They are paid at maintenance of employment at 12 weeks, 26 weeks, and 52 weeks. Partial or Full outcomes payment are calculated based on the 'employment benchmarks' set for each participant, and can be either 8, 15, 23 or 30 hours per week.

Table 16: IEA Outcome Fees (GST exclusive)

Fee type	Funding Level 1	Funding Level 2	Funding Level 3	Funding Level 4	Funding Level 5
12 week outcome FULL	\$1,515	\$2,706	\$3,946	\$5,566	\$9,933
12 week outcomes PARTIAL	\$487	\$871	\$1,285	\$1,842	\$3,268
26 week outcome FULL	\$1,933	\$3,448	\$5,022	\$7,096	\$12,631
26 week outcomes PARTIAL	\$625	\$1,115	\$1,640	\$2,329	\$4,182
52 week outcome FULL	\$499	\$888	\$1,294	\$1,828	\$3,264
52 week outcomes PARTIAL	\$158	\$285	\$423	\$597	\$1,077

As explained by the Department, 'Partial Outcomes are paid where the hours of employment are less than the Participant's Employment Benchmark each week, on average, for 12, 26 and 52 consecutive weeks but meet the minimum requirements as follows:

- at least 5 but less than 8 hours per week for where the Participant has an Employment Benchmark of 8 hours
- at least 10 but less than 15 hours per week where the Participant has an Employment Benchmark of 15 hours
- at least 15 but less than 23 hours per week where the Participant has an Employment Benchmark of 23 hours, or
- at least 20 but less than 30 hours per week where the Participant has a 30-hour Employment Benchmark'.

The Department notes that Inclusive Employment Australia will be available to participants with a Future Work Capacity of 0-7 hours per week. They will have an Employment Benchmark of 8 hours and will attract Full and Partial Outcomes where requirements are met. There will be additional flexibilities to meet the Full Outcome, this will be available for working at least 8 hours per week for:

- 9 of 12 weeks for a 12-week Employment Outcome
- 20 of 26 weeks for the 26-week Employment Outcome. And
- 20 of 26 weeks for the remaining 26 weeks of the 52-week Employment Outcome.

However, given the above explanation, it would appear that no outcomes payment will be made for employment of less than 5 hours per week. It should be noted that this is the situation of 44% of ECS outcomes, hence these would not be eligible for IEA outcomes payment funding.

Moderate Intellectual Disability (MID) Payment

Moderate Intellectual Disability payments are in addition to outcome payments and available in relation to participants who achieve a Full outcome for a job placement of at least 15 hours per week. Participants are eligible for a Provider to claim the MID Payment when the Participant evidences an assessed Intelligence Quotient (IQ) of 60 or less, or has been classified by a registered psychologist, using a recognised assessment tool, as having moderate intellectual disability.

Table 17: Moderate Intellectual Disability Payment

Fee type	Amount per instance
12 week MID payment	\$11,524 (GST exclusive)
26 week MID payment	\$16,119 (GST exclusive)
52 week MID payment	\$2.931 (GST exclusive)

The requirement for a MID payment to be applied only to those who achieve a job placement of 15 or more hours per week will mean that this revenue source would not be available for virtually all of the ECS participants, despite their level of disability and compliance with IQ assessment.

Ongoing Support Fees

Providers can claim fees related to the provision of ongoing support to employees with disability to maintain their employment. Ongoing Support is available from the 26-week Employment Outcome for Participants receiving Post Placement Support.

Ongoing Support Fees are set in recognition of the level of support required by the employee (Flexible, Moderate or High Ongoing Support).

Table 18: Ongoing Support Fees

Fee type -Level of Support	Amount per instance	Monthly	Quarterly
Flexible ongoing support*	\$480 (GST excl)	N/A	N/A
Moderate ongoing support	N/A	\$443 (GST excl)	\$1,439 (GST excl)
High ongoing support	N/A	\$1,107 (GST excl)	\$3,598 (GST excl)

* Up to 6 instances of flexible ongoing support can be claimed in a 26 week period.

Providers are expected to deliver:

- 6 contacts per quarter for each Moderate Ongoing Support Participant, and
- 12 per quarter for each High Ongoing Support Participant.

Calculating revenue from Inclusive Employment Australia

The funding calculation estimates the funding to be received under the Inclusive Employment Australia (IEA) program for 1 placement in the DSA Employment Connections Service, utilising DSA outcomes data to approximate an average placement in the program. The funding calculation is based on Department of Social Services (2025) *Inclusive Employment Australia Deed 2025* pricing and conditions.

The model assumed the average placement has the following features:

- participants are IEA Funding Level 2 or 3 (pricing provided for both levels)
- it takes 6 months of pre-placement support prior to securing work
- participants that achieve 26 weeks of employment, not subject to the minimum hours benchmark, receive flexible ongoing support, up to max allowance of 6 times.
- average hours worked are 6.3 hrs (based on DSA outcomes data), aligning the average participant to a future work capacity of 0-7 hours per week per IEA guidelines.
- achieve 2 progress payment activities, but only for those reaching 12 week outcomes
- participants do not qualify for Moderate Intellectual Disability (MID) payment as they do not work 15 hrs per week.

To generate a placement revenue, a calculation was made as to the likely outcome attainment of an 'average' client (at each of IEA Levels 2 and 3), based on averaging DSA outcomes data for

43 participants. Some continuity of outcomes assumptions were applied for participants employed, but yet to achieve either 26-week or 52-week outcomes.

Per IEA guidelines (DSS, 2025d, p.237):

- A full outcome is achieved when a participant works at least 8 hours per week across any 9 weeks of a 12 Consecutive Week Period for a 12-week Employment Outcome; or works at least 8 hours per week across any 20 weeks of a 26 Consecutive Week Period (for the 26-week Period or the 52-week Period).
- A partial outcome is achieved when a participant works 5 hours each week, on average, in the Outcome Period.

Table 19: Average placement payment outcomes for 43 participants in ECS

	12 week outcome	26 week outcome	52 week outcome
Full Payment	32.6%	32.6%	23.3%
Partial Payment	19.6%	14.0%	11.6%
No IEA outcome payment	48.8%	53.4%	65.1%

Based on Table 19, the ECS per placement model in the next section constructs an average single placement outcome as a mix of outcomes at each outcome period (12, 26 and 52 weeks). The inclusion of a minimum weekly hours benchmark severely limits the achievement of outcomes payments for the average ECS participant. Based on the DSA outcomes data, 44% of participants fail to meet the minimum 5 hours per week benchmark to qualify for outcome payments. Table 20 details the employment outcomes assuming no minimum hour benchmark based on the DSA outcomes data for 43 participants. This realises a far higher rate of outcomes payment (aligned to actual outcomes attained).

Table 20: Employment outcomes with no minimum hour benchmark for 43 participants in ECS

	12 week outcome	26 week outcome	52 week outcome
Percentage of participants who achieved employment outcomes, assuming no minimum hour benchmark	88.4%	76.7%	60.5%

IEA revenue model - 1 Year model

The funding calculation estimates the funding to be received under the Inclusive Employment Australia (IEA) program for 1 placement in the DSA Employment Connections Service. For the

purposes of transparent costing, the model assumes 100% of the possible IEA revenue is available to DSA. In reality, DSA would only receive a proportion of the below revenue as agreed with any IEA provider with which they entered into a sub-contract or fee splitting arrangement.

There are several obstacles to revenue from IEA within the IEA model as it stands. In particular these relate to:

- the lack of payment for job placements of less than 5 hours
- outcome benchmarks being set in 'bands' regardless of the actual capacity of the person. These don't appear to align well with the outcome levels of ECS participants
- the lack of eligibility for MID payments for clients who work below 15 hours per week.

A set of models is provided below with three levels of assumptions:

1. Base case which reflects the current eligibility within the Guidelines.
2. Mid case which reflects a reasonable assumption that the MID should be extended to this cohort (requiring a change in program guidelines); and
3. Best case which assumes all employed participants are eligible for full payment, despite target hours being below 8 hour benchmark, and MID payment.

In the Base case model (i.e. current operating guidelines), IEA revenue would cover for 29% of the costs of ECS delivery.

Table 21: Average revenue per placement from IEA source (base case)

IEA Fee Type	Total Fee Income (ex. GST) @ Funding Level 2	Total Fee Income (ex. GST) @ Funding Level 3	Assumptions/Notes
Service Fee	\$1,235	\$1,436	Assumes 4 months of service fees before progress activities undertaken
Progress Fee	\$2,012	\$2,012	Assumes 2 instances of progress fees before a 26-week outcome
Ongoing Support Fee	\$2,209	\$2,209	Only available to participants after 26-weeks of employment (not subject to minimum weekly hours)
Outcome Fee 12 week	\$1,044	\$1,525	Calculation provided in Table 22
Outcome Fee 26 week	\$1,280	\$1,867	Calculation provided in Table 22
Outcome Fee 52 week	\$240	\$351	Calculation provided in Table 22
MID Outcome Fee - 12 weeks	-	-	Not eligible
MID Outcome Fee - 26 weeks	-	-	Not eligible (as above)
MID Outcome Fee - 52 weeks	-	-	Not eligible (as above)
Total	\$8,020	\$9,400	
Average (across Levels 2 and 3)		\$8,710	
Comparison to Cost Model (metropolitan), cost per placement		\$30,111	
<i>IEA Funding Gap - Metropolitan Model</i>		\$21,401	

NB: Note that this assumes 100% of IEA payments go to DSA's Employment Connections Service whereas this is not possible and a fee-splitting arrangement would be required with selected Inclusive Employment Australia providers. Hence, the expected revenue may be 50% or less of what is predicted here.

Table 22: Outcome fee assumptions and calculation using IEA weekly hour benchmark guidelines

	A	B	C	D	$E = A \times C + B \times D$	F	G	$H = A \times F + B \times G$
	% that achieve Full Outcome*	% that achieve Partial Outcome*	Full Outcome Fee Income Level 2	Partial Outcome Fee Income Level 2	Outcome Funding Level 2	Full Outcome Fee Income Level 3	Partial Outcome Fee Income Level 3	Outcome Funding Level 3
Outcome Fee 12 week	32.6%	18.6%	\$2,706	\$871	\$1,044	\$3,946	\$1,285	\$1,525
Outcome Fee 26 week	32.6%	14.0%	\$3,448	\$1,115	\$1,280	\$5,022	\$1,640	\$1,867
Outcome Fee 52 week	23.3%	11.6%	\$888	\$285	\$240	\$1,294	\$423	\$351

* Based on DSA outcomes data for 43 participants, i.e. 32.6% of participants are expected to achieve a full outcome at 12 weeks of employment, therefore the average 12 week full outcome fee income per participant is calculated by taking 32.6% of the full outcome fee income.

Table 23: Average revenue per placement from IEA source (mid case)

NB. Mid-case assumes same outcome assumptions as Base Case, but includes MID payment for those participants with a full outcome.

IEA Fee Type	Total Fee Income (ex. GST) @ Funding Level 2	Total Fee Income (ex. GST) @ Funding Level 3	Assumptions
Service Fee	\$1,235	\$1,436	Assumes 4 months of service fees before progress activities undertaken
Progress Fee	\$2,012	\$2,012	Assumes 2 instances of progress fees before a 26-week outcome
Ongoing Support Fee	\$2,209	\$2,209	Only available to participants after 26-weeks of employment (not subject to minimum weekly hours)
Outcome Fee 12 week	\$1,044	\$1,525	Calculation provided in Table 22
Outcome Fee 26 week	\$1,280	\$1,867	Calculation provided in Table 22
Outcome Fee 52 week	\$240	\$351	Calculation provided in Table 22
MID Outcome Fee - 12 weeks	\$3,757	\$3,757	Percentage of participants who achieve 12-week full outcome (32.6%) x 12-week MID fee of \$11,524 = \$3,757
MID Outcome Fee - 26 weeks	\$5,255	\$5,255	Percentage of participants who achieve 26-week full outcome (32.6%) x 26-week MID fee of \$16,119 = \$5,255
MID Outcome Fee - 52 weeks	\$683	\$683	Percentage of participants who achieve 52-week full outcome (23.3%) x 52-week MID fee of \$2,931 = \$683
Total Average (across Levels 2 and 3)	\$17,715	\$19,094	
Comparison to Cost Model (metropolitan), cost per placement		\$18,404	
<i>IEA Funding Gap - Metropolitan Model</i>		\$30,111	
		\$11,707	

NB: Note that this assumes 100% of IEA payments go to DSA's Employment Connections Service whereas this is not possible and a fee-splitting arrangement would be required with selected Inclusive Employment Australia providers. Hence, the expected revenue may be 50% or less of what is predicted here.

Table 24: Average revenue per placement from IEA source (best case)

NB. Best case assumes all employed participants are eligible for full payment, despite target hours being below 8-hour benchmark, and MID payment.

Fee Type	Total Fee Income (ex. GST) @ Funding Level 2	Total Fee Income (ex. GST) @ Funding Level 3	Assumptions
Service Fee	\$1,235	\$1,436	Assumes 4 months of service fees before progress activities undertaken
Progress Fee	\$2,012	\$2,012	Assumes 2 instances of progress fees before a 26-week outcome
Ongoing Support Fee	\$2,209	\$2,209	Only available to participants after 26-weeks of employment (not subject to minimum weekly hours)
Outcome Fee 12 week	\$2,392	\$3,488	Calculation provided in Table 25
Outcome Fee 26 week	\$2,645	\$3,852	Calculation provided in Table 25
Outcome Fee 52 week	\$537	\$783	Calculation provided in Table 25
MID Outcome Fee - 12 weeks	\$10,187	\$10,187	Percentage of participants who achieve 12-weeks of employment with no minimum weekly hours benchmark (88.4%) x 12-week MID fee of \$11,524 = \$10,187
MID Outcome Fee - 26 weeks	\$12,363	\$12,363	Percentage of participants who achieve 26-weeks of employment with no minimum weekly hours benchmark (76.7%) x 12-week MID fee of \$16,119 = \$12,363
MID Outcome Fee - 52 weeks	\$1,773	\$1,773	Percentage of participants who achieve 52-weeks of employment with no minimum weekly hours benchmark (60.5%) x 12-week MID fee of \$2,931 = \$1,773
Total	\$35,353	\$38,104	
Average (across Levels 2 and 3)		\$36,728	
Comparison to Cost Model (metropolitan), cost per placement		\$30,111	
<i>IEA Funding Surplus* - Metropolitan Model</i>		\$6,617	

* Note that while this set of costing assumptions generates a surplus, this costing assumes 100% of IEA payments go to DSA's Employment Connections Service whereas this is not possible and a fee-splitting arrangement would be required with selected Inclusive Employment Australia providers. Hence, the expected revenue may be 50% or less of what is predicted here, resulting in a substantial funding gap.

Table 25: Outcome fee assumptions and calculation assuming no minimum weekly hours benchmark

	A	B	C = A x B	D	E = A x D
	% that achieve Full Outcome*	Full Outcome Fee Income Level 2	Outcome Funding Level 2	Full Outcome Fee Income Level 3	Outcome Funding Level 3
Outcome Fee 12 week	88.4%	\$2,706	\$2,392	\$3,946	\$3,488
Outcome Fee 26 week	76.7%	\$3,448	\$2,645	\$5,022	\$3,852
Outcome Fee 52 week	60.5%	\$888	\$537	\$1,294	\$783

* Based on DSA outcomes data for 50 participants when it is assumed that there is no minimum weekly hours benchmark, i.e. 88.4% of participants are expected to achieve a full outcome at 12 weeks of employment, therefore the average 12 week outcome fee income per participant is calculated by taking 88.4% of the full outcome fee income.

These models clearly show a marked difference for services seeking to fund employment services for people with limited capacity to work (i.e. less than 8 and less than 5 hours per week), depending on the way the funding is structured.

MULTI-YEAR FINANCIAL MODEL

Establishing the multi-year financial model

The multi-year model reflects the continuous reality of the ECS program, building on the costs and revenue of the 1 Year models. The multi-year model incorporates assumed cost and revenue increases over time (due to changes in salary etc) and is based on costs and revenue of the program operating at a single state level, associated with supporting multiple participants.

General multi-year assumptions:

- The modelling has been based on 8 new annual participants in the state level program (i.e. not a national program that multiplies across states).
- Expenses and revenue to both increase by 3% annually.
- Participant cost (year 1) of \$32,965 is a blended cost based on an assumed split of participants at 70% metro based (with a Year 1 cost of \$30,111) and 30% regional (with a Year 1 cost of \$39,625).
- Ongoing post-placement support is provided from year 2 to participants who achieve 26 weeks of employment, regardless of their minimum weekly hours worked. Those participants who do not achieve 26 weeks of employment, re-join the support process to find another role – this is called ‘re-placement’ below.

It is unrealistic to assume that all 8 annual participants will join the Employment Connections Service program in the first month of each year. Rather the participants are assumed to join the program at staggered intervals across each year. Meaning the annual cost of participants are likely to fall across a 2-year period within the modelling. The 2-year spread of costs is detailed in Appendix D and summarised in Table 26 below.

Table 26: Assumed timing of annual participant commencement on the Employment Connections Program

Participant	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6	Month 7	Month 8	Month 9	Month 10	Month 11	Month 12
1	X											
2	X											
3			X									
4				X								
5						X						
6								X				
7									X			
8											X	

Adding the cost of annual ongoing post placement support

A key new addition in the multi-year costs model is the provision of Ongoing post-placement support. The level of ongoing support has been based around the IEA guidelines for High Ongoing Support equating to a minimum of 12 contacts per quarter, and Moderate Ongoing Support equating to a minimum of 6 contacts per quarter. Industry data has been used to estimate the split of High versus Moderate support. This industry data reflected ongoing support for cohorts with 15 hours, or higher, average weekly working hours. This was scaled back to allow for the approximately 6 hours average weekly hours for the ECS participants, leading to an assumption of 30% of participants requiring High ongoing support and 70% Moderate support. The cost of the added element of Annual Ongoing Support per placement (based on a 70/30 metro (\$5,668) and regional (\$7,720) split is provided in Table 27 below, showing an annual cost of \$6,284 per participant.

Table 27: Annual cost (blend of 70/30 metro to regional cost split) of ongoing post-placement support per participant.

	Average # of Annual Contacts	Average Time per Contact (Hours)	Average Return Travel Time per Contact (Hours)	Total Annual Hours Ongoing Support	Labour Cost of Annual Contacts (including overheads)	Travel Kilometres Cost	Total Annual Ongoing Support Cost
Ongoing post-placement support	31.2	1.55	0.84	74.6	\$5,589	\$695	\$6,284

The total cost of the ECS model has been updated below to show the cost of each stage, as well as the added stage of Ongoing post placement support. Table 28 shows the labour, travel and overhead costs for each stage using a blend of the metro (\$30,111) and rural (\$39,625) year 1 costs, based on an assumed participant ratio of 70% metro to 30% regional.

Table 28: Per year per participant cost (blend of 70/30 metro to regional cost split), year 1 and annual post placement cost beyond year 1

	Personalised client assessment	Job development and placement	Intensive job site training	Ongoing Support	Indirect Activities (supporting 8 placements)	Total Cost Per Placement (Yr 1)	Ongoing post placement support (annually post Yr 1)
Labour costs excl. travel time	\$2,726	\$3,104	\$1,830	\$4,427	\$4,391	\$16,478	\$2,894
Travel time labour costs	\$1,752	\$1,752	\$850	\$2,067	\$697	\$7,118	\$1,577
Travel reimbursement	\$772	\$772	\$412	\$1,030	\$483	\$3,469	\$695
Overheads	\$1,120	\$1,214	\$670	\$1,624	\$1,272	\$5,900	\$1,118
Total	\$6,371	\$6,842	\$3,762	\$9,148	\$6,842	\$32,965	\$6,284

Calculating a five year model

The below model predicts costs across five years, anticipating 40 employment placements in 5 years (per a single State association). By the end of the 5th year, 32 people would have achieved (ideally) at least one 52 week outcome with potential for multi-year employment longevity. The provision of ongoing support both maintains employment duration and finds new employment where an employment placement ceases (called 're-placement'). The model shows the cost for five years of service delivery (40 placements attained and 32 placements maintained/re-placed). It is assumed that the 8 annual participants will join the Employment Connections Service program at different intervals across each year, therefore the 1 year placement costs will be spread across a 2-year period. Detailed costings are provided at Appendix D and E.

Table 29: Cost detail of the multi-year financial model.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
NDIS registration	(\$40,100)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Participant delivery/ initial placement costs	(\$182,842)	(\$269,202)	(\$277,278)	(\$285,596)	(\$294,164)
- 8 Yr 1 participants	(\$182,842) *	(\$80,875) *	\$0	\$0	\$0
- 8 Yr 2 participants	\$0	(\$188,328) *	(\$83,301) *	\$0	\$0
- 8 Yr 3 participants	\$0	\$0	(\$193,977) *	(\$85,800) *	\$0
- 8 Yr 4 participants	\$0	\$0	\$0	(\$199,797)*	(\$88,374) *
- 8 Yr 5 participants	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	(\$205,791)
Re-placement costs**	\$0	(\$21,050)	(\$34,889)	(\$35,935)	(\$37,013)
- 2.2 Yr 1 participants	\$0	(\$21,050)	(\$13,207)	\$0	\$0
- 2.2 Yr 2 participants	\$0	\$0	(\$21,682)	(\$13,603)	\$0
- 2.2 Yr 3 participants	\$0	\$0	\$0	(\$22,332)	(\$14,011)
- 2.2 Yr 4 participants	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	(\$23,002)
Post-placement support costs beyond year 1***	\$0	(\$25,250)	(\$74,818)	(\$131,996)	(\$192,536)
- 8 Yr 1 participants	\$0	(\$25,250)	(\$48,811)	(\$54,933)	(\$56,581)
- 8 Yr 2 participants	\$0	\$0	(\$26,007)	(\$50,275)	(\$56,581)
- 8 Yr 3 participants	\$0	\$0	\$0	(\$26,788)	(\$51,783))
- 8 Yr 4 participants	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	(\$27,591)
Ongoing NDIS accreditation	\$0	(\$37,183)	(\$38,298)	(\$39,447)	(\$40,631)
Total costs per year	(\$222,942)	(\$352,685)	(\$425,284)	(\$492,975)	(\$564,345)

* Due to participants commencing on the Employment Connections Program at different times throughout the year, each 1 Year cost for the annual participants is spread over 2 years.

** Re-placement support represents assistance to find a new role, provided to the 28% of participants who do not reach 26-weeks of employment in their initial employment placement.

*** Post placement support beyond year 1 is provided to those participants who achieve 26 weeks of employment, regardless of hours worked per week. Based on DSA outcomes data, this includes post-placement support from year 2 for 72% of participants who achieve 26-weeks of employment in their initial employment placement, and also providing post placement support from year 3 for the 28% of participants who had failed to achieve 26-weeks of employment in their initial employment placement but have since been supported to take up a second employment placement.

The 5-year cost model reflects the following number of supported participants each year.

Table 30: Annual number of participants supported, split by support type.

	Number of participants receiving support from ECS in each year				
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Participants entering the ECS program	8	8	8	8	8
Re-placement in new role (after unsuccessful or terminated employment placement)	0	2	2	2	2
Ongoing post-placement support	0	6	14*	22**	30***
Total annual participants supported	8	16	24	32	40

* 6 from Yr 1 + 6 from Yr 2 + 2 re-placed into new roles in Yr 2

**6 from Yr 1 + 6 from Yr 2 + 6 from Yr 3 + 2 re-placed into new roles in Yr 2 + 2 re-placed into new roles in Yr 3

*** 6 from Yr 1 + 6 from Yr 2 + 6 from Yr 3 + 6 from Yr 4 + 2 re-placed into new roles in Yr 2 + 2 re-placed into new roles in Yr 3 + 2 re-placed into new roles in Yr 4.

This analysis highlights that the costs of operating the ECS program shift over time as the model moves from one where the primary activity is attaining an initial placement (at a 1 Year cost of \$32,965, based on 70/30 metro (\$30,111) and regional (\$39,625) split metro) to a predominance of activity shifting to provision of ongoing support to increasing numbers of clients (where the cost of this provision is lower).

Multi-year financial model with NDIS revenue

NDIS revenue related assumptions:

- NDIS funding is based on the metro workload. This reflects the difference in workload between metro and regional being due to the travel time. Under the NDIS pricing requirements, higher travel time can only be charged for participants located in the Modified Monash Model category MM4 (Medium rural towns: within 10km road distance, of a town with a population between 5,000 and 15,000) or above (NDIA, 2025, p. 82). It has been assumed this is applicable to an insignificant number of participants, so would have a negligible impact on the NDIS funding assumed in the modelling.
- As a provider of NDIS services there is an initial NDIS registration cost (\$40,100) and annual ongoing accreditation costs (\$36,100). It is assumed that these are solely borne by the ECS program (and not apportioned to any other NDIS activities undertaken by each

State association as a provider, given most associations have indicated they do not undertake other NDIS provider activities as a registered provider).

- Ongoing post-placement support has been reflected on the basis of costs outlined in Table 27 above. It should be noted though that NDIS funding may not be available indefinitely, or long term for post placement support. This aspect of the model is based on an initial review with the NDIA Employment Branch, resulting in a reduction to the ongoing support hours originally assumed. The revised assumptions have yet to be thoroughly validated and therefore the expectations about the level of support to be provided may not be able to be met.
- All activities delivered as ongoing post-placement support have been costed against NDIS Core Supports in Employment funding.
- The typical NDIS fee income and timing assumed per participant is detailed in Appendix D.
- It is assumed the 8 annual participants will join the Employment Connections Service program at the intervals outlined in Table 26. Therefore, a participant's annual costs and funding will, in most cases, be spread across 2 years. This 2-year spread of costs and funding is detailed in Appendix E.

The following table highlights that the Employment Connections Service program would continue to operate at a very substantial deficit across five years but would support 37 people to find and maintain long term employment.

Table 31: 5-year financial outcomes from NDIS revenue

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Participant Placement NDIS Funding	\$97,907	\$147,031	\$151,442	\$155,985	\$160,665
Re-place in role NDIS support funding	\$0	\$14,645	\$23,977	\$24,697	\$25,438
Ongoing post-placement support NDIS funding beyond year 1	\$0	\$18,339	\$54,341	\$95,869	\$139,841
Total Revenue	\$97,907	\$180,015	\$229,761	\$276,551	\$325,943
Participant placement costs – year 1	(\$182,842)	(\$269,202)	(\$277,278)	(\$285,596)	(\$294,164)
Re-placement costs	\$0	(\$21,050)	(\$34,889)	(\$35,935)	(\$37,013)
Post-placement support costs beyond year 1	\$0	(\$25,250)	(\$74,818)	(\$131,996)	(\$192,536)
NDIS registration costs	(\$40,100)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Ongoing NDIS accreditation	\$0	(\$37,183)	(\$38,298)	(\$39,447)	(\$40,631)
Total Expenses	(\$222,942)	(\$352,685)	(\$425,284)	(\$492,975)	(\$564,345)
Net Surplus / (Loss)	(\$125,035)	(\$172,670)	(\$195,523)	(\$216,424)	(\$238,402)
Cumulative Net Surplus / (Loss)	(\$125,035)	(\$297,705)	(\$493,228)	(\$709,652)	(\$948,054)
Average # of participants receiving support	5	13	21	29	37

Multi-year financial model with IEA revenue

IEA revenue related assumptions:

- Eligibility per IEA guidelines (December 2025) applied to latest DSA outcomes, the key elements being:
 - Full outcome payment at 8 hours per week and partial outcome at 5 hours per week, no payment below 5 hours per week.
 - Moderate Intellectual Disability (MID) payment at 15 hours per week.
- IEA service fee received for 6 months while the participant is supported to secure a role.
- IEA funds post placement ongoing support for up to 5 years and possibly indefinitely (per IEA guidelines, DSS, 2025d, p. 209)
- Ongoing support, available to participants who achieve 26-weeks of employment, is based on a mix of 70% of participants receive Moderate ongoing support and 30% receive High ongoing support, based on industry data. Ongoing support hours are calculated on the basis of number of contacts required (and the hours to deliver these) as represented in Table 27 above.
- The model assumes 100% of the possible IEA revenue is available to DSA. In reality, DSA would only receive a proportion of the below revenue as agreed with the IEA provider. Hence, the expected revenue would likely be materially less than what is predicted here, resulting in an even larger net loss. Additional costs of delivering as an IEA sub-contractor are also not known so have not been included.

Details of the cost phasing are outlined in Appendix D (Table 40) and Appendix E (Table 44).

The following table highlights that the Employment Connections Service program would continue to operate at a very substantial deficit across five years.

Table 32: 5-year financial outcomes from IEA revenue.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Participant Placement Funding	\$28,989	\$67,077	\$70,146	\$72,250	\$74,418
Re-place in role support funding	\$0	\$8,782	\$16,335	\$17,093	\$17,606
Post-placement support funding beyond year 1	\$0	\$30,950	\$91,709	\$161,795	\$236,003
Revenue	\$28,989	\$106,810	\$178,190	\$251,138	\$328,027
Participant placement costs - first year	(\$182,842)	(\$269,202)	(\$277,278)	(\$285,596)	(\$294,164)
Re-placement costs	\$0	(\$21,050)	(\$34,889)	(\$35,935)	(\$37,013)
Post-placement support costs beyond year 1	\$0	(\$25,250)	(\$74,818)	(\$131,996)	(\$192,536)
Expenses	(\$182,842)	(\$315,502)	(\$386,985)	(\$453,528)	(\$523,714)
Net Surplus / (loss)*	(\$153,044)	(\$208,693)	(\$208,795)	(\$202,389)	(\$195,688)
Cumulative Net Surplus / (Loss)	(\$153,044)	(\$362,546)	(\$571,341)	(\$773,731)	(\$969,418)
Average # of participants receiving support	5	13	21	29	37

Note: this table assumes participants in each year enter the program at staggered intervals. Hence the total revenue and costs are proportionally adjusted to reflect this. Delivery costs per annum therefore are not 1 Year costs multiplied by 8 participants (at 100% of cost of each participant). Detail of the cost phasing are outlined in Appendix E.

Potential revenue impact of changes to IEA program guidelines

Various scenarios were modelled, to test the financial impact should changes to the current IEA guidelines be made consistent with the characteristics of the ECS cohort. The 5-year financial outcomes of each guideline change are summarised in Table 33. The results highlight the significant impact of the MID payment that is not currently available to most participants of ECS.

Table 33: IEA scenario modelling, annual increase in IEA funding from each modelled change.

Modelled change to IEA guidelines	Year 1 (annual increase)	Year 2 (annual increase)	Year 3 (annual increase)	Year 4 (annual increase)	Year 5 (annual increase)	Total 5-Year Impact (cumulative)
Increase the funding level to 5 (from an average of 2 & 3)	\$15,061	\$64,530	\$76,525	\$79,267	\$81,645	\$317,029
Recalibrate the full outcome payment to 5 hours (instead of 8) and a partial outcome payment to 3 hours (instead of 5)	\$6,246	\$39,359	\$47,747	\$49,535	\$51,021	\$193,907
Recalibrate the MID payment to 8 hours (instead of 15)	\$9,680	\$70,541	\$85,129	\$88,152	\$90,797	\$344,299
Total Incremental Impact of All Modelled Guideline Changes	\$30,987	\$174,430	\$209,400	\$216,955	\$223,463	\$855,235

These modelled changes would have a significant impact on the financial outcomes of the modelled IEA revenue, reducing the predicted 5-year loss of approximately \$969k, based on the current IEA guidelines, to a 5-year loss of just \$114k while delivering a small surplus from Year 3 onwards. However, it's important to note that this does not reflect a fee-splitting arrangement required with selected Inclusive Employment Australia providers, that would reduce income and likely result in an ongoing loss.

Blended revenue

There may be possibilities to access both types of revenue (NDIS and IEA), though this is unclear in the current context. This would be dependent on funding guidelines allowing this 'complementarity' of use, and in being clear about which of the Employment Connections Service elements were aligned with each revenue stream. Emerging data is highlighting the potential of this collaborative approach, particularly for organisations who are providers in both programs, i.e. IEA providers and NDIS providers (Nevile, 2026).

To demonstrate the potential impact of accessing both NDIS and IEA, a simple scenario was modelled based on accessing the NDIS Capacity Building funding available to assist a participant secure a role through the Personalised Client Assessment and Job Development stages of the ECS model. Then accessing IEA funding for the intensive job support and post-placement stages of the ECS model, once a role is secured. Under this scenario, approximately \$45,000 additional funding would be available annually, or \$231,000 over the 5-year period modelled, compared to IEA funding alone. A more accurate assessment of blended funding would require re-analysing the revenue streams once this respective allocation was clear.

How to improve the financial viability of the Employment Connections Service

Overall, neither revenue generated via NDIS nor subcontracting to IEA providers is sufficient to cover the costs of the Employment Connection Service, when calculated on a per placement per year basis, or a multi-year basis. However, if we assume higher levels of payment in the IEA model (as per Table 33), then the match between costs and revenue comes closer.

Addressing the funding shortfall, at least in part, will require improving the efficiency of the ECS model and reducing costs to strengthen its financial sustainability.

Sharing costs across states

The state-based nature of the ECS model lends itself to a duplication of certain costs, such as certain indirect cost activities. Activities including developing marketing and communications collateral, such as case studies and storytelling, are prime examples that could be more centralised and shared across states and territories. Elements of employer engagement and partnership developments, such as with national employers, could also be more centralised, particularly where the target organisations have national recruitment functions.

The cost model assumes that each state requires its own NDIS registration and undertakes its own associated ongoing compliance activities. Centralising NDIS registration under one entity has the potential to share the initial registration and ongoing costs across six states and territories, a possible 83% reduction in annual NDIS provider costs from around \$40,000, to around \$6,000.

Economies of an established model and market

The documented model of the Employment Connections Service provides a clear, repeatable approach that is readily communicated to new staff, clients and employers. This kind of patterned model of delivery can reduce costs by having centralised or shared training, professional development and resources. Repeat engagement with the ECS by employers also reduces costs as employers increase capability via the program and less time is needed to upskill employers or customise jobs and workplaces (as described in communication with Jobsupport and through current investigations with ECS). As the skills of informal supports in the workplace grow, levels of ongoing support can be decreased though it is important to note that Jobsupport data shows that the need for ongoing support is likely to be required indefinitely for this cohort. Further analysis would be required to estimate the cost savings achievable from a

scalable and repeatable model, and to model the implications of these efficiencies for the financial sustainability of ECS.

Travel time reduction

Travel costs, made up of both labour time for travel and kilometre reimbursements, make up around 38% of the participant placement cost (in the 1 Year model) and 42% of annual participant post-placement support costs (ongoing from year 2). These costs are only partially covered by available funding. Under NDIS, around 50% of each eligible journey cost is funded. The NDIS funded round trip travel time is capped at 1 hour for each eligible journey. However, the ECS model assumes an average round trip travel time of 1.5 hours in metropolitan areas and 3 hours in rural areas, resulting in an overall average of almost 2 hours based on the 70:30 metropolitan-rural split. A reduction of travel time by one-third, to 1 hour for a metropolitan return trip and 2 hours in rural areas, would reduce the 5-year costs, modelled in Table 29, by an average of almost \$45,000 per year, saving \$223,000 across the 5-years.

A hub and spoke or 'pod' model (Elmes et al., 2023), with small numbers of contracted staff located near rural based participants, may also help to reduce travel time in rural settings.

Additionally, scale economies can be achieved by working with large employers who employ multiple participants, consolidating visits into a single trip, thereby reducing the number of journeys and travel time.

BARRIERS TO A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND INVESTMENT

Program and funding constraints in the Inclusive Employment Australia program

The study brought to light a range of barriers to a sustainable business model in the delivery of employment services for people with high employment support needs. These barriers have policy and investment implications for funders, in particular the National Disability Insurance Agency and the Department of Social Services.

Barriers to becoming a Commonwealth employment services provider

Preparatory workshops to support new not-for-profit entrants to the provider market of the Inclusive Employment Australia program were held during the pre-bidding period of the new program. These workshops identified that there were substantial barriers to entry for not-for-profit organisations. These included:

- complexity of the model's design, including coverage across Employment Service Areas, and payment focused around outcome milestones.
- role in managing the mutual obligation requirements of people with disability who have them. For many organisations, the requirement to interface with Centrelink for referrals, was poorly aligned with their existing referral pathways. Not-for-profit organisations also subscribed to human rights principles which meant that managing mutual obligation was misaligned with the way supports are currently delivered by these organisations.
- requirement to obtain 'Right Fit for Risk' accreditation (to ensure that their IT systems were compliant) which required resources beyond those available to many not-for-profit organisations both to establish and maintain (Crosbie et al., 2025).

As a result, organisations like Down Syndrome Australia, regardless of having an effective employment services model for a key cohort, face significant barriers to entering this market as a provider and receiving revenue through this mechanism. In this context, Down Syndrome Australia did not bid to become an IEA provider.

Barriers to sub-contracting to an Inclusive Employment Australia provider

As discussed in the previous section, an alternative mechanism may be sub-contracting to one or more Inclusive Employment Australia providers to deliver a part or all of the employment supports for people with Down syndrome and other disabilities such as intellectual disability.

In the new Inclusive Employment Australia program, specialist providers for intellectual disability are relatively concentrated in a small number of Employment Service Areas (ESAs), with multiple specialist providers (for intellectual disability) in some ESAs. This is likely to mean that those geographic areas with a higher proportion of people with intellectual disability already have specialist intellectual disability providers (possibly more than one), while those areas with lower concentrations remain unsupported. However, providing services in areas of low target populations can lead to increased travel costs rather than decreased costs (as recommended earlier in the report) and more work would be needed to establish the viability of this approach.

As part of this study, CSI researchers sought to engage with IEA (and ex DES) providers to assess their experience with and interest in sub-contracting to services such as the Employment Connections Service. Overall, there was only one prior experience of sub-contracting arrangements (unsuccessful) and no other interest identified across multiple providers with one large provider anticipating that there would be no interest in sub-contracting given the new IEA funding model, given the reduced financial viability to the provision of services under the new model before sub-contracting is considered.

In order to support the potential for sub-contracting, guidance to all parties is needed about how these arrangements can best function to support employment outcomes, and how revenue is to be shared. Further examination of the incentives and disincentives to this approach is needed.

Inadequate funding

At this point, the modelling shows a substantial deficit in revenue to cover the Employment Connections Service (which is acting as a proxy for the international, evidence-based Supported Employment model) if relying on the new IEA, either as a sub-contractor or provider. Two factors strongly influence this outcome and both relate to cohorts of jobseekers who gain less than 15 hours of work per week. This modest level of work is the norm for some cohorts. In the case of the Employment Connections Service, data for 25 participants showed 32% of these were working less than 5 hours per week on commencement (with an average across the life of the program of 44%), 20% were working 5-7.5 hours per week, and none were working 15 hours or more a week. The first factor is the structure of outcome payments and the second is the Moderate Intellectual Disability payment.

At present, the outcomes payment structure privileges those with a higher capacity to work more hours per week, particularly 15 hours or more. The payment structure does not align well to those individuals who can only work 0-7 hours per week because of the nature of their disability, other health conditions, and the inadequacies of their environments and levels of support. This skewing towards higher hours of work, or higher income earned, was also a critique in the Payment By Outcomes #3 study, where multiple social enterprises and participants reported ongoing barriers to increasing their hours of work per week, including co-morbidities as well as caring and other factors (Suchowerska et al., 2026). Similarly, the evaluation of the Evolve program (focused on supporting the 'transformation' of three mid-large Australian Disability Enterprises) found that, in some enterprises, the average hours of work per week among supported employees were below 15 hours (Elmes et al., 2026). This set of data suggests that there will be a group of people who cannot attain a work capacity of 8 or 15 hours per week, yet these people can be employed in a range of settings, including open employment, on lower hours per week. This group is not well attended to in the current price settings of IEA.

Further, people with a work capacity of 0-7 hours week are benchmarked at '0' hours but are required to meet a minimum of 5 hours per week of employment to attain a partial outcome and 8 hours per week to attain a full outcome. This is the only cohort who are required to meet an outcome that is higher than their individual employment benchmark (i.e. assessed work capacity). There appears to be an assumption within the IEA guidelines that participants can be supported to increase their hours of work to 8 hours per week with no attention paid to the actual capacity to do so or the levels of support required (to both jobseekers and employers) to achieve this. This assumption may be driven by the success of one provider, Jobsupport, to enrol participants with a 0-7 hour per week work capacity but successfully gain and maintain employment for them at 15 hours or more per week (DEEWR, 2013). Beyond this, we could find no other data that suggested that people with Down syndrome with low assessed hours of work capacity per week could increase their employment levels substantially, if at all. Currently, IEA providers that support people working less than 5 hours a week will receive no outcomes payment (Full or Partial) for this work. This can only leave those who can work only 1-4 hours per week without employment services given that service provision to this cohort is not being remunerated. The above data suggests this will be an average of 44% of the Down syndrome cohort in the Employment Connections Service, so almost one half of employment service activity would be unremunerated in this model.

Additionally, service providers cannot claim the Moderate Intellectual Disability (MID) payment unless they work with people who achieve 15 hours or more a week of work. This appears particularly poorly matched to the intended cohort. A sensible assumption might be that these payments are designed to recognise the additional work of supporting people with moderate intellectual disability (and/or high support needs), and as such should be available for the cohort

DSA works with. However, the logic behind the introduction of the MID payment in 2010 highlights that:

‘A critical design feature of MIDL is the incentive for providers to pursue more substantial employment for people with moderate intellectual disability. Typically, this means securing a job that is above the person’s employment benchmark hours’ (DEEWR, 2013, p.5).

As stated above, this incentive appears to have been largely realised in only one provider, Jobsupport, who has been able to enrol people with 0-7 hour work capacity but find employment opportunities for them at 15 hours or more per week (DEEWR, 2013). 2020 data shows that across the 837 clients within Jobsupport, the average employed client works 20 hours per week, and has been in their current job for 7.7 years (Centre for International Economics, 2020).

At present, the IEA funding framework does little to encourage employment supports for the cohort of people who require substantial employment services and support, and who can maintain only a small number of paid working hours per week.

Program and funding constraints in the NDIS

Small and unpredictable market size

Access to NDIS employment-related payments as a revenue stream for employment services is very unreliable given that, as yet, employment goals are not routinely in most participants’ plans: at present only 40% of participants have them. In Q2 2025/2026 only 738 people with Down syndrome nationally had Capacity Building employment funding. This is a far smaller proportion of people with Down syndrome than those who had Core Community funding (8,209). This equates to less than 9% of these people (of working age) with Down Syndrome (15% with intellectual disability) who had Capacity Building Employment funding in their plans¹⁴. These figures highlight the extremely low availability of Capacity Building employment funding vis a vis other types of funding for this cohort.

This represents a small market for NDIS employment service providers and offers small rationale to enter the market. Plan utilisation for people with Down syndrome related to their Capacity

¹⁴ This calculation is based on 88% of those having Core Supports Community in their plans (across cohorts) being aged between 15-65+. This percentage has been applied to the 9,329 people with Down syndrome (and 76,412 people with intellectual disability) had Core Community supports in their plans.

Building employment funding is only 56% (Q2, 2025/2026), being relatively stable at between 51-56% across the previous year. This suggests an insufficient market of providers or unsuitability of services provided that has not evolved in the last 12 months at least.

Level and insecurity of funding allocated

Explanation of NDIS funding early in this report highlighted that across Core and Capacity Building funding it is likely that some people with Down syndrome and intellectual disability do have sufficient funding allocated in their NDIS plans to purchase the Employment Connections Service. In Q2 2025/2026, Core Community supports for people with Down syndrome averaged \$57,822 and \$46,028 for people with intellectual disability. A small number of people with Down syndrome had Capacity building employment funding in their plan of \$17,074 annually, \$14,056 annually for people with intellectual disability (Q2 2025/2026, NDIS Data). In this context, it would appear that sufficient funding has been allocated in some people's plans, even if only a small number of people have Capacity Building funding. However, the central problem is that these funds appear unable to be used to deliver significant aspects of the Employment Connections Service model as validated by the NDIA. This is unexpected given the model is highly evidence-aligned and employment outcomes appear to be a priority for government. Enabling the utilisation of both NDIS Core Community (Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation) funding and Capacity Building – Finding and Keeping a Job to match the activities of the Employment Connections Service model would not increase the funding required via NDIS but would legitimise the use of already allocated funding for employment services such as ECS. Given substantial under-utilisation of Capacity Building employment related funding this strategy has additional merit.

There is high variability of employment funding in people's plans. As shown above, only a small number of people have Capacity Building support. A range of research highlights that people often lack this funding and therefore miss out on employment services given that services, including jobs-focused social enterprises, cannot afford to deliver without adequate funding revenue (Suchowerska et al., 2026). Additionally, seeking changes to NDIS plans is time-consuming and precarious. Multiple research studies in Australian Disability Enterprise contexts highlight that plan reviews are not always successful, come with attendant risks of plan reduction, incur lengthy delays and create stress (Elmes et al., 2026, Joyce et al., 2025; Campbell et al., 2024). In addition, there is evidence from employment support providers in the NDIS market that even if funding is allocated in a NDIS plan, employment funding is not quarantined sufficiently inside individual participants' budgets and can be used by other providers for a range of purposes (Campbell et al., 2024). This means that even if the allocation of funding is well matched to the quantum and type of employment services to be provided,

service providers cannot bank on its availability for this purpose. This has particular application to Core (Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation) funding which can be used for a variety of purposes.

Where employment funding is allocated, there is no data that explains or justifies this level of funding provided, or guidance about this. There appears to be a lack of attention to sourcing funding model evidence, as employment supports/services have been omitted from the commissioning of consultant advice for NDIS funding models. In this context, the funding allocated does not appear to be linked to the evidence about the quantum or type of support necessary to achieve employment outcomes, nor the diversity of needs across cohorts.

As a result, there is a lack of standardisation in funding allocated for employment supports, and allocation is highly variable, or even non-existent, across individuals. This is a key difference with the IEA program which means that the Employment Connections Service can only offer services to those who have this funding and who have an adequate level of it.

Unless sufficient funding is allocated to achieving employment outcomes then services will be unable to respond to the opportunity to provide services. This also needs to be understood in the context of organisations being required to register as NDIS providers with all the obligations and costs that this entails. In this context, NDIS service providers that only offer employment services need adequate funding to offset these costs.

The need to broaden recognition of personnel who can deliver NDIS 'Employment Related Assessment, Counselling and Advice'

There is a strong alignment between the Personalised Client Assessment stage of the Employment Connections Service model and the Discovery stage of Customised employment. As explained by Hall et al. (2022), the delivery of the Discovery stage to fidelity is a suitable alternative to other forms of vocational assessment. However, service providers who do so cannot access this NDIS line item unless they meet narrow criteria based on their staff qualification type (rather than the nature of the delivery type).

There is potential to expand the eligibility of service providers who can use this line item to those who have received Customised Employment or Discovery training, or its equivalent, and/or those who deliver services that are assessed against or shown to strongly align with a fidelity model. In doing so, this is likely to also expand utilisation of this line item in NDIS plans through the expansion of services available to deliver it.

Overly narrowing this 'specialised' delivery to staff with specific qualifications (rather than delivery of an evidence-based practice) narrows the market of providers. Additionally, in order for NDIS participants with this line item in their plans to utilise the allocation, they are likely to need

to purchase services from different providers, i.e. purchase the first stage of the ECS model from a provider eligible to deliver this line item, and then purchase subsequent stages from the ECS model. While this may be beneficial for some participants, in the main it is likely to disrupt the logic of the ECS model which is based on deep understanding of each person with disability gained via the first stage.

Organisational re-positioning and intermediary models

Moving from a grant-funded model to a business model for a for-purpose organisation, whose main purpose is not to run a business, is a complex task and requires further investigation. There are a range of valuable employment initiatives in Australia developed and run by not-for-profit organisations whose primary purpose is not to be a social enterprise. This is the case for Down Syndrome Australia which is a Disability Representative Organisation, where the broader mandate is to provide support, information and resources to people with Down syndrome and their families. Given the difficulties noted above for any business venture in this area, there are substantial considerations for any organisation considering a change in its organisational model.

One solution may be the development and support of ‘intermediaries’, for example, funded ‘co-operative’ models. A co-operative model enables for-purpose organisations to collectivise and share the formal obligations of running an enterprise, such as NDIS registration, business-related staffing and organisational infrastructure. This model could decrease the organisational infrastructure costs in the current model as it shares these with a number of organisations.

McFee (2021), on behalf of the Business Council of Co-operatives and Mutuals in Australia, argues that new approaches to market stewardship in schemes like the NDIS are needed in order to address challenges of thin or failing markets and to enable participant choice and control.

‘In Australia and internationally, co-operatives and mutuals are often formed in response to thin markets or market failure and once established are generally highly successful and sustainable’ (McFee, 2021, p.10).

In Australia, and more so in the UK, the development and operation of ‘social care mutuals and co-operatives’ seek to meet the need for social and health care services. Some examples have a lengthy history, such as the National Health Co-operative (NHC) established in Australia in 2006, that is a community led co-operative that delivers primary healthcare in thin markets (McFee, 2021). While the NHC is an example of a co-operative as a single entity, an alternative model is that of ‘enterprise co-operatives’ where members are other enterprises (for example, the Supported Independent Living Cooperative). In these instances, the co-operative provides a level of ‘backbone’ support to member enterprises. This helps share compliance (e.g. being a

NDIS registered provider) and administrative and other costs, while enabling enterprise members to retain their autonomy and ability to react to local conditions (McFee, 2021). Enterprise cooperatives are described in the following way:

'Co-operatives of businesses and not-for-profit organisations, called enterprise co-operatives, can support smaller providers to share corporate functions including bulk purchasing, accounting, human resources, marketing, client software and OH&S services. Enterprise co-operatives assist specialist organisations to increase productivity and market power while retaining local input and local jobs' (<https://caretogether.coop/about-co-ops/what-are-co-operatives-and-mutuals/>).

This kind of model has possibilities for Down Syndrome Australia, as well as other potential providers within heavily compliance driven social care sectors such as the NDIS. However as highlighted above and in the NDIA revenue modelling, changes are required to the ability to access funds for the delivery of ECS in order for a co-operative model to be financially viable method of delivery. The NDIA has some experience in supporting the development of social care co-operatives (for example Kudos Services). Such models require further investigation in the context of supporting the delivery of specialised employment services to thin markets.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Down Syndrome Australia has designed, implemented and evaluated a model of employment services for people with Down syndrome that is highly aligned with the international evidence about what constitutes effective practice in employment service/support provision for this cohort. The ECS model directly corresponds to the evidence of what is needed to support people with intellectual disability, activating the essential components of supporting jobseekers, families and employers to construct an inclusive and tailored work opportunity, as stated in the research literature. The ECS model has attained outcomes for more than 140 people in a three year period. This study has shown that this model can be delivered at a cost of \$30,111 (in metropolitan areas) or \$39,625 (in regional and rural areas) per person per employment placement outcome for the first year of delivery. Compared with limited evidence on costs of other employment services in Australia, this is less costly than the previous Disability Employment Services and at the lower end of the range of costs for other programs in Australia. Costs of the program shift in the multi-year model as the outcomes reflect a higher emphasis on providing ongoing support to an increasing cohort of employed participants, supporting new placements for those whose original placement ends prematurely, while still commencing 8 participants per annum (per State association) into employment positions.

This is the first time that we know of that anyone in Australia has detailed the costing of the delivery of an employment service that is consistent with the international evidence on the Supported Employment model. This offers an important starting point for more modelling to test whether or not the pricing frameworks for both NDIS and Inclusive Employment Australia (formerly DES) are sufficient to enable this evidence-based approach in Australia. In particular, we need to better understand:

- whether the Supported Employment model, or what aspects and what quantum of the model, can be funded via NDIS and/or IEA,
- where the parameters are between NDIS and IEA – i.e. how to blend these payments in a complementary way without breaching funding rules.

This investigation is particularly important for people with disability who are furthest from the labour market. People with Down syndrome have low rates of employment and predominantly find work in Australian Disability Enterprises with little opportunity to explore other alternatives. People with low levels of assessed work capacity, especially those in the 0-7 hour per week cohort, appear to be inadequately supported in the Inclusive Employment Australia program, and few received Capacity Building Employment funding in the NDIS. This represents retention of structural barriers to employment support for this cohort, where low hours of employment per

week (i.e. under 8 hours) are not valued in policy and funding design. As gross wages payments are likely to be small for this cohort and therefore unlikely to affect payment of the Disability Support Pension, the Commonwealth Government is unlikely to yield income support savings or tax revenue to offset the cost of employment services provision to this cohort. However, value to government and society can be realised by considering the cost benefits of employment including increased wellbeing, social connection and safety as outlined earlier in the report. Overall, there is a need to further investigate the costs and revenue options for different employment service and support models, including social enterprise, particularly for those cohorts furthest from the labour market with relatively low levels of assessed work capacity. Effective and sustainable initiatives cannot evolve, and nor can a policy and investment environment be crafted to best support this evolution, without this kind of evidence.

Unfortunately, this study has found that there appears to be no immediate well-suited revenue source that will fully fund the Employment Connections Service, despite its comparative pricing advantages compared to other programs. A combination of both NDIS and IEA revenue shows substantial promise but requires clarity from funders. Further, changes to the IEA to better meet the needs of cohorts who are very marginalised from the labour market could also provide a viable revenue stream for initiatives such as the Employment Connections Service, particularly if the Moderate Intellectual Disability payment could be leveraged for groups attaining outcomes below 15 hours per week. Without better alignment of these revenue sources to an evidence-based program such as the Employment Connections Service, innovative initiatives such as this one remain reliant on precarious short term grant funding from philanthropy and government, limiting their capacity to continue let alone scale.

Of most promise in the current context is the total quantum of aligned funding in the NDIS for people with Down syndrome and intellectual disability. Overall, across Core and Capacity Building employment related funding there would appear to be sufficient funding in the plans of some participants from these cohorts. The difficulty appears to be unlocking this available funding for use by these participants to fund the full range of activities within the Employment Connections Service. The analysis undertaken in this study highlights that only a portion of activities can be funded by the NDIS, hence leaving a substantial funding shortfall and, more importantly, a program where only a portion of evidence-based activities are eligible for funding. In this instance, it is not a need for more spending within the NDIS, but a clearer authorising of expenditure of available budgets on evidence-aligned employment services, such as this one. Unless the NDIS can clearly show the market of providers that it is funding employment at sufficient levels, across a sufficient population of participants, and with sufficient authorisation to fund evidence-aligned activities of employment support, then people with Down syndrome and intellectual disability will continue to be denied access to suitable employment services.

In all, this study shows that the design of social services investment is not sufficiently mature to enable innovative enterprise solutions to entrenched social problems such as employment for people with Down syndrome. More is needed to be done to ensure that there is suitable funding designed for programs addressing these marginalised cohorts. Without it, programs such as the Employment Connections Service, that has delivered jobs to more than 140 people over three years across Australia, will simply cease to exist, taking with it the opportunity for employment for those with few options for employment support.

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APPENDIX A: DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ELEMENTS OF THE EMPLOYMENT CONNECTIONS SERVICE MODEL

The Employment Connections Service model was broken down into four phases of delivery. The activities within each of these phases then detailed and linked to hours of staff delivery, associated travel time and costs.

Table 34. The activities and stages of the Employment Connections Service model (Detailed) with associated hours (including hours for indirect constant costs)

	Total labour hours	Total travel hours
Discovery/ Personalised Client Assessment	45.50	22.50
1 Delivery of Discovery model (Hall et al., 2022) - 5 stages (see second table below)		
Job Development & Placement	51.25	22.50
1 Expressions of interest by potential employers		
• initial conversations with/screening of employers for appropriateness/suitability		
• initial meeting with employer at workplace		
• site visit with employer (to assess workplace, assess accessibility, meet employer, rough job carve, walk through premises, identify potential jobs, discuss training for staff members including the main contact, discuss comms)		
• follow up meeting with employer (EC Manager)		
• follow up meeting with employer (Employment Ambassador: EA)		
2 Think about job opportunities, write up a job description & job ad, think about comms method to be used.		
3 Advertising of job/targeted recruitment process		
• brief comms (EC Manager)		
• brief comms (Comms)		
• send job ad out via emails, social media etc &/or identify specific participant and approach them		
• engagement with families of participant, questions answered & f/up email		
• assist participant to prepare a CV & personal summary		
• forward applications to employer & encourage them to interview all participants		
4 Help employer write questions for the interviews (sent to participants pre interview)		
5 Schedule interviews and send out questions to participants		
6 Attend interview of participant (including walk through, meet team, interview)		
7 Record interview evaluation notes		
8 Assist employer to notify successful and unsuccessful participants		
9 Deliver disability awareness training/staff briefings to workplace		
10 Job customisation		
11 Assist employer to convert contract into easy read format for participant/family		
12 Check in leading up to start date		

- with employer, participant &/or IEA support worker
- with family (and establishment of comms protocol between family & employer)

Intensive Job Site Training	33.00	12.00
1 Day 1 check in		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with employer, participant &/or IEA support worker • with family 		
2 Accompany participant on job - EC Manager		
Accompany participant on job - Job Coach		
3 Accompany parent(s) during an on-site visit (EC Manager)		
Accompany parent(s) during an on-site visit (Job Coach)		
4 Prepare task cards for participant detailing job tasks (including photos)		
5 End of week 1 check in		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with employer, participant &/or IEA support worker • with family 		
6 End of week 2 check in		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with employer, participant &/or IEA support worker • with family 		
7 End of week 3 check in		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with employer, participant &/or IEA support worker • with family 		
7 End of week 4 check in		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with employer, participant &/or IEA support worker • with family 		
8 Record Keeping		
Ongoing Support	82.75	30.00
1 Further disability awareness training to deal with issues &/or train new staff		
2 Accompany participant on job (faded support over 1st 12 months)		
3 Deliver further onsite training as required (including preparation of further task cards for participant detailing any new/updated job tasks (including photos) to help with growth of the role)		
4 Check ins		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with employer, participant &/or IEA support worker • with family 		
5 Placement case study (EC Manager)		
Placement case study (Comms)		
6 Record Keeping		
Indirect / constant costs per year		
1 Employer engagement (via online, email, phone)	75.76	9.38
2 Employer engagement (in person)		
3 Developing partnerships/talking to IEA providers		
4 Educating families about employment program and raising expectations		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create newsletter content • format and send newsletter out 		
5 Comms/marketing to employers		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create social media collateral • scheduling social media posts to go out 		

- 6 Employers network
- 7 Meetings with prospective employers (EC Manager)
Meetings with prospective employers (EA)
- 8 Interview other people with Down Syndrome about their employment stories & share EA employment stories (EC Manager)
Interview other people with Down Syndrome about their employment stories & share EA employment stories (EA)
- 9 Project and Operational Management: Reporting, deliverable tracking, compliance, financials, CRM updates, risk management, quality review/management

Detailed costing of the first element of Personalised Client

Assessment using the Discovery Fidelity Model

Detailed breakdown of standardised current costs of the Discovery/Personalised Client Assessment stage of the Employment Connections Service, based on Discovery Fidelity Scale by Hall et al. (2022).

Table 35. The activities of the first stage (Personalised Client Assessment) of the Employment Connections Service model

Discovery model fidelity elements	Direct labour (Hrs)	Travel Labour (Hrs)	Travel (Kms)	Direct labour, including overheads (\$)	Travel Labour, including overheads (\$)	Travel Kms cost (\$)	Total Cost per placement per yr
Home and community visits and conversations	8.0	6.0	160	\$599.15	\$449.36	\$158.40	\$1,206.91
Discovery activities	8.0	6.0	160	\$599.15	\$449.36	\$158.40	\$1,206.91
Informational interviews	5.0	6.0	160	\$374.47	\$449.36	\$158.40	\$982.23
Vocational profile narrative	8.0	3.0	60	\$599.15	\$224.68	\$79.20	\$903.03
Employment plan	16.5	1.5	40	\$1,235.75	\$112.34	\$39.60	\$1,387.69
Delivery of total Discovery/ Personalised client assessment p.p	45.5	22.5	600	\$3,407.67	\$1,685.11	\$594.00	\$5,686.78

Detailed costing of ongoing post placement support (year 2 onwards)

The assumptions used to estimate ongoing post placement support effort, are based on industry data for the level of high and moderate ongoing post placement support, as defined by the IEA guidelines, provided to people with Down syndrome working 15 hours per week. The percentage of people who receive high support, within this industry data, has been scaled back based on the average weekly hours for the ECS participants of 6 hours. Resulting in an assumption that 30% of ECS participants receive high support. While the remaining 70% of participants are assumed to receive moderate support.

Table 36. The assumptions for ongoing post placement support (year 2 onwards) of the Employment Connections Service model

	Moderate Support (Provided to 70% of ECS Participants)					High Support (Provided to 30% of ECS Participants)				
	# of Contacts	Contact Duration (Hours)	Annual Contact (Hours)	Travel Metro (Hours)	Travel Rural (Hours)	# of Contacts	Contact Duration (Hours)	Annual Contact (Hours)	Travel Metro (Hours)	Travel Rural (Hours)
Face-to-Face	9	3.25	29.25	13.50	27.00	24	3.25	78.00	36.00	72.00
Non-Face-to-Face	15	0.25	3.75	0.00	0.00	24	0.25	6.00	0.00	0.00
Total	24		33.00	13.50	27.00	48		84.00	36.00	72.00

Table 37. The cost of ongoing post placement support (metropolitan) of the Employment Connections Service model

	Moderate Support (Provided to 70% of ECS Participants)					High Support (Provided to 30% of ECS Participants)				
	Labour Hours (Direct & Travel)	Travel (Kms)	Labour, including overheads (\$)	Travel Kms (\$)	Total Cost (\$)	Labour Hours (Direct & Travel)	Travel (Kms)	Labour, including overheads (\$)	Travel Kms (\$)	Total Cost (\$)
Face-to-Face	42.75	360	\$3,202	\$356	\$3,558	24	960	\$8,537	\$950	\$9,487
Non-Face-to-Face	3.75	0	\$281	\$0	\$281	24	0	\$450	\$0	\$450
Total	46.00	360	\$3,483	\$356	\$3,839	48	960	\$8,987	\$950	\$9,937
Blended Ongoing Support Cost (metropolitan) at 70% Moderate and 30% High Support										
						\$3,839		\$9,937		
						@ 70%		@ 30%		
						\$2,687		\$2,981		
						\$5,668				

APPENDIX B: EXAMPLES OF DISABILITY- FOCUSED SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

Examples of jobs-focused or work integration social enterprises for people with disability in Australia include:

Jigsaw

Jigsaw is a social enterprise being delivered across five States and operating since 2014 with the aim of training and transitioning people with disabilities into open or mainstream employment at award wages. It has three phases: 1. Academy – this is a training and work experience program where participants acquire foundational work skills at their own pace (taking 22 weeks- two years); 2. Digital – this offers unpaid and paid traineeships in the social enterprise working on information management activities for Jigsaw business clients; 3. Connect – this is a transition pathway to other employment with ongoing support provided (Hutchinson et al., 2025). A recent evaluation suggests that Jigsaw has a transition employment placement outcome of 28.6% alongside a range of other health, wellbeing and social connection benefits (Hutchinson et al., 2025). This lower level of transition or placement outcome may be due to this aspect of the model (i.e. 'Connect' phase) only being added in recent years (Hutchinson et al., 2025).

Australian Spatial Analytics (ASA)

ASA is a work integration social enterprise focused on training and employing young neurodivergent adults who experience severe barriers to employment. During 2023/2024, ASA employed 154 neurodivergent adults who undertake work in the social enterprise (for the 43 business clients of the enterprise) across three sites (ASA, 2024). While transition to other employment is not a primary goal, 6 people have transitioned to other work (ASA, 2024). In this model, 80% of revenue of the social enterprise comes from trade, and 20% from philanthropy (Geoffrey Smith, ASA, DEA Conference 2025, presentation).

APPENDIX C: NDIS DATA

Data is available from the NDIA in relation to participants numbers, providers and market for employment-related supports. The data below is a summary of the data available from the NDIA Explore Data site: <https://dataresearch.ndis.gov.au/explore-data>, and represents data for Q1 2024/25. It captures data related to Capacity Building: Finding and Keeping a Job category (but does not delineate between line items in this category).

Table 38. NDIA data Q1 2024/2025

Type of disability	No. with Capacity Building (all categories) funds	No. with Capacity Building - Employment funds	Average committed support \$ for 6 months	Average total payments made for 6 months	% utilisation	Number of active providers in this category in 6 months - Australia wide	Number of participants per provider (in 6 months)	Number of active providers in this category in 6 months - by location
Down syndrome	11598	635	\$7,605	\$4,139	54%	0	0	
Intellectual disability		7882	\$6,872	\$2,620	38%	49	161	
Autism		15125	\$7,051	\$2,601	37%	51	297	
Psychosocial		2276	\$2,482	\$532	21%	24	95	
All disability (total), Aust wide		29,492	\$6,370	\$2,336	37%	124	238	
Indigenous		2683	\$6,821	\$1,862	27%			
CALD		1981	\$5,550	\$2,541	46%			
Age 15-18 yrs			\$7,919	\$2,845	36%	7	0	
Age 19-24 yrs			\$8,032	\$3,073	38%	50	317	
Age 25-34 yrs			\$2,564	\$778	30%	43	93	
Age 35-44 yrs			\$2,153	\$622	29%	24	84	
Age 45-54yrs			\$1,978	\$470	24%	11	0	
Major cities		20,026	\$6,206	\$2,385	38%			77
Population >50,000		3,233	\$6,886	\$2,371	34%			19
Population 15,000-50,000		2,596	\$6,546	\$2,317	32%			9
Population 5,000-15,000		1,225	\$6,440	\$2,103	33%			<5
Population less than 5000		1,882	\$6,733	\$2,149	32%			13

APPENDIX D: TYPICAL FEE PROFILES FOR 5-YEAR FINANCIAL MODELS

Table 39: The assumed typical NDIS fee income and timing, per participant

Participant Placement														
			Timing (Month number since joining the ECS program)											
ECS program stage	NDIS Fee Type	Total Fee Amount per Participant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Discovery	Capacity Building: Employment Assistance	\$4,639	\$1,160	\$2,319	\$1,160									
Job Capacity	Capacity Building: Employment Assistance	\$2,875				\$1,150	\$1,725							
Job Capacity	Core: Supports in Employment	\$391						\$391						
Site Training	Core: Supports in Employment	\$2,450							\$2,450					
Post Placement Support	Core: Supports in Employment	\$7,657							\$1,914	\$1,914	\$1,914	\$638	\$638	\$638
Participant Re-placement														
			Timing (Month number since joining the ECS program)											

ECS program stage	NDIS Fee Type	Total Fee Amount per Participant	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Job Capacity	Capacity Building: Employment Assistance	\$2,875			\$1,150	\$1,725								
Job Capacity	Core: Supports in Employment	\$391					\$391							
Site Training*	Core: Supports in Employment	\$1,225						\$1,225						
Post Placement Support	Core: Supports in Employment	\$7,657						\$1,914	\$1,914	\$1,914	\$638	\$638	\$638	
Participant Ongoing Support														
			Timing (Month number since joining the ECS program)											
ECS program stage	NDIS Fee Type	Total Fee Amount per Participant	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24+
Post Placement Support	Core: Supports in Employment	\$4,564 pa.	\$380	\$380	\$380	\$380	\$380	\$380	\$380	\$380	\$380	\$380	\$380	\$380

* Job site training requirement for participants being re-placed into a new role is assumed to be less 50% than a first-time participant, due to their previous job experience.

Table 40. The assumed typical IEA fee income and timing, per participant

Participant Placement				Timing (Month number since joining the ECS program)																			
ECS program stage	IEA Fee Type	% of participants who qualify*	Average Fee Amount per Participant**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	
Discovery	Service Fee (Monthly)	100%	\$334 pm		\$334	\$334	\$334	\$334	\$334	\$334													
Job Capacity / Site Training	Progress Fee (up to 2 instances)	88%	\$889 per instance			\$889				\$889													
Post Placement Support	Full Outcome Fee 12 weeks	33%	\$1,098										\$1,098										
Post Placement Support	Partial Outcome Fee 12 weeks	19%	\$205										\$205										
Post Placement Support	Full Outcome Fee 26 weeks	33%	\$1,398																		\$1,398		
Post Placement Support	Partial Outcome Fee 26 weeks	14%	\$193																		\$193		
Post Placement Support	Full Outcome Fee 52 weeks	23%	\$251																				\$251
Post Placement Support	Partial Outcome Fee 52 weeks	12%	\$42																				\$42

Post Placement Support	Moderate Intellectual Disability (MID) Payment - 12 week	5%	\$576										\$576					
Post Placement Support	MID Payment - 26 week	5%	\$806														\$806	
Post Placement Support	MID Payment - 52 week	2%	\$59															\$59
Participant Re-placement																		
				Timing (Month number since joining the ECS program)														
ECS program stage	IEA Fee Type	% of participants who qualify*	Average Fee Amount per Participant**	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24			30
Pre-employment Support	Service Fee (Monthly)	100%	\$334 pm	\$334	\$334	\$334	\$334	\$334	\$334									
Job Capacity / Site Training	Progress Fee (up to 2 instances)	88%	\$889 per instance			\$889				\$889								
Post Placement Support	Full Outcome Fee 12 weeks	33%	\$1,098									\$1,098						
Post Placement Support	Partial Outcome Fee 12 weeks	19%	\$205									\$205						
Post Placement Support	Full Outcome Fee 26 weeks	33%	\$1,398													\$1,398		

Post Placement Support	Partial Outcome Fee 26 weeks	14%	\$193														\$193		
Post Placement Support	Full Outcome Fee 52 weeks	23%	\$251																\$251
Post Placement Support	Partial Outcome Fee 52 weeks	12%	\$42																\$42
Post Placement Support	Moderate Intellectual Disability (MID) Payment - 12 week	5%	\$576										\$576						
Post Placement Support	MID Payment - 26 week	5%	\$806														\$806		
Post Placement Support	MID Payment - 52 week	2%	\$59																\$59
Participant Ongoing Support																			
				Timing (Month number since joining the ECS program)															
ECS program stage	IEA Fee Type	% of participants who qualify*	Average Fee Amount per Participant**	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25+			
Post Placement Support - Initial Placement	Moderate Ongoing Support Fees	54%	\$238 pm	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238		
Post Placement Support -	High Ongoing Support Fees	23%	\$255 pm	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255		

Initial Placement																		
Post Placement Support - Placed in new role	Moderate Ongoing Support Fees	16%	\$72 pm															\$72
Post Placement Support - Placed in new role	High Ongoing Support Fees	7%	\$77 pm															\$77

* The percentage of participants who qualify for the fee, these assumptions are based on outcomes data for the Employment Connections Service (Progress fees; Outcome fees; and Moderate Intellectual Disability fees) or industry data (Post-placement support fees).

** The typical fee per participant, calculated by applying the percentage of participants who qualify for the fee to the IEA fee available.

Table 41. The assumed typical blended fee income and timing, per participant

Participant Placement																	
ECS program stage	Fee Type	% of participants who qualify*	Average Fee Amount per Participant**	Timing (Month number since joining the ECS program)													
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	19
Discovery	NDIS Capacity Building: Employment Assistance	100%	\$4,639	\$1,160	\$2,319	\$1,160											
Job Capacity	NDIS Capacity Building: Employment Assistance	100%	\$2,875				\$1,150	\$1,725									
Job Capacity / Site Training	IEA Progress Fee (up to 2 instances)	88%	\$889 per instance			\$889				\$889							
Post Placement Support	Full Outcome Fee 12 weeks	33%	\$1,098										\$1,098				
Post Placement Support	Partial Outcome Fee 12 weeks	19%	\$205										\$205				
Post Placement Support	Full Outcome Fee 26 weeks	33%	\$1,398													\$1,398	
Post Placement Support	Partial Outcome Fee 26 weeks	14%	\$193													\$193	

Post Placement Support	Full Outcome Fee 52 weeks	23%	\$251																\$251
Post Placement Support	Partial Outcome Fee 52 weeks	12%	\$42																\$42
Post Placement Support	Moderate Intellectual Disability (MID) Payment - 12 week	5%	\$576										\$576						
Post Placement Support	MID Payment - 26 week	5%	\$806															\$806	
Post Placement Support	MID Payment - 52 week	2%	\$59																\$59
Participant Re-placement																			
				Timing (Month number since joining the ECS program)															
ECS program stage	IEA Fee Type	% of participants who qualify*	Average Fee Amount per Participant**	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24				30
Pre-employment Support	Service Fee (Monthly)	100%	\$334 pm	\$334	\$334	\$334	\$334	\$334	\$334										
Job Capacity / Site Training	IEA Progress Fee (up to 2 instances)	88%	\$889 per instance			\$889				\$889									
Post Placement Support	Full Outcome Fee 12 weeks	33%	\$1,098									\$1,098							

Post Placement Support - Initial Placement	Moderate Ongoing Support Fees	54%	\$238 pm	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238	\$238		
Post Placement Support - Initial Placement	High Ongoing Support Fees	23%	\$255 pm	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255	\$255		
Post Placement Support - Placed in new role	Moderate Ongoing Support Fees	16%	\$72 pm														\$72	
Post Placement Support - Placed in new role	High Ongoing Support Fees	7%	\$77 pm														\$77	

* The percentage of participants who qualify for the fee, these assumptions are based on outcomes data for the Employment Connections Service (Progress fees; Outcome fees; and Moderate Intellectual Disability fees) or industry data (Post-placement Support fees).

** The typical fee per participant, calculated by applying the percentage of participants who qualify for the fee to the fee available.

APPENDIX E: Employment Connections Service program participant fee income profile assumptions

Table 42. Assumed cost phasing for each of the 8 annual participants used in the 5-year financial model.

	Participant Placement		Participant Re-placement		Post-placement Support	
	% of Cost		% of Cost		% of Cost	
Participant	Year 1	Year 2	Year 2	Year 3	Year 2	Year 3
1	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%
2	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%
3	89%	11%	87%	13%	83%	17%
4	83%	17%	80%	20%	75%	25%
5	72%	28%	67%	33%	58%	42%
6	49%	51%	35%	65%	42%	58%
7	40%	60%	23%	77%	33%	67%
8	23%	77%	0%	100%	17%	83%
Average % Fee Share	69%	31%	61%	39%	64%	36%
Participant cost*	\$32,965		\$18,413		\$6,472	
Phased average cost per participant	\$22,855	\$10,109	\$11,315	\$7,099	\$4,113	\$2,360
# of participants	8	8	1.9	1.9	6.1	6.1
Total Phased Cost	\$182,842	\$80,875	\$21,050	\$13,207	\$25,250	\$14,488

* Participant Re-placement and Ongoing Support costs include inflationary uplift as these cost activities commence in year 2.

Table 43. Assumed NDIS fee income phasing for each of the 8 annual participants used in the 5-year financial model.

	Participant Placement		Participant Re-placement		Post-placement Support	
	% of NDIS Funding		% of NDIS Funding		% of NDIS Funding	
Participant	Year 1	Year 2	Year 2	Year 3	Year 2	Year 3
1	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%
2	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%
3	93%	7%	95%	5%	83%	17%
4	89%	11%	89%	11%	75%	25%
5	68%	32%	68%	32%	58%	42%
6	42%	58%	27%	73%	42%	58%
7	32%	68%	24%	76%	33%	67%
8	19%	81%	0%	100%	17%	83%
Average % Fee Share	68%	32%	63%	37%	64%	36%
NDIS Fee income available	\$18,012		\$12,512		\$4,701	
Average NDIS fee income per participant	\$12,238	\$5,773	\$7,872	\$4,641	\$2,987	\$1,714
# of participants	8	8	1.9	1.9	6.1	6.1
Total NDIS Fee income	\$97,907	\$46,187	\$14,645	\$8,634	\$18,339	\$10,523

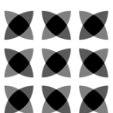
Table 44. Assumed IEA fee income phasing for each of the 8 annual participants used in the 5-year financial model.

	Participant Placement			Participant Re-placement			Post-placement Support	
	% of IEA Funding			% of IEA Funding			% of IEA Funding	
Participant	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 2	Year 3
1	68%	32%	0%	95%	5%	0%	100%	0%
2	68%	32%	0%	95%	5%	0%	100%	0%
3	68%	32%	0%	68%	32%	0%	83%	17%
4	44%	56%	0%	68%	32%	0%	75%	25%
5	44%	56%	0%	44%	56%	0%	58%	42%
6	26%	70%	5%	30%	66%	5%	42%	58%
7	22%	74%	5%	26%	70%	5%	33%	67%
8	4%	92%	5%	8%	88%	5%	17%	83%
Average % Fee Share	43%	55%	2%	54%	44%	2%	64%	36%
IEA Fee income available	\$8,408			\$8,965*			\$7,934	
Average IEA fee income per participant	\$3,624	\$4,652	\$132	\$4,720	\$4,057	\$188	\$5,041	\$2,892
# of participants	8	8	8	1.9	1.9	1.9	6.1	6.1
Total IEA Fee income	\$28,989	\$37,218	\$1,056	\$8,782	\$7,547	\$350	\$30,950	\$17,758

* Participant Re-placement fee includes assumed inflationary increase compared to Participant Placement fee income.

Table 45. Assumed blended fee income phasing for each of the 8 annual participants used in the 5-year financial model.

	Participant Placement			Participant Re-placement			Post-placement Support	
	% of Blended Funding			% of Blended Funding			% of Blended Funding	
Participant	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 2	Year 3
1	80%	20%	0%	95%	5%	0%	100%	0%
2	80%	20%	0%	95%	5%	0%	100%	0%
3	80%	20%	0%	68%	32%	0%	83%	17%
4	67%	33%	0%	68%	32%	0%	75%	25%
5	67%	33%	0%	44%	56%	0%	58%	42%
6	60%	37%	3%	30%	66%	5%	42%	58%
7	48%	49%	3%	26%	70%	5%	33%	67%
8	25%	72%	3%	8%	88%	5%	17%	83%
Average % Fee Share	63%	36%	1%	54%	44%	2%	64%	36%
IEA Fee income available	\$13,919			\$8,965			\$7,934	
Average IEA fee income per participant	\$8,832	\$4,955	\$132	\$4,720	\$4,057	\$188	\$5,041	\$2,892
# of participants	8	8	8	1.9	1.9	1.9	6.1	6.1
Total IEA Fee income	\$70,656	\$39,640	\$1,056	\$8,782	\$7,547	\$350	\$30,950	\$17,758



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