



Employment support for people with intellectual disability: what works and how to implement it in Australia

Evidence synthesis summary

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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 Centre for Inclusive Employment is located, in Melbourne's east and outer-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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Why this matters

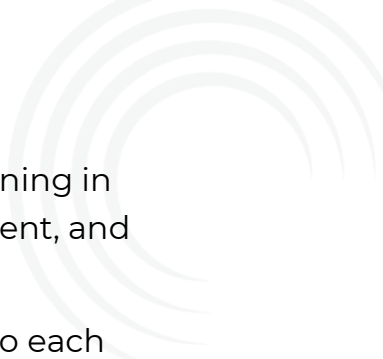
Australians with intellectual disability face one of the lowest rates of open employment of any group. Despite high aspirations, many encounter barriers such as limited work experience, low expectations from employers, and insufficient long-term support. In 2025, national reforms (Inclusive Employment Australia and the NDIS) aim to end segregated employment and provide flexible, ongoing supports. This summary distils the evidence on what works, what doesn't, and how stakeholders can take practical steps to close the employment gap.

Key evidence: What improves employment outcomes

- **Jobseeker-focused support:** Real work experience, person-centred planning (Discovery), skills training in real settings, and empowering people to set their own goals and make informed choices.
- **Employer and workplace support:** Proactive engagement and job development, customised or carved roles, inclusive onboarding and training for supervisors, reasonable adjustments, and building an inclusive culture.
- **Bridging and ongoing support:** Careful job matching, supported employment (place–train–maintain) or customised employment models, coordination across transitions, and follow-along support that can be reactivated when challenges arise.

Implementation factors: How to make it work

Even with the right strategies, success depends on how these supports are delivered. Research and lived experience highlight crucial implementation factors:

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- **Skilled support staff:** Job coaches and consultants require training in techniques such as systematic instruction, employer engagement, and Discovery. Ongoing supervision and mentoring are essential.
 - **Adequate intensity and duration:** Supports must be tailored to each person's needs. Intensive early support should gradually decrease but remain available long term.
 - **Cross-system coordination:** Schools, NDIS programs, inclusive employment providers, and employers must work together to avoid gaps during transitions (e.g., leaving school or changing jobs).
 - **Flexible funding and policies:** Funding models should reward long-term outcomes and allow providers to reinstate support when needed. Systems should not impose arbitrary time limits.
 - **Working with employers:** Strong partnerships with employers, including training, adjustments, and valuing diversity, increase opportunities and retention.

Insights from lived experience

- **Inclusion means belonging:** people want to be part of the team.
- **Natural supports matter:** supportive supervisors and co-workers reduce reliance on job coaches.
- **Disclosure and stigma:** workers need guidance around when to disclose their disability and employers need awareness training.
- **Transitions are critical:** leaving school or changing jobs requires coordinated support.
- **Small adjustments, big difference:** simple accommodations like visual schedules can make or break retention.
- **Families need confidence:** involve families and address worries about safety and benefits.

Practical guidance for providers, employers and policymakers

What employment support providers can do

- **Embed the place–train–maintain approach:** secure a real job first, then deliver on-the-job training and ongoing support.
- **Develop jobs and engage employers:** build relationships, offer disability awareness training and help customise roles.
- **Match and customise:** invest time in individualized planning and job carving to match people to roles.
- **Provide on-site training:** use systematic instruction and teach both tasks and workplace norms.
- **Build natural supports:** coach supervisors and colleagues to be mentors and buddies.
- **Plan for follow-along:** keep in touch and be ready to re-engage if challenges arise.
- **Coordinate transitions:** share employment plans across systems to maintain continuity.
- **Measure and celebrate:** track retention, inclusion and satisfaction, not just placements, and share stories.

What employers can do

- **Create a welcoming culture:** emphasise inclusion, assign a buddy and encourage social connections.
- **Adapt job and environment:** flexible roles, visual instructions, and simple adjustments can make tasks clear.
- **Provide good training:** give clear instructions and feedback; treat errors as learning opportunities.
- **Use available supports:** access JobAccess and the Employment Assistance Fund and partner with employment services.
- **Support growth:** encourage skill development, recognise

achievements, and explore career progression opportunities

What policymakers can do

- **Realign funding and evaluation** to long-term outcomes and quality jobs, not just placements.
- **Allow flexible, person-centred service delivery** that adapts support intensity over time.
- **Invest in workforce capability:** train job coaches, mentors and consultants in evidence-informed techniques.
- **Promote coordination across systems:** integrate Inclusive Employment Australia, NDIS, schools and employers to ensure smooth transitions.
- **Lead by example:** adopt inclusive hiring and procurement practices in the public sector and incentivise private employers to follow suit.
- **Maintain enabling infrastructure:** ensure easy access to JobAccess, the Employer Assistance Fund (EAF) and training resources; invest in assistive technology and digital tools.

Conclusion: Making inclusive employment a reality

A holistic, person-centred approach to inclusive employment has been shown to work. By integrating preparation, employer engagement, on-the-job training and sustained follow-along support, more people with intellectual disability can secure and keep meaningful jobs.

The evidence points to the importance of working with employers to create roles, tailoring support to individual needs, and ensuring policy and funding frameworks emphasise long-term outcomes.

The journey does not end when a job placement is made; ongoing coaching, workplace adjustments and career development are essential. By acting on these insights, providers, employers, policymakers and communities can help close the employment gap and build workplaces where everyone belongs.