



A Portable Training Entitlement System for Disability Support Workers

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In 2017, the Australian Services Union commissioned The Australia Institute to investigate the viability of a fully funded portable training entitlement system for Disability Support Workers. Here is a summary of the report by Dr. Rose Ryan and Dr. Jim Stanford of The Australia Institute’s Centre for Future Work.

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The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

represents a historic advance in addressing the needs of Australians with disabilities: not only in the extensive resources devoted to the program, but also in the innovative, individualised model of care which it establishes. Once fully rolled-out, the NDIS will support around a half-million participants, receiving a wide range of customised services. To meet that need, employment in disability services is poised for rapid growth: estimates suggest that the broad disability services workforce will double in size in coming years (adding about 70,000 new full-time equivalent positions).

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The NDIS’s individualised model of support is organised around a funding envelope for each consumer, determined through a clinical assessment of individual needs, which then pays for a tailored package of supports and services provided for each participant. A critical precondition for success of this system is the existence of a highly skilled and qualified workforce, capable of delivering a flexible range of high-quality services (as specified in the individual plans). Evidence from both Australia and internationally demonstrates conclusively that the quality of disability and human services depends crucially on high-quality employment standards, job security and training for those providing the services. This is especially important given the flexible, fluid delivery and work practices that will emerge under the NDIS’s individualised model of care. In the emerging decentralised market for disability services, there are significant risks that the quality of work, and hence the



quality of care, could be undermined by competitive pressures, high turnover and job churn, inadequate quality safeguards, and chronic underinvestment in training and workforce development.

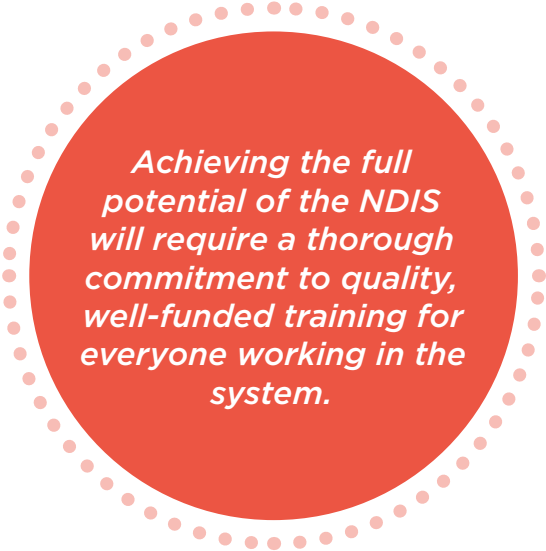
To maximise the potential of the NDIS to deliver a suite of high-quality, individualised services to hundreds of thousands of individual participants, the system desperately needs a strong and immediate strategy to facilitate ongoing investments in workforce development, training, and job quality. This strategy must ensure:

- **Wages and working conditions attractive enough to recruit and retain tens of thousands of new workers.**
- **Good job quality, including employment security, autonomy and recognition.**
- **The development of a range of appealing career paths in the sector, so that workers can see a positive long-term future working in this field.**
- **A systematic strategy for training, qualifications and workforce development.**

New recruits must be supported to demonstrate their prior skills and learning, and attain additional training for which they are recognised and credited. And all disability support workers must have access to ongoing training, to broaden and update their skills throughout their careers, accumulate more credentials, and pursue recognised career paths.

Under the NDIS's decentralised, market-oriented delivery model, ensuring adequate investments in training will be challenging. And unfortunately, initial research demonstrates that insufficient attention is being paid to workforce training and development. Providers experience difficulties recruiting new staff; conditions of work have become more difficult; the flexible contingent nature of the work (including providers working on a piece-work basis for multiple participants) undermines compensation and scheduling stability; and there has

been a reduction in the quantity of training (including in-house supervision and support) provided for disability support workers. These trends all pose significant risks to the quality of life and safety of NDIS participants, to the job quality and opportunity of disability service workers, and to the organisational stability and success of providers.

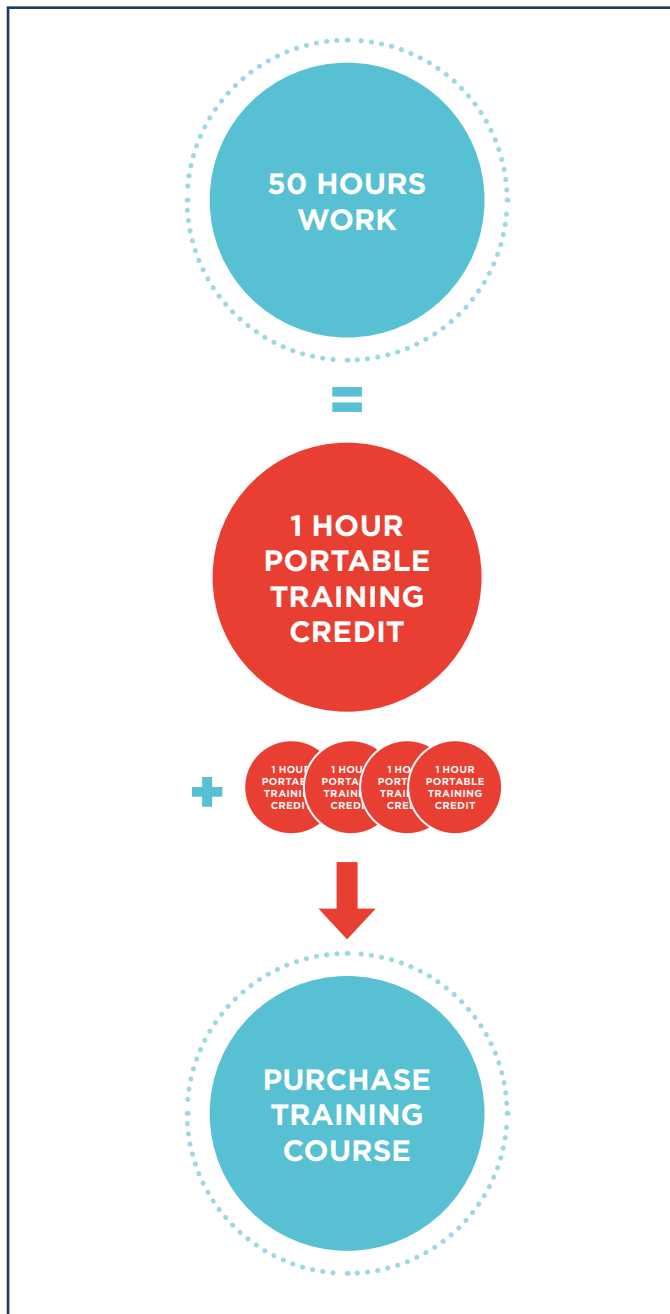


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Achieving the full potential of the NDIS, and ensuring that participants receive the high-quality, individualised services that the scheme was intended to provide, will require a thorough commitment to quality, well-funded training for everyone working in the system. After reviewing in detail the skills and training challenges facing the disability services sector as the NDIS is rolled out, this report proposes an innovative and comprehensive strategy to improve the sector's training performance. Our proposal includes immediate induction and foundation programs to provide new entrants to the workforce with basic skills and qualifications, and an ongoing portable training entitlement scheme through which disability support workers accumulate regular entitlements to training opportunities throughout their careers. They utilise those entitlements to undertake ongoing training in specialised topics and sub-disciplines, facilitating their progression through career paths which reflect their accumulating skills and credentials.

The proposed portable training system acknowledges the flexible, decentralised service delivery model of the NDIS; it will allow workers to accumulate skills despite the fact that many will not be working in regular, permanent “jobs.” And it will ensure that skills development evolves in line with the individualised

industry dominated by irregular, unsupported, and often isolated short-term “gigs.” In turn that will allow more successful recruitment and retention by service providers, and much higher-quality service provision to people with disabilities.



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The training program would be phased in over five years, funded by government through an independent revenue stream (parallel to the unit pricing system that applies to NDIS-funded services). Costing simulations indicate that all elements of the training program (including induction, foundation, and ongoing portable training entitlements) could be funded for a total cost averaging about \$190 million per year. Compared to the anticipated \$22 billion annual cost of the NDIS once fully rolled-out, this represents an investment of less than one cent for each dollar of total payments. That is a very small investment indeed in the skills, qualifications, and career paths that will be essential to realise the NDIS’s full potential: both as a system for delivering high-quality care to participants, and as a source of rewarding, high-value work for service providers.

needs and preferences of NDIS participants. Disability support workers will come to see this sector as one offering great opportunities for learning, training, advancement, and compensation – rather than an

The main features of the proposed training system include:

- New recruits to the sector would receive basic induction and foundation courses, to provide them with adequate skills to start their careers.
 - Throughout their careers, disability support workers would then accumulate entitlements to paid training. These entitlements are fully portable, accumulated and retained by each worker even when they work for multiple employers (or directly for NDIS participants).
 - Disability support workers would accumulate one hour of paid training (paid at their average wage in the preceding year) for each 50 hours of NDIS-compensated work. Given typical hours currently worked in the sector, that is sufficient for an average worker to accumulate credits for one three-day paid training course per year.
 - When utilising their accumulated credits, workers can choose the timing and topics of training.
 - The system will be integrated with better-defined qualifications for various NDIS-funded functions, and better-defined career paths – whereby workers can advance to higher levels of certification (and better pay) as they accumulate credits.
 - All training would occur in public institutions (such as TAFEs) or selected registered non-profit organisations.
- In addition to the accumulation of portable credits by individual workers, the program would also provide direct funding to provider organisations for selected workplace-level training initiatives, as well as establishing a system to consistently administer course curriculum and related qualifications.



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