



27 November 2023

Disability Employment Centre of Excellence
Department of Social Services
GPO Box 9820
Canberra, ACT 2601
By email – COE@dss.gov.au

Dear Consultation team,

**Amaze submission to Establishing a Disability Employment Centre of Excellence
Options Paper.**

Amaze works to build acceptance and understanding of autism in communities, educational settings, organisations and business, and wider society. Informed by evidence, experts and lived experience, we influence policy change for Autistic people and provide independent, credible information and resources to individuals, families, professionals, government, and the wider community.

We are closely connected with the community through our national Autism Connect helpline, peer support networks and capacity building initiatives. Our recently established [A-Plus Employment Program](#) takes a demand-side approach and supports businesses to embrace inclusion and leverage the strengths and capabilities of existing and new Autistic employees. Informed by evidence and co-designed with Autistic people and businesses, the program focuses on equipping employers with the understanding, knowledge and tools to foster a neuro-inclusive environment to attract, develop and retain Autistic talent.

We welcome your decision to establish a Disability Employment Centre of Excellence (“Centre”). It is an important step towards building the disability capabilities of employment service providers, employers and the NDIS and improving employment rates and outcomes for people with disability. We agree that the core elements of the Centre should include data collection, research, training, evidence-based practice and the dissemination of evidence informed information and resources.

Our submission focusses on the importance of the Centre:

- **Recognising Autistic people as a priority cohort for employment solutions.**
- **Supporting self-advocacy.**
- **Working in close partnership and collaboration with Autistic people, their families, carers, and representative organisations.**
- **Establishing transparent targets and measures to evaluate success.**

Autistic people experience some of the worst employment rates and outcomes in Australia and require tailored solutions.

In 2018, the [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#) reported that only 38% of Autistic people of working age had a job, compared with 53% of all working age people with disability and 84% of people without disability. The unemployment rate for Autistic people was 34%, more than three times the rate for people with disability generally (10.3%) and almost eight times the rate of people without disability (4.6%).

A survey conducted by the [Australian Autism Alliance](#) of 769 Autistic adults and 3,115 parents and carers of Autistic people in 2020 made similar findings. Of the Autistic people that were able to respond themselves, only 53% were in paid employment. Of the parents/carers responding on behalf of an Autistic person over 18, only 28% of the Autistic people they cared for held a paid job.

There is no broken-down data on the employment status of Autistic people with complex support needs or Autistic people from LGBTQIA+ communities, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, First Nations backgrounds or those experiencing inter-generational disadvantage. However, anecdotally we understand outcomes are considerably worse for these cohorts.

These statistics are a national shame. Autistic people have equal rights to employment and can bring a range of great strengths, interests and skills to the workforce. As recognised by the Senate Select Committee on Autism's [Inquiry into the services, support and life outcomes for Autistic Australians](#), disability wide approaches to improving employment outcomes for Autistic people have not been successful. Tailored approaches, addressing the specific barriers and enablers to Autistic employment are urgently needed. The establishment of the Centre provides an invaluable opportunity to drive autism specific research, information resources and training.

The Centre must recognise Autistic people as a priority cohort, support self-advocacy, drive partnerships and collaboration, and set transparent targets and measures for success.

Building on the core-elements of the Centre proposed in your Options Paper, we recommend the following:

- **Identify autism as a priority cohort:** While the Options Paper recognises people with intellectual disability as a priority cohort, Autistic people must also be recognised a priority cohort for research, information and resources, support and employer and employer services training.
- **Directly support Autistic people to find and get a job:** We support your proposed target audiences for capacity building (including Disability Employment Services, employment service providers, employers, supported employment services, disability advocates and NDIS). However, we also recommend that people with disability be included as a target audience, with the Centre driving accessible information, resources and training to build their understanding of employment rights and options. The Disability Royal Commission's [Final Report](#) (October 2023) recently highlighted the many vulnerabilities of, and discrimination faced by, employees with disability and the importance of building self-advocacy skills. The Centre should also play a role in building community awareness of the value of inclusive employment for everyone.
- **Include partnerships and collaborations as core elements of the Centre:** Given the importance of partnerships and collaborations to achieving the aims of the Centre, we recommend they be expressly included as core-elements. In particular, the research agenda and co-design of information resources and training for priority groups, such as Autistic people, must draw upon organisations that are connected to these priority cohorts, are already working to improve their employment outcomes or have the capacity and expertise to support tailored approaches. We would encourage the Centre to connect with us on our [A-Plus Employment Program](#) and explore how we could work together to provide best practice support to businesses on creating neuro-inclusive environments and improving employment of Autistic people.
- **Establish targets and measures and evaluate success:** A core-element of the Centre must be the establishment of key targets and measures, disaggregated for priority groups such as Autistic people. These targets and measures should aim to evaluate the success of the Centre, as well as the impacts of broader disability employment reforms

and initiatives on employment outcomes. A comprehensive outcomes framework must be developed by the Centre at its outset.

- **Prioritise co-design, accountability, independence and sustainability in any Centre model.** The priorities for any successful Centre model must include:
 - **Co-design:** The Centre must ensure that the views, voices and aspirations of people with disability are at the centre of its development, work, products and evaluation. Co-design with people with disability, their families and representative organisations must be the first priority.
 - **Accountability:** As outlined above, the Centre must transparently set targets and measures for success, create a comprehensive outcomes framework and monitor and evaluate employers and employment services against these measures as appropriate. The Centre should also annually measure and publicly report upon its success and learnings.
 - **Sustainability:** The Centre can only be effective in improving employment outcomes if it has a long-term commitment and funding by Australian governments, it cannot be a short-term initiative or left to the whim of isolated grant rounds or private donations.
 - **Independence:** The model must be established with a mutual recognition of independence, particularly to enable the Centre to independently measure its impacts, hold employers, employment services and governments to account and be a free advocate for change and reform.

Amaze is ready to assist.

Please contact me by email at jim.mullan@amaze.org.au if we can assist by providing further information or answering any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,



Jim Mullan
Chief Executive Officer