

Australian Autism Alliance

Submission to DEWR:

Shaping the future of employment services discussion paper

Autism-Specific Considerations: Building on Inclusion Australia's Submission

Submitted by: Australian Autism Alliance
Contact: Jenny Karavolos, Chair, Australian Autism Alliance
chair@australianautismalliance.org.au
www.australianautismalliance.org.au
Date: 31/07/2026

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the First Nations and Traditional Owners of the land, sea and waterways and pay respects to Elders past, and present and recognise those whose ongoing effort to protect and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures will leave a lasting legacy for future Elders and leaders. We recognise the enduring connection that First Nations peoples have to land, waters, culture, and community. This land was, is, and always will be Aboriginal land.

We acknowledge the Individual and collective expertise of those with a living or lived experience of disability, as well as the lived experience of people who have been carers. We recognise their vital contribution at all levels and value the courage of those who share their unique perspective for the purpose of learning and growing together to achieve better outcomes for all.

Contents

Acknowledgements	2
About the Australian Autism Alliance.....	4
1 Executive Summary	5
2 Summary of Recommendations.....	7
3 Considerations for Autistic People: Building on Inclusion Australia's Submission	8
4 Designing Employment Systems that Work for Autistic People	11
5 Recommendation 1 – Compliance, Safeguards and Mutual Obligations	12
6 Recommendation 2 – Disability Data and Outcomes.....	13
7 Recommendation 3 & 4 – Assessment and Service Pathways.....	14
8 Recommendation 5 – Program of Support.....	15
9 Recommendation 6 – Co-design and Governance	16
10 Recommendation 7 – Accessible Communication	17
11 Conclusion	18

About the Australian Autism Alliance

www.australianautismalliance.org.au

The [Australian Autism Alliance](http://www.australianautismalliance.org.au) (the Alliance) is a funded national peak body Disability Representative Organisation (DRO) providing a Strong Unifying Voice for Autism, and authoritative policy expertise on autism working with Australian government at all levels to strengthen policy and service systems affecting Autistic Australians. Established in 2016, the Alliance works to improve the life chances of Autistic people and strengthen collaboration across the Australian autism community.

The Alliance contributes futures-focused adviser expertise to a range of national advisory and reform processes, including DHDA Disability Representative Organisation program, the NDIA Autism Advisory Group, the NDIA DRCO Co-Design Advisory and Reform groups, NDIS Commission Disability Sector Consultative group, the National Autism Strategy Oversight Council, and National Health and Mental Health Roadmap for Autistic people. The Alliance is focused on system design solutions that enable disability systems to respond effectively to the diversity of Autistic support needs - “Change the System, Not the Person”.

Our membership represents a cohesive national network of key organisations with a diverse focus on autism – that is led by Autistic people, advocacy groups, peak bodies, service providers, and researchers. Together, this network provides a platform for the diversity of Autistic perspectives and lived experience across Australia.

Through our members and communication channels, the Alliance reaches more than half a million people and supports Autistic people and their families across the lifespan. Most importantly, our work is informed by Autistic people and the Australian autism community.



1 Executive Summary

The Australian Autism Alliance (the Alliance) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission in response to the Australian Government's *Shaping the Future of Employment Services* Discussion Paper.

The Alliance supports the Government's commitment to reforming Australia's employment services system to create a more personalised, responsive and effective model that better supports people with disability to obtain and sustain meaningful employment.

The Alliance supports the overarching direction of the proposed reforms and, in particular, the recognition that employment services should be designed around the individual, rather than requiring individuals to fit rigid service models. This represents an important opportunity to build an employment system that recognises diversity, responds to changing circumstances and focuses on long-term employment outcomes rather than short-term program participation.

The Alliance also supports the overall direction of Inclusion Australia's submission and endorses its recommendations relating to accessible and person-led assessment, greater transparency in assessment processes, improved publication of disability data, meaningful and paid co-design, disability representation in governance, accessible information and stronger safeguards throughout the employment services system. This submission should be read as complementary to Inclusion Australia's submission by identifying additional autism-specific considerations. Where this submission does not address a specific recommendation made by Inclusion Australia, it should not be taken as expressing a position on that issue.

Autism is a distinct disability. Autism is highly heterogeneous, meaning that while Autistic people share common characteristics, every Autistic person is unique. Each person has their own individual diversity, strengths, capacity, aspirations, communication preferences and support needs. The autism spectrum is not linear. Many Autistic people describe a "spiky profile", where significant strengths and capabilities coexist alongside areas requiring considerable support. Support needs are also dynamic and may change throughout a person's life depending on factors such as life transitions, workplace environments, stress, health, routine changes or autistic burnout.

For this reason, employment systems should avoid making assumptions about an individual's capability based on diagnosis or perceived levels of functioning. While diagnosis is an important pathway to understanding, support and access to services, it does not, in isolation, determine the type, intensity or duration of employment support an individual may require. Effective employment services must consider the whole person, recognising that support needs are individual, may fluctuate over time, and are influenced by the interaction between the individual and the environments and systems around them.

The Alliance believes that successful employment reform requires more than improving employment programs. It requires designing systems that are flexible, accessible and capable of responding to the diversity of Autistic people. This includes recognising different communication styles, sensory and executive functioning differences, co-occurring conditions, changing support needs and the importance of workplace adjustments that enable individuals to participate and thrive.

Consistent with the Alliance's broader philosophy of *Change the System, Not the Person*, this submission focuses on how employment systems can better recognise and respond to the diversity of Autistic people while supporting sustainable employment outcomes. In doing so, the Alliance seeks to build on Inclusion Australia's submission by highlighting autism-specific considerations across compliance and safeguards, disability data, assessment and service pathways, Program of Support arrangements, co-design and governance, and accessible communication.

The Alliance's central proposition is that the success of employment reform for Autistic people will not be determined by asking Autistic people to adapt to employment systems. Rather, it will be determined by designing employment systems that recognise and respond to the diversity of Autistic people so that every individual has the opportunity to obtain and sustain meaningful employment that reflects their strengths, aspirations and support needs.

The Alliance's key messages are:

- **Support should be individualised.** Employment systems should recognise the diversity of Autistic people and respond to individual strengths, aspirations and changing support needs.
- **Systems should adapt to people.** Successful employment reform depends on designing flexible and accessible systems that respond to disability-related needs, rather than expecting individuals to fit standardised processes.
- **Success should be measured by outcomes.** Sustainable employment, career progression, participant experience and wellbeing are stronger indicators of success than administrative compliance or short-term job placements.
- **Employment reform should build on existing disability expertise.** The Alliance supports Inclusion Australia's recommendations and offers this submission as a complementary autism perspective to strengthen the future employment services system.

2 Summary of Recommendations

The Alliance supports the overall direction of Inclusion Australia's submission and endorses the following recommendations relevant to the autism-specific considerations addressed in this submission.

That is, the Alliance endorses Inclusion Australia's recommendations relating to:

- Person-led and accessible assessment processes.
- Greater transparency of assessment tools and decision-making.
- Improved publication of disability data.
- Meaningful and paid co-design with people with disability.
- Stronger disability representation in governance.
- Accessible information and communication.
- Improved provider capability, accountability and safeguards.

Building on Inclusion Australia's submission, the Alliance makes the following additional recommendations to ensure Australia's future employment services system effectively responds to the diversity of Autistic people.

2.1 Summary of Recommendations

Rec No	Recommendation Topic	Summary	Section in Submission
R1	Compliance, Safeguards and Mutual Obligations	Strengthen compliance, safeguard and mutual obligation arrangements by recognising disability-related barriers to participation, embedding accessible communication and reasonable adjustments before compliance action is considered, and ensuring compliance responses are proportionate, fair and responsive to individual circumstances.	Section 5
R2	Disability Data and Outcomes	Improve disability data collection and reporting to better understand employment outcomes for Autistic people, measure meaningful employment outcomes, incorporate participant experience and support continuous improvement across the employment services system.	Section 6
R3 & R4	Assessment and Service Pathways	Ensure assessment and service pathways are holistic, person-led and flexible, recognising the diversity of Autistic people and supporting individualised employment pathways that adapt as support needs and circumstances change.	Section 7
R5	Program of Support	Design Program of Support arrangements, including those associated with Disability Support Pension eligibility, that provide flexible and responsive access to employment supports, promote continuity of relationships and enable participants to obtain, maintain and progress in meaningful employment.	Section 8
R6	Co-design and Governance	Embed meaningful participation of Autistic people and autism representative organisations throughout the design, implementation, monitoring and continuous improvement of employment services, supported by transparent governance and accountability.	Section 9

Rec No	Recommendation Topic	Summary	Section in Submission
R7	Accessible Communication	Strengthen accessible communication by providing information in formats that respond to individual communication preferences and support needs, enabling informed decision-making and meaningful participation throughout the employment journey.	Section 10

Table 1: Recommendation Summary Table

The Alliance believes these recommendations will strengthen the implementation of future employment services by ensuring systems are flexible, accessible and responsive to the diversity of Autistic people. Together with Inclusion Australia's recommendations, they provide a practical framework for designing employment services that support meaningful and sustainable employment outcomes.

3 Considerations for Autistic People: Building on Inclusion Australia's Submission

The Alliance supports Inclusion Australia's submission and encourages it to be read alongside this submission. Inclusion Australia's submission appropriately reflects the experiences and priorities of people with intellectual disability and makes important recommendations to improve accessibility, assessment, co-design, transparency and safeguards across Australia's future employment services system.

This submission builds on Inclusion Australia's work by identifying additional considerations arising from autism and the diversity of Autistic people. It should therefore be read as complementary to, rather than replacing or duplicating, Inclusion Australia's recommendations.

3.1 Autism is a distinct disability

Autism is a distinct disability. Autism is highly heterogeneous, which means that while Autistic people share common characteristics, they present differently from one person to the next.

Like all people, every Autistic person is unique and has their own individual strengths, capacity, aspirations, communication preferences, experiences and support needs. Their day-to-day experiences are dynamic and influenced by the interaction between the individual and the systemic, environmental and interpersonal barriers they encounter.

As a result, employment services designed around standard assumptions about disability or capability will not meet the needs of many Autistic people. Systems must instead be capable of responding to individual circumstances and adapting as those circumstances change.

3.2 There is no single Autistic employment journey

Autistic people participate in education, training and employment in many different ways. Some require significant and ongoing employment supports throughout their working lives. Others require only occasional assistance or workplace adjustments. Some may require additional support during periods of transition, illness, stress, workplace change or autistic burnout before returning to employment with little or no ongoing assistance.

Support needs are therefore not fixed. They may increase or decrease throughout a person's life depending on changes in health, environment, workplace expectations, relationships or life circumstances.

Employment services should recognise this diversity and avoid rigid service pathways that assume support needs remain constant over time.

3.3 Strengths and support needs coexist

The autism spectrum is not linear. Many people describe autism as a "spiky profile", where significant strengths and capabilities coexist alongside areas requiring substantial support. For example, an Autistic person may demonstrate exceptional technical knowledge, analytical thinking or problem-solving skills while simultaneously experiencing challenges with executive functioning, communication, sensory processing, managing change or navigating workplace expectations.

Likewise, many Autistic people thrive in environments that align with their interests, strengths and aspirations but may experience considerable barriers in environments that are inaccessible, unpredictable or lack appropriate workplace adjustments.

Employment services should therefore move beyond deficit-based assumptions and recognise both the strengths Autistic people bring to the workforce and the supports that enable those strengths to be realised.

3.4 Diagnosis is an important pathway—but support must be individualised

The Alliance supports timely access to autism diagnosis. Diagnosis plays an important role in helping individuals understand their experiences, access appropriate supports and make informed decisions about education, employment and participation.

However, diagnosis alone does not determine the support a person may require to obtain or sustain employment.

Employment services should consider the whole person, including:

- a. individual strengths and aspirations;
- b. communication preferences;
- c. executive functioning and organisation;
- d. sensory processing needs;
- e. workplace environment;
- f. co-occurring conditions;
- g. previous employment experiences;
- h. workplace adjustments; and
- i. the person's own goals for employment.

Supports should be individualised and responsive to each person's circumstances rather than based on assumptions associated with a particular diagnosis or perceived level of functioning.

3.5 Systems and environments influence outcomes

Employment outcomes are influenced not only by an individual's capability but also by the environments in which they live and work.

Accessible recruitment practices, flexible workplaces, supportive managers, clear communication, appropriate workplace adjustments and inclusive organisational cultures all contribute significantly to employment success.

Conversely, inaccessible systems, inflexible service models, poor communication and limited understanding of autism can create barriers that unnecessarily reduce participation.

Accordingly, employment reform should focus not only on preparing Autistic people for work but also on ensuring employment services and workplaces are equipped to support Autistic people effectively.

This reflects the Alliance's broader philosophy of **Change the System, Not the Person**.

3.6 Sustainable employment should be the measure of success

For many Autistic people, success is not simply obtaining employment.

Success means obtaining and sustaining meaningful employment that reflects the individual's strengths, aspirations and support needs.

Employment services should therefore measure success through outcomes such as:
sustainable employment;

- a. job retention;
- b. career progression;
- c. participant wellbeing;
- d. workplace inclusion;
- e. appropriate workplace adjustments; and
- f. participant satisfaction with employment outcomes.

These measures provide a more meaningful indication of whether employment services are supporting people to build long-term careers rather than simply achieving short-term placement targets.

3.7 The Alliance's perspective

The Alliance believes Australia's future employment services system presents an opportunity to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach towards a system that recognises the diversity of Autistic people and responds to individual strengths, aspirations and changing support needs.

Throughout the remainder of this submission, the Alliance builds on Inclusion Australia's recommendations by identifying autism-specific considerations across compliance and safeguards, disability data, assessment and service pathways, Program of Support arrangements, co-design and governance, and accessible communication.

The Alliance's central proposition is that successful employment reform for Autistic people will not be achieved by expecting individuals to adapt to employment systems. Rather, it will be achieved by designing employment systems that are flexible, accessible and responsive to the diversity of Autistic people so that every individual has the opportunity to obtain and sustain meaningful employment.

4 Designing Employment Systems that Work for Autistic People

The Alliance believes the principles outlined above should inform every aspect of employment services reform. Rather than expecting Autistic people to adapt to standardised systems, employment services should be intentionally designed to recognise and respond to the diversity of Autistic people.

The framework below illustrates the key design principles that should underpin future employment services. These principles are interconnected. They recognise that sustainable employment outcomes are achieved by understanding the whole person, providing flexible pathways and supports, communicating in accessible ways, building autism capability across employment services, creating inclusive workplaces, and embedding rights, safeguards and accountability throughout the employment journey.

Designing Employment Systems that Work for Autistic People

Employment success is achieved when systems recognise the diversity of Autistic people and respond to individual strengths, aspirations and support needs.

Change the System, Not the Person.



Figure 1. Designing Employment Systems that Work for Autistic People

No single principle operates in isolation. Employment outcomes improve when these elements work together as an integrated system. This reflects the Alliance's philosophy of **Change the System, Not the Person** and provides the framework through which the following recommendations should be considered.

Applying these Principles

The following recommendations apply this framework to the key areas identified in Inclusion Australia's submission and the *Shaping the Future of Employment Services* Discussion Paper.

The Alliance supports Inclusion Australia's recommendations and offers the following additional autism-specific considerations to strengthen the design and implementation of Australia's future employment services system.

5 Recommendation 1 – Compliance, Safeguards and Mutual Obligations

The Alliance agrees that employment services should encourage participation while ensuring people with disability are treated fairly, respectfully and consistently.

From an autism perspective, compliance arrangements should recognise that barriers to participation often arise from inaccessible systems rather than a lack of willingness to engage. Employment services should therefore distinguish between deliberate non-participation and disability-related barriers, responding to the latter through flexibility, reasonable adjustments and additional support rather than punitive compliance measures.

Many Autistic people experience barriers that can affect their engagement with employment services, including differences in communication, executive functioning, sensory processing, periods of autistic burnout or changing support needs. These barriers may affect a person's ability to attend appointments, respond within prescribed timeframes or navigate administrative processes, despite a genuine commitment to finding and maintaining employment. Compliance processes should recognise these circumstances and ensure participants are not disadvantaged because employment services have failed to accommodate disability-related needs.

Safeguards should operate before compliance action is considered. Participants should receive information in accessible formats, understand what is expected of them, and have reasonable adjustments implemented where required. Providers should also be expected to identify disability-related barriers early and work collaboratively with participants to address them before compliance responses are initiated.

The Alliance strongly supports the removal of punitive, inaccessible and unsafe compliance practices for people with disability. This submission does not seek to revisit the broader policy question of whether mutual obligations should be retained or removed. Rather, the Alliance's focus is on ensuring that any future compliance framework appropriately recognises disability-related barriers, embeds accessible communication and reasonable adjustments, and protects the rights of Autistic people.

Where mutual obligations continue to apply, they should be accompanied by reciprocal responsibilities. Participants have responsibilities to engage with employment services, but providers and the broader employment system also have responsibilities to deliver accessible, responsive and individualised supports.

Embedding these principles will create a compliance framework that promotes participation while recognising the diversity of Autistic people and reducing the risk of unnecessary or inappropriate compliance action.

Recommendation 1: Compliance, Safeguard and Mutual Obligation Arrangements

Compliance, safeguard and mutual obligation arrangements distinguish between deliberate non-participation and disability-related barriers to participation;

- a. require providers to demonstrate that accessible communication and reasonable adjustments have been implemented before compliance action is considered;
- b. ensure compliance responses are proportionate, fair and responsive to individual circumstances;
- c. recognise that support needs may fluctuate over time, including during periods of transition or autistic burnout; and
- d. reinforce reciprocal accountability by recognising that participants, providers and Government all have responsibilities in creating accessible and inclusive employment services.

6 Recommendation 2 – Disability Data and Outcomes

The Alliance supports Inclusion Australia's recommendation to improve the collection, reporting and use of disability data across Australia's future employment services system. Better data is fundamental to understanding whether reforms are achieving their intended outcomes and to driving continuous improvement across employment services.

From an autism perspective, employment data should do more than report participation or job placement numbers. It should provide meaningful insights into the experiences and outcomes of Autistic people so that policy, funding and service design are informed by evidence. Without appropriate data, the barriers experienced by Autistic people and the effectiveness of different approaches remain difficult to identify and address.

The Alliance also notes that many Autistic people may not be identifiable within employment services data because they have chosen not to disclose their disability or have not received a formal autism diagnosis. This may reflect late diagnosis, the cost and availability of assessment, or concerns about stigma and discrimination. As a result, Autistic people may be underrepresented in disability datasets and compliance reporting, limiting Government's ability to understand employment outcomes and evaluate the effectiveness of reforms.

The Alliance encourages Government to recognise the diversity of the autism community when designing data collection and reporting. Where appropriate and consistent with privacy requirements, data should enable a better understanding of the experiences of different cohorts of Autistic people, including those with co-occurring disability, young people transitioning from education, people returning to employment following illness or autistic burnout, and people living in regional, rural and remote communities.

Performance reporting should also move beyond measuring administrative activity or short-term employment outcomes. Sustainable employment is better reflected through measures such as job retention, career progression, participant wellbeing, workplace adjustments, participant satisfaction and employer capability. These measures provide a more meaningful understanding of whether employment services are supporting people to build long-term careers rather than simply achieve initial placements.

The Alliance also encourages Government to use disability data as a tool for continuous improvement. Transparent reporting enables governments, providers, employers, researchers and disability representative organisations to identify emerging trends, evaluate reforms and strengthen employment services over time.

Employment systems are ultimately shaped by the outcomes they measure. If Government wishes to improve sustainable employment outcomes for Autistic people, those outcomes must first be visible, measurable and used to drive continuous improvement.

Recommendation 2: Disability Data and Outcomes

Improve disability data and outcomes by:

- a. collecting and reporting data that provides greater visibility of employment outcomes for Autistic people;
- b. recognising the diversity of the autism community through appropriate data collection and reporting, where feasible and consistent with privacy requirements;
- c. measuring sustainable employment outcomes, including job retention, career progression, participant wellbeing and participant satisfaction, in addition to employment commencements;
- d. incorporating participant experience to better understand the barriers and enablers influencing employment outcomes; and
- e. using data to support transparency, continuous improvement and evidence-informed policy and service design.

7 Recommendation 3 & 4 – Assessment and Service Pathways

The Alliance supports Inclusion Australia's recommendations to strengthen assessment processes and ensure people with disability are connected to employment services that reflect their individual circumstances, aspirations and support needs.

From an autism perspective, assessment should do more than determine eligibility for services. It should provide a holistic understanding of the individual and identify the supports, adjustments and opportunities that will enable meaningful and sustainable employment.

Assessment should recognise that autism is highly heterogeneous and that no two Autistic people have the same strengths, aspirations or support needs. While diagnosis is an important pathway to understanding and accessing supports, employment planning should also consider factors such as communication preferences, executive functioning, sensory processing, workplace environment, previous employment experiences, co-occurring conditions and individual career goals.

The Alliance also encourages flexible service pathways that recognise support needs may change over time. Participants should be able to increase or reduce support, access specialist expertise where required, and move between service pathways as their circumstances evolve without unnecessary administrative barriers. This flexibility is particularly important during periods of transition, workplace change or autistic burnout.

Employment planning should be undertaken in genuine partnership with participants and focus on achieving meaningful and sustainable employment rather than simply securing short-term placements.

Understanding both the strengths an individual brings to the workplace and the adjustments that enable them to succeed will support better employment outcomes for participants, providers and employers alike.

Recommendation 3 & 4: Assessment and Service Pathways

Assessment and service pathways:

- a. adopt a holistic, person-led approach that recognises the individual's strengths, aspirations and support needs;
- b. use diagnosis to inform, but not determine, employment supports;
- c. recognise that support needs may change over time and provide flexibility to adjust supports accordingly;
- d. enable participants to move between service pathways as their circumstances and employment goals evolve; and
- e. focus on achieving meaningful and sustainable employment outcomes through individualised planning and appropriate workplace supports.

8 Recommendation 5 – Program of Support

The Alliance supports Inclusion Australia's recommendation to ensure Program of Support arrangements promote continuity, flexibility and equitable access to employment services.

The Alliance also notes that many Autistic people seeking access to the Disability Support Pension may experience particular challenges in demonstrating 20 impairment points under a single impairment table. Autism often presents as a "spiky profile", where significant strengths coexist with substantial functional challenges across multiple domains. As a result, some Autistic people may be more likely to undertake a Program of Support before establishing DSP eligibility. This reinforces the importance of ensuring Program of Support arrangements are flexible, responsive and capable of recognising the complexity of autism rather than assuming a linear pattern of impairment or support need.

From an autism perspective, employment support should not be viewed as a one-off intervention. Many Autistic people experience changing support needs throughout their employment journey, with periods where additional assistance may be required during transitions, changes in workplace expectations, illness, autistic burnout or other significant life events. Employment services should be designed to respond to these changes without requiring people to restart their employment journey or navigate unnecessary administrative barriers.

The Alliance encourages Program of Support arrangements that allow participants to move seamlessly between different levels of assistance as their circumstances change. Participants should be able to re-engage with supports when needed, reduce support as confidence and independence increase, and access specialist expertise where employment challenges become more complex. This flexibility will help people maintain employment and reduce avoidable workforce exits.

Continuity of relationships is also important. Where possible, participants should be supported by providers who understand their communication preferences, strengths, workplace adjustments and employment goals. Maintaining trusted relationships reduces the need for individuals to repeatedly explain their circumstances and enables employment supports to be tailored more effectively over time.

For many Autistic people, the value of employment support lies not in its intensity but in its availability when circumstances change. A flexible Program of Support should therefore provide timely, responsive assistance that helps people obtain, maintain and progress in employment, rather than relying on fixed periods of support that may not align with an individual's needs.

Recommendation 5: Programs of Support

Design Program of Support arrangements, including those associated with Disability Support Pension eligibility to:

- a. provide flexible access to employment supports that respond to changing needs over time;
- b. enable participants to move between different levels of support without unnecessary administrative barriers;
- c. support timely re-engagement with employment services following periods of transition, illness or autistic burnout;
- d. promote continuity of relationships with providers wherever possible; and
- e. focus on sustaining employment and supporting long-term career development rather than short-term service episodes

9 Recommendation 6 – Co-design and Governance

The Alliance supports Inclusion Australia's recommendation to strengthen co-design and governance across Australia's future employment services system. The Alliance agrees that Autistic people and people with disability should be genuine partners in the design, implementation and evaluation of employment policy and services.

From an autism perspective, meaningful participation requires more than consultation. Autistic people and autism representative organisations should be involved throughout the policy cycle, including service design, implementation, monitoring and continuous improvement. Their lived experience provides valuable insight into the barriers and enablers that influence employment outcomes and helps ensure reforms are practical, accessible and responsive to the diversity of the autism community.

The Alliance also encourages Government to recognise that autism is a distinct disability with unique employment experiences and support needs. While there are common issues across the disability community, there are also autism-specific considerations that should inform the development and implementation of employment services. Engaging with autism representative organisations alongside broader disability organisations will help ensure these perspectives are reflected in policy and service design.

Effective governance also requires transparency and accountability. Government should provide opportunities for ongoing engagement with disability representative organisations, share the outcomes of consultation processes, and use participant feedback and emerging evidence to continuously improve employment services over time.

Recommendation 6: Co-design and Governance

Strengthen co-design and governance by:

- a. embedding meaningful participation of Autistic people and autism representative organisations throughout the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of employment services;
- b. recognising autism as a distinct disability and ensuring autism-specific expertise informs the design, implementation and continuous improvement of employment services;
- c. providing accessible and inclusive co-design processes that enable participation by people with diverse communication and support needs;
- d. establishing transparent mechanisms to demonstrate how stakeholder input has informed decisions; and
- e. supporting ongoing engagement with disability representative organisations to inform continuous improvement and future reform.

10 Recommendation 7 – Accessible Communication

The Alliance supports Inclusion Australia's recommendation to strengthen accessible communication across Australia's future employment services system. Clear, accessible and inclusive communication is fundamental to ensuring Autistic people can understand their options, make informed decisions and participate confidently in employment services.

From an autism perspective, accessible communication extends beyond the use of plain language. Autistic people have diverse communication preferences and information processing styles, and employment services should be sufficiently flexible to respond to those differences.

This may include providing information in written and visual formats, allowing additional processing time, offering supported communication where appropriate, and ensuring participants can engage using communication methods that best meet their individual needs.

Communication should also be consistent throughout the participant journey. Information about eligibility, assessment, mutual obligations, workplace adjustments and available supports should be clear, timely and presented in ways that reduce unnecessary complexity or ambiguity. Participants should not be disadvantaged because important information is inaccessible or difficult to understand.

Accessible communication is equally important for employers and employment service providers. Practical guidance on autism, workplace adjustments, inclusive recruitment practices and effective workplace supports can improve confidence, reduce misconceptions and contribute to more inclusive employment outcomes.

Effective communication is not simply about making information easier to read. It is about ensuring people understand, can act on the information they receive and are able to participate as equal partners in decisions affecting their employment.

Recommendation 7: Accessible Communication

Strengthen accessible communication by:

- a. providing information in a range of accessible formats that respond to individual communication preferences and support needs;
- b. ensuring communication is clear, timely and consistent throughout the participant journey;
- c. embedding supported communication and allowing additional processing time where required;
- d. providing employers and employment service providers with practical guidance on autism, workplace adjustments and inclusive employment practices; and
- e. designing communication processes that enable informed decision-making and meaningful participation.

11 Conclusion

The Alliance welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the *Shaping the Future of Employment Services* consultation and supports the overall direction of reform. We also acknowledge and support the overall direction of Inclusion Australia's submission and offer these autism-specific considerations to strengthen the design and implementation of Australia's future employment services system.

Autistic people have diverse strengths, aspirations and support needs. Employment services that recognise this diversity through accessible, flexible and person-centred approaches will be better placed to support meaningful and sustainable employment outcomes.

The Alliance believes the success of future employment services will not be measured solely by the number of people who obtain employment, but by whether people are supported to obtain, maintain and progress in employment that reflects their strengths, goals and individual circumstances.

By designing employment systems that are flexible, accessible and responsive to the diversity of Autistic people, Australia has an opportunity to create a more inclusive employment system that reflects the principle of *Change the System, Not the Person* and delivers better outcomes for individuals, employers and the broader community.

We welcome an invitation to speak further with DEWR.