

## **POLICY STATEMENT 9**

### **EMPLOYMENT, DISABILITY AND MENTAL ILLNESS**

#### **Background**

Lived Experience Australia believes that all people with a psychiatric disability have a right to employment. This includes the availability of appropriate training and employment opportunities and non-discriminatory work places. Financial disincentives to employment and onerous reporting requirements must also be addressed, such as the impact on an individual's welfare payments when they enter the workforce, and Centrelink's cumbersome business reporting requirements.

Negative community attitudes or a lack of understanding about the impact of mental illness can prevent people gaining employment in the first place, or result in a lack of support when in employment. The very nature of employment means that people with mental illness face many barriers including great anxiety regarding their ability to sustain and fulfil their work commitments. The often episodic nature of psychiatric disability makes it difficult to maintain regular employment. Relapse is often rapid and can be totally disabling, often needing hospitalisation. These periods of hospitalisation and rehabilitation can last many months, or longer, with accompanying and associated disability. It is important that workplaces understand the impact of mental illness, and are able to accommodate relapses, including through the provision of flexible working hours during the working week.

Many consumers are not on DSP, but may be on Newstart or the Personal Support Program (PSP). The PSP is a proven avenue for supporting consumers to move back into and retain employment, and should be expanded to include more consumers that are currently on Newstart.

It is also important that the welfare system is able to provide continuity of financial support for consumers attempting to enter the workplace, or those experiencing relapse when employed. Not all consumers are on a Disability Support Pension (DSP), but if they are, the system can discourage a consumer from trialling employment as their DSP is immediately reviewed.

#### **Policy**

Lived Experience Australia advocates for the following specific measures to support the employment of people with a mental illness and improve their social inclusion.

1. The Disability Support Pension is fundamental to people with a mental illness.
2. Changes to the DSP to provide continuity of financial support for consumers entering employment, to accommodate the episodic and often chronic nature of mental illness.
3. Support consumers in their attempt to engage in meaningful employment.
4. Ongoing support for consumers in seeking employment and after they have commenced employment, until such support is no longer required.

5. Increased financial and other incentives for employers who provide employment to people with a mental illness.
6. Support and education for employers and their employees and employment agencies employing, or seeking to employ, someone with a mental illness.
7. Provision of ongoing support for consumers after they have started employment.
8. Smooth transition processes from welfare support to employment for people with a mental illness.
9. The urgent need to up-skill 'front of office' staff about mental illness is central to attitudes toward people with a mental illness. These organisations include but are not limited to Centrelink, Disability, Job Agencies, Employment services.
10. The information required for staff to successfully engage with people with a mental illness include an understanding of the severity, episodic nature and how it can interfere with employment.
11. Consumers who wish to engage in microbusinesses should receive appropriate support during the first year of establishment including waiver of any reporting, or other requirements, that might diminish the income or profits earned in that first year.
12. All employers Occupational Health and Safety First Aid training requirements should include mandatory training in Mental Health First Aid.

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