

## Disability Employment Reforms Consultation

Family and Community Services (FaCS) have commenced a national consultation process to gain stakeholder feedback into the proposed changes to disability employment services. The Australian government wants to ensure employees with disabilities have good transition arrangements in place, as the disability employment assistance reforms are implemented. The consultations aim to examine available safety net options and are consulting closely with employees with disabilities, employment service providers, families and carers to discuss their concerns and find the best solutions.

One of the outcomes of the October 24 consultation at the Masonic Centre was the recognition that there were few mental health service providers present and another mental health forum has been scheduled for November 2003 at the Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association (PRA).

There are concerns that the proposed changes will affect what are called 'business services' and have enormous impact for mental health consumers. Business services that provide on site employment to people with a disability may now have to prove they are a 'viable business' and if people cannot meet the 'productivity' level the service may be de-funded and the person transferred to 'other appropriate services'.

FaCS reports that the recurring issues at all the sessions have covered:

- the difficulty of effectively communicating with parents and business service employees
- implications for services in rural and remote Australia where no alternative exists
- ageing carers and consumers
- complexity of the issues facing the sector to achieve reform changes, considerable concern about the wages tool, the requirement to pay award based wages and the related issue of the implications of proceedings before the Australian Industrial Relations Commission
- Australian Government and State/Territory government responsibilities and perceived possible 'cost-shifting'
- the financial implications if any people with disabilities choose to move from an employment service to a day service, and
- the case based funding price for business service.

A series of focus groups with employees with disabilities and their families will be held during November, as well as consultation sessions open to the public. Visit: [www.facs.gov.au/disabilityreforms](http://www.facs.gov.au/disabilityreforms) or phone 1800 050 009 for a copy of the consultation paper. Comments can be submitted until 21 November 2003.

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