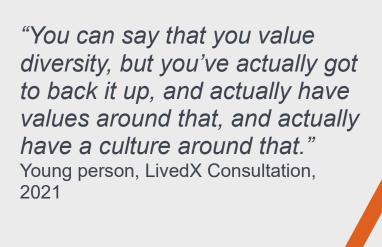
Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA)'s submission to the 2025-26 Jobs and Skills Australia Workplan



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A note on terminology:

Throughout this submission, Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) uses person-first language, e.g., person with disability. However, CYDA recognises many people with disability choose to use identity-first language, e.g., disabled person.

We note that although the cohort we represent is children and young people with disability aged 0 to 25 years, due to this submission being focused on employment we refer to young people with disability only. For the purposes of this submission we consider this cohort to be aged 14 – which represents the average age of first employment across Australia – to 25 years.

Acknowledgements:

Children and Young People with Disability Australia would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Lands on which this report has been written, reviewed and produced, whose cultures and customs have nurtured and continue to nurture this Land since the Dreamtime. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present. This is, was, and always will be Aboriginal Land.



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Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1

Undertake targeted research into the education-to-employment transition for young people with disability that;

- Focuses on identifying and addressing barriers within both the Vocational Education and Training (VET) and university sectors.
- Directly engages young people with disability and their families to inform evidence-based solutions that improve pathways into meaningful employment.

Recommendation 2

Enhance workforce data collection and employer research to provide a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of young people with disability in the labour market. This includes;

 Revising existing employer surveys to assess barriers faced by young job seekers with disability and ensuring workforce insights lead to policy reforms that improve employment outcomes for this cohort.

Recommendation 3

Implement a National Employer Readiness Framework to increase employer confidence and capability in hiring and retaining young people with disability. This initiative should be integrated into workforce planning to ensure young people with disability are included in shaping Australia's future workforce.

Recommendation 4

Work with the tertiary education sector, including VET and universities, to develop a national framework for inclusive education and training pathways. This framework should set clear standards for accessibility, support and reasonable adjustments to ensure young people with disability have equitable access to education and improved employment outcomes.

Recommendation 5

Embed co-design principles in its consultation and research processes by directly involving young people with disability in the design and development of its capacity cohort study on people with disability. Recommended actions to achieve this include;

- Engaging young people with disability in shaping the study's methods and
 questions to ensure their lived experiences and intersectional barriers—such as
 workforce bias related to both youth and disability—are meaningfully
 addressed.
- Partnering with disability-led organisations, including youth advocacy groups, to facilitate inclusive consultation processes.

•	Ensure findings from this research inform JSA's broader workforce and skills planning, guiding policy and program development that better supports young people with disability in transitioning into meaningful employment.

Introduction

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) is the national representative organisation for children and young people with disability aged 0 to 25 years. CYDA has extensive national networks of young people with disability, families and caregivers of children with disability, and advocacy and community organisations.

Our vision is that children and young people with disability in Australia will fully exercise their rights, realise their aspirations and thrive in all communities. We do this by:

- Raising community attitudes and expectations
- Championing initiatives that promote the best start in the early years for children with disability, and their families and caregivers
- Leading social change to transform education systems to be inclusive at all points across life stages
- Advocating for systems that facilitate successful life transitions to adulthood
- Leading innovative initiatives to ensure the sustainability and impact of the organisation and the broader sector.

CYDA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the 2025-26 workplan for Jobs and Skills Australia.

This submission draws on evidence from our previous policy submissions and the lived experiences of our community:

- LivedX 2022 series: Full policy paper Tertiary education and learning
- LivedX 2022 series: Full policy paper Financial security and employment
- CYDA's submission Disability Employment Strategy consultation
- Submission to the consultation of the New Disability Employment Support Model
- Joint submission to the Employment White Paper
- CYDA's submission to the Senate Select Committee on Job Security Young people with disability and job insecurity
- CYDA's submission to the draft Quality Framework for the Disability Employment Services Program

This submission is grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), to which Australia is a signatory, as well as the legislative framework governing disability employment, enshrined in the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA). It is also informed by the **Australian Disability Strategy**, which

outlines national priorities for improving employment outcomes for people with disability.

Article 27 of the CRPD affirms that "States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. States Parties shall safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work, including for those who acquire a disability during the course of employment, by taking appropriate steps, including through legislation¹."

Despite this commitment, people with disability in Australia continue to face significant barriers to both securing and maintaining employment, leaving many excluded from the labour market.

Data demonstrates that young people (aged 15-25) with disability are excluded from education and labour force participation at a much higher rate than their peers without disability. In particular:

- 10.9% of 15-24 year olds with disability had left school by the age of 16 compared to 3.6% of their peers without disability²
- 52% of young people with disability participated in the labour force compared to 72% for their peers without disability
- 25% of young people with disability were unemployed compared to 11% of their peers without disability and
- 24% of young people with disability were employed full time compared to 36% of their peers without disability.³

¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (30 March 2007, New York) [2008], <u>Article 27 – Work and employment</u>

² AIHW. (2020). People with disability in Australia. Available at: Educational attainment (aihw.gov.au)

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024. People with disability in Australia. Available at: <u>Labor force participation</u>

Submission structure

The submission is structured in five areas, corresponding to CYDA's five recommendations and the five outcome areas detailed in the Jobs and Skills Plan 2025-26. Each part leads with our recommendation and is followed by a response to the outcome area from the Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) Consultation Paper.

Outcome area 1 responds to outcome area one of the consultation paper relating to **fostering inclusive participation**.

Outcome area 2 responds to outcome area two of the consultation paper relating to **understanding today's workforce**.

Outcome area 3 responds to outcome area three of the consultation paper relating to shaping Australia's future workforce.

Outcome area 4 responds to outcome area four of the consultation paper relating to optimising pathways and system architecture

Outcome area 5 responds to outcome area five of the consultation paper relating to activating an informed dialogue.

Direct quotes drawn from the data collected are indented from main text, italicised and in inverted commas, anonymised (or pseudonyms used) to protect privacy and minimally modified for brevity and/or clarity.



Outcome area 1: Fostering inclusive participation

"Our goal is to assist all people to reach their individual and collective potential in an inclusive labour market. We want to support communities to thrive by delivering evidence informed solutions to removing barriers that inhibit participation and by encouraging broader opportunities." (Jobs and Skills Australia – Strategic Plan 2024-2027)

Recommendation 1 – Undertake targeted research into the education-toemployment transition for young people with disability that:

- Focuses on identifying and addressing barriers within both the Vocational Education and Training (VET) and university sectors.
- Directly engages young people with disability and their families to inform evidence-based solutions that improve pathways into meaningful employment.

Rationale

Despite the aspirational goal for fostering inclusive participation, detailed in the JSA Strategic plan (2024-27), the listed priorities for Outcome 1 in the JSA workplan 2025-26, do not meaningfully address inclusion for people with disability, particularly young people.

- Gaps in education pathways: As shown in the JSA VET workforce study young people with disability are more likely to access VET than university, with 27.1% holding a Certificate III/IV compared to 20.6% of the general population, while only 18.4% attain a Bachelor's degree or higher compared to 32.8% of the general population⁴. CYDA recommends that JSA should explore the structural and systemic reasons behind this disparity.
- Barriers to higher education: According to young people with disability, universities continue to create barriers for them, including inadequate

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⁴ https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/studies/vet-workforce-study

accommodations, ableist cultures, and low expectations⁵. The Universities Accord (listed as part of JSA operating environment) does not sufficiently address inclusion for young people with disability—JSA has an opportunity to build on this work and propose solutions that improve accessibility and inclusion in tertiary education.

• Stronger data and accountability: JSA should leverage its proposed cohort studies on the participation of Australians with disability in the workforce to ensure young people with disability are a distinct focus. The Outcomes Framework of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 should guide the development of meaningful targets and actions that improve education and employment pathways for young people with disability. CYDA also recommends that JSA include workplaces as well as employee cohorts in 'capacity studies' which are listed as an activity in outcome area of the JSA Strategic Plan.

By prioritising this research and embedding young people's voices in policy development, JSA can help create a more inclusive and equitable labour market.

⁵ https://cyda.org.au/livedx-2022-series-full-policy-paper-tertiary-education-and-learning/

Outcome area 2: Understanding today's workforce

"A contemporary skilled workforce is critical for delivering for Australia today, and for our future tomorrow. We provide solid and broad evidence and advice to better understand the current workforce. This contributes to addressing current skills and labour market needs." (Jobs and Skills Australia – Strategic Plan 2024-2027)

Recommendation 2

JSA should enhance its workforce data collection and employer research to provide a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of young people with disability in the labour market. This includes revising existing employer surveys to assess barriers faced by young job seekers with disability and ensuring workforce insights lead to policy reforms that improve employment outcomes for this cohort.

Actions to achieve this:

- Strengthen data collection on young people with disability: Expand JSA's workforce research to include more granular, disability-specific data on unemployment, underemployment and job retention rates for young people with disability.
- Review and improve the recruitment experiences and outlook survey: Revise survey measures to specifically assess employer attitudes, recruitment practices and workplace accessibility for young people with disability. This should include evaluating:
 - The accessibility of job application and interview processes.
 - How employer hiring criteria (e.g., "cultural fit," "attitude,"
 "experience") create barriers for young job seekers with disability.
 - The extent to which reasonable adjustments are offered at different hiring stages.
- Consult with disability and employment organisations: Work with
 Disability Representative Organisations (DROs) and employment services
 to gain direct insights into the challenges young people with disability
 face in securing and maintaining work.
- Address long-term labour market scarring: Ensure policies account for the long-term employment impacts of early-career disadvantage for young people with disability, who face compounded barriers due to both their age and systemic discrimination in hiring.

Rationale

- Young people with disability experience higher unemployment rates:
 Labour market data consistently shows that young people with disability face higher unemployment and lower workforce participation rates compared to their non-disabled peers⁶. Improving data collection on this cohort is essential for improving understanding of the current workforce and developing targeted solutions.
- Employer hiring practices create systemic barriers: JSA's Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey highlights key employer hiring criteria—such as "relevant work experience," "attitude," "cultural fit," and "qualifications"—which can disproportionately disadvantage young job seekers with disability. Without targeted interventions, these hiring norms will continue to exclude this group.
- Job application and interview processes remain inaccessible: Many young
 people with disability face barriers at every stage of recruitment, from
 inaccessible job postings to interview processes that fail to accommodate
 diverse needs. Research must explore how these processes can be made
 more inclusive and equitable.
- Young workers are more vulnerable during economic downturns: Economic downturns disproportionately impact young workers, with employers often reluctant to hire or retain them due to perceived lower experience and skill levels⁷. For young people with disability, this effect is even more severe due to existing systemic discrimination in hiring. According to the *Productivity Commission*, early-career employment barriers can lead to long-term "scarring" effects on future job stability and earnings⁸.
- Aligning with disability employment policy priorities: Insights gained from improved data collection should inform broader government reforms under the New Disability Employment Support Model and Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031, ensuring employment programs are evidence-based and address the specific barriers faced by young people with disability.

By strengthening workforce research and employer engagement, JSA can **build a clearer**, **evidence-based understanding of the challenges young people with disability face in the labour market**. This will ensure workforce policies and programs are informed by real-world data, leading to more inclusive and effective employment solutions.

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024. People with disability in Australia. Available at: <u>Labor force</u> participation

⁷ Dhillon, Z., & Cassidy, N. (2018). *Labour market outcomes for younger people*. Available at <u>Labour Market</u> Outcomes for Younger People | Bulletin – June Quarter 2018 | RBA

⁸ de Fontenay, C., Lampe, B., Nugent, J. and Jomini, P. (2020). *Climbing the jobs ladder slower: Young people in a weak labour market.* Available at https://www.pc.gov.au/research/supporting/jobs-ladder.pdf

Outcome area 3: Shaping Australia's future workforce

"Our labour market is dynamic. A skilled and adaptable workforce is needed to prepare for and maximise the opportunities from economic adjustments. We provide evidence and advice to shape policy and programs to ensure an adequately skilled and productive workforce into the future." (Jobs and Skills Australia – Strategic Plan 2024-2027)

Recommendation 3: JSA should implement a National Employer Readiness Framework to increase employer confidence and capability in hiring and retaining young people with disability. This initiative should be integrated into workforce planning to ensure young people with disability are included in shaping Australia's future workforce

Actions to achieve this:

- Expand employer capacity-building initiatives: Develop targeted resources, training, and incentives to support employers in hiring and retaining young people with disability, focusing on leadership commitment and career progression opportunities.
- Strengthen employment pathways for young people with disability: Collaborate with career services, universities and training providers to ensure job placement programs connect young people with disability to meaningful employment opportunities aligned with their qualifications and aspirations, rather than defaulting to low-paid or part-time roles.
- **Promote inclusive workplace design:** Provide guidance and support for businesses to create physically and digitally accessible workplaces to eliminate employment barriers, such as inaccessible office spaces.
- Embed leadership and career progression pathways: Encourage businesses to implement disability leadership programs that create clear pathways for career advancement, ensuring young people with disability have opportunities to grow within their industries.
- Align with the Australian Disability Strategy: Ensure workforce policies and programs align with the Employment and Financial Security outcome of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031 by setting measurable targets to improve employment outcomes for young people with disability.

Rationale

- **Economic Benefits:** Increasing employment participation among people with disability can substantially boost the economy. Research indicates that decreasing the gap in labour participation rates between people with and without disability by one-third could result in a cumulative \$43 billion increase in Australia's GDP over a decade⁹.
- **Improved mental health outcomes:** For people with disability, working in a job that aligns with their skills and needs can improve mental health. Conversely, underemployment or unemployment is associated with poorer mental health outcomes¹⁰.
- Current employer readiness is improving, but more action is needed:
 According to the AIHW, 30% of employers in 2022 reported being more
 prepared to hire a person with disability than they were a year earlier¹¹. JSA has
 the opportunity to accelerate this momentum by embedding employer readiness
 initiatives into workforce planning.
- Young people with disability are being excluded from meaningful employment: Career services and job placement programs often fail to connect young people with disability to professional and skilled roles. As a young person from CYDA's LivedX 2021 Consultation shared:

"[Career services] just didn't have contacts for clinical professional roles. They wanted to offer sort-of part-time work, or they wanted to offer things at the supermarket and things like that, which are fantastic avenues but coming out of my Masters, I wanted full-time permanent employment in my field." (LivedX 2021 Consultation participant)

• Workplace inaccessibility is a major barrier to employment: Many workplaces remain physically inaccessible, excluding young people with disability from job opportunities. One young person described:

"I was denied a job because the physical space did not fit my wheelchair." (LivedX 2021 Consultation participant)

Addressing workplace accessibility must be a priority in workforce planning.

 Disability leadership is critical for sustainable inclusion: Ensuring that young people with disability can progress into leadership roles will help shift

⁹ The economic and business benefits of employing people with disability, Human Rights.gov.au, Factsheet (2021)

¹⁰ Getting and keeping a job is important for mental health, Article, Pursuit University of Melbourne, July 2024

¹¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) <u>People with disability in Australia</u>, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 07 March 2025.

workplace cultures and drive long-term change. As one young person highlighted:

"To ensure that it's meaningful employment, there needs to be a commitment to disabled leadership at all levels of the organisation, not just casual contractors. There needs to be the ability for disabled people to move up and take on more responsibility." (LivedX 2021 Consultation participant)

Alignment with national priorities: Workforce policies should actively
contribute to Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031, ensuring that
employment programs are designed with clear, measurable targets to increase
labour market participation and career progression for young people with
disability.

By embedding employer readiness, strengthening pathways, and addressing systemic barriers, JSA can play a leading role in shaping a more inclusive and skilled workforce that maximises the contributions of young people with disability.

Outcome area 4: Optimising pathways and system architecture

"A well-functioning national skills system is fundamental for a delivering the skills Australia needs today and into the future. We aim to provide analysis and advice on a more cohesive education and training system that is well defined, universally accessible, equitable, easy for students to navigate and responsive to meet the current and emerging needs of industry and society." (Jobs and Skills Australia – Strategic Plan 2024-2027)

Recommendation 4: JSA should work with the tertiary education sector, including VET and universities, to develop a national framework for **inclusive** education and training pathways. This framework should set clear standards for accessibility, support, and reasonable adjustments to ensure young people with disability have equitable access to education and improved employment outcomes.

Actions to achieve this:

- Establish national accessibility standards: Work with education providers to
 create consistent, enforceable accessibility standards for course design,
 campus facilities, and learning materials to ensure students with disability can
 freely choose their field of study, rather than making decisions based on
 accessibility constraints.
- Improve accountability for reasonable adjustments: Ensure education providers uphold their obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act* and *Disability Standards for Education* by introducing independent oversight and clear accountability measures to prevent barriers to participation.
- Increase funding for educational supports: Advocate for targeted funding to guarantee that students with disability receive necessary supports, such as assistive technology, note-taking services, and specialised learning accommodations, without excessive personal financial burden.
- Address employment barriers for graduates with disability: Conduct a
 dedicated study to identify why graduates with disability face significantly worse
 employment outcomes compared to their peers and develop specific strategies
 to improve job placements and career progression.
- Transform to a quality education system by phasing out segregated employment pathways: Ensure that post-secondary education and training do not lead to segregated, lower-paid employment by embedding inclusive employment outcomes within skills system reforms.

Rationale

- Systemic exclusion from higher education and employment: Young people
 with disability face significant structural barriers in both the VET and university
 sectors. Inaccessible courses, inadequate accommodations, and a lack of
 institutional support limit their ability to enter and succeed in tertiary education,
 restricting their career options.
- Disproportionate employment outcomes: Students with disability who do complete tertiary education are still far less likely to secure meaningful employment compared to their peers. VET graduates with disability are 1.5 times more likely to report no improvement in employment status after training¹², and twice as likely to remain unemployed compared to those without disability. Similarly, graduates with disability from undergraduate and postgraduate courses are 1.5 to 2 times more likely to be unemployed than their peers¹³.
- Limited course and campus choices: Accessibility barriers force young people with disability to select courses and campuses based on what is manageable, rather than their actual interests and aspirations. One young person from CYDA's LivedX Consultations (2021) shared:

"I had to choose a campus largely due to accessibility purposes and picked my major based on the lack of travel or movement needed as an IT personnel, even if I don't really like the subject myself."

- Inconsistent and insufficient accommodations: The availability and quality of reasonable adjustments in education depends largely on the skills and processes of individual staff members, leaving students with disability without consistent support. Despite the Disability Discrimination Act (Cth) and the accompanying Disability Standards of Education requiring providers to take reasonable steps to enable the student with disability to participate in education on the same basis as a student without disability, we know that many students' rights are not being upheld. The system places the onus on students to understand their rights, fund assessments, self-advocate, and challenge discrimination, creating additional barriers to participation.
- Aligning with national policy goals: The Universities Accord Final Report¹⁴,
 has acknowledged the need for stronger inclusion measures, but its targets
 remain inadequate. JSA has an opportunity to lead systemic reform by ensuring

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¹² VET graduates with disability less likely (37%) to report improved employment status after training than those without disability (58%) and less likely (45%) to be employed after training than those without disability (71%); AIHW. (2020). People with disability in Australia. Available at: Educational attainment (aihw.gov.au)
¹³ Graduates from: undergraduate courses who reported they had disability (79%) were less likely than those without disability (86%) to be employed, postgraduate coursework courses who reported disability (85%) were less likely than those without disability (92%) to be employed. Available at: Educational attainment (aihw.gov.au)
¹⁴ Australian Universities Accord Final Report, February, 2024

that the education system delivers equitable pathways into high-quality employment for young people with disability.

By embedding accessibility and equity in Australia's skills and education system, JSA can ensure that young people with disability have **genuine choice**, **opportunity**, **and fair access to skilled employment** in the future workforce.

Outcome area 5: Activating an informed dialogue

"Government, industry, business, unions and individuals all have a role in developing and delivering a skilled workforce. JSA is placed to guide an informed conversation about current and future workforce and skills needs and opportunities. Facilitating a well- informed, evidenced-based, dialogue is essential, across tripartite partners and broader stakeholders, to help influence change through effective decision making by policy makers, business leaders, workers and unions, education providers and learners." (Jobs and Skills Australia – Strategic Plan 2024-2027)

Recommendation 5: JSA should embed co-design principles in its consultation and research processes by directly involving young people with disability in the design and development of its capacity cohort study on people with disability. Recommended actions to achieve this include;

- Engaging young people with disability in shaping the study's methods and questions to ensure their lived experiences and intersectional barriers such as workforce bias related to both youth and disability—are meaningfully addressed.
- Partnering with disability-led organisations, including youth advocacy groups, to facilitate inclusive consultation processes.
- Ensuring findings from this research inform JSA's broader workforce and skills planning, guiding policy and program development that better supports young people with disability in transitioning into meaningful employment.

Rationale

Young people with disability face unique and intersecting barriers in accessing employment, yet their perspectives are often overlooked in workforce planning and policy development. JSA has a key role in ensuring that discussions about Australia's workforce and skills needs are informed by those with lived experience.

- Embedding Co-Design for Meaningful Inclusion: Research and policy initiatives that fail to involve people with disability in their design risk reinforcing systemic barriers. Co-design ensures that workforce planning reflects the real experiences and challenges young people with disability face, leading to more effective and inclusive solutions.
- Addressing Intersectional Barriers: Young people with disability experience compounded discrimination—not only due to ableist attitudes but also due to workforce bias against young workers. Without targeted research and dialogue, their specific challenges remain invisible in national workforce planning.

- Building an Evidence Base for Change: A well-designed capacity cohort study, developed in collaboration with young people with disability, will generate robust data to inform policy and program development. This evidence can help drive reforms that remove barriers to employment and create pathways for young people with disability to participate in meaningful work.
- Strengthening Inclusive Workforce Planning: JSA's Strategic Plan highlights
 the importance of informed dialogue across government, industry, business,
 unions, and individuals. Ensuring young people with disability are actively
 included in this dialogue will lead to more equitable and sustainable workforce
 policies.

By embedding co-design principles and prioritising lived experience, JSA can play a leading role in shifting workforce planning towards genuine inclusion and opportunity for young people with disability.

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