

Vision Australia Submission

**Employment White Paper – Terms of Reference**

Submission to: Employment Taskforce, Treasury

Date: 9 November 2022

Submission approved by: Chris Edwards, Manager Government Relations and Advocacy, NDIS and Aged Care, Vision Australia

Submission

Vision Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Employment Taskforce in relation to the Terms of Reference relevant to the Employment White Paper. The focus of our submission is disability employment.

The unemployment rate for people with disability in Australia is almost double the rate of people without disability. Finding and maintaining a job is the most significant challenge facing Australians who are blind or have low vision. Those with blindness and low vision represent the highest level of unemployment across all disability groups. Research conducted by Vision Australia in 2018 with the CNIB Foundation (Canada) and the Blind Foundation of New Zealand, found that only 24% of Australians who are blind or have low vision are in full-time employment. This figure was lower than both Canada and New Zealand.

The Terms of Reference currently only mention disability employment in Item 5, noting that the White Paper will cover:

*“Labour force participation, labour supply and improving employment opportunities.*

*5.1 …*

*5.2 Improving labour market outcomes for those who face challenges in employment, including First Nations people, those who live in rural and remote areas, younger and older Australians, people with disability, and those who may experience discrimination.*

*5.3 …*

*5.4 …”*

It is our submission that the Terms of Reference should express an improvement in labour market outcomes for people with disability as a separate and distinguishable area of coverage. Disability employment in Australia is at stagnant and unacceptable levels. Whilst other sectors of the workforce have had ebbs and flows in employment levels, the employment of people with disability has remained consistently poor over the last 20 years.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Categorising disability employment separately is necessary to focus more attention in this area, and ensure that satisfactory and improved employment outcomes are achieved, including within the blindness and low vision cohort. In addition, this change would reflect current Government priorities and community expectations, given that employment and financial security is a specific outcome area in Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021-2031, as well as a key focus area for the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

About Vision Australia

Vision Australia is the largest national provider of services to people who are blind or have low vision in Australia. We are formed through the merger of several of Australia’s most respected and experienced blindness and low vision agencies, celebrating our 150th year of operation in 2017.

Our vision is that people who are blind or have low vision will increasingly be able to choose to participate fully in every facet of community life. To help realise this goal, we provide high-quality services to the community of people who are blind, have low vision or have a print disability, and their families. Vision Australia service delivery areas include:

* Registered provider of specialist supports for the NDIS and My Aged Care Aids and Equipment;
* Assistive/Adaptive Technology training and support;
* Seeing Eye Dogs;
* National library services, early childhood and education services and Feelix Library for 0-7 year olds;
* Employment services;
* Production of alternate formats;
* Vision Australia Radio network including a national partnership with Radio for the Print Handicapped;
* NSW Spectacles Program; and
* Government advocacy and engagement.

We work collaboratively with governments, businesses and the community to eliminate the barriers our clients face in making life choices and including fully exercising their rights as Australian citizens. Vision Australia has unrivalled knowledge and experience through constant interaction with clients and their families, of whom we provide services to more than 26,000 people each year, and also through the direct involvement of people who are blind or have low vision at all levels of our organisation.

Vision Australia is well placed to advise governments, business and the community on challenges faced by people who are blind or have low vision as well as they support they require to fully participating in community life.

We have a vibrant Client Reference Group, comprising of people with lived experience who are representing the voice and needs of clients of our organisation to the board and management.

Vision Australia is also a significant employer of people who are blind or have low vision, with 15% of total staff having vision impairment. Vision Australia also has a Memorandum of Understanding with, and provides funds to, Blind Citizens Australia, to strengthen the voice of the blind community.

1. 1n 1998, the labour force participation rate for people with disability was 46.5% (ABS, Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 1998)

   In 2018, the labour force participation rate for people with disability was 53.4% (ABS, Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia, Summary of Findings, 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)