

NOVEMBER 2019

# Chair Chat



## Employment Opportunities in the Disability Sector

In November 2017, an [edition](#) of this article outlined the issues and challenges involved with employment opportunities within the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), namely the development of an adequate workforce and viable employment prospects for all staff. Over the past two years this situation has intensified.

Information from various sources informs Nulsen Group that:

- In Western Australia the number of people living with disabilities receiving individualised funding and services will increase from about 34,600 in June 2019 to 47,941 by June 2023. Therefore, an additional 13,341 new people living with disabilities will require services and ongoing support (Bilateral Agreement, January 2017).
- Disability funding will increase from \$1.26 billion in June 2019 to over \$2.0 billion per annum by June 2023 (Disability Services: Annual Report 2018/19).
- Total economic growth in WA related to disability services will virtually double by June 2023. Community based services including the disability sector is the third fastest growth industry in this state (West Australian, 20 February 2019).
- Employment, both direct and indirect, will increase to well over 20,000 full-time positions.
- Across the whole of Australia, the disability sector workforce is increasing at 3.3% per quarter, whereas the general workforce is increasing at 0.6% per quarter.
- Over the next two to three years, the Productivity Commission estimates that one in five new jobs in Australia will be created within

the disability sector. The only other sector to demonstrate this level of growth will be the renewable energy sector.

It will be evident from the above information that this significant growth over a short period has placed the disability sector and the service providers within it under considerable strain.

Hence, the need to educate, recruit and retain high quality, well-trained personnel during this era of high growth.

There is an obvious need to build sector capacity and capability, as there are projected shortages in direct care Support Workers as well as all therapy and allied health staff. There will be a number of implications for employers who operate in this extremely competitive labour market. Employers will need to recruit more widely and increase job flexibility to respond to the different needs and preferences of the participants and consequently, the direct care staff members. High quality, well-trained staff becomes the most valuable resource in this type of elevated growth environment.

How can the disability sector respond to the increase in demand for high quality staff? Some commentators have suggested that immigration policies may need to modify to attract additional qualified immigrants of working age into Australia. Others have suggested an information and awareness campaign amongst school leavers in order to outline the future opportunities within the disability sector. A combination of approaches may be required.

To assist with the skills shortage and invest in the workforce, the State Labor Government has reduced TAFE fees by over 50 percent in a number of courses, including Certificate IV in Disability Services. Concession fees are available to people under the age of 24 as well as some reductions for

non-concession students. Nulsen's Workforce Development team (initial contact 6253 4700) will be able to assist you with any queries you may have. With the increased complexity in the disability sector, Nulsen Group is looking to adapt its recruitment and training processes to develop a more specialised workforce. This is demonstrated by the need for sub-skills (e.g. high level medical support) to provide the best quality of direct care to individuals we support. The recruitment process will be tailored to better recognise these specialised skill sets and better utilise them within the organisation. Support staff are also provided with more specialised learning and development opportunities to better equip them for their roles. Nulsen Group will take every opportunity to offer Support Workers permanent contracts. Implementing this approach provides Support Workers with stable and secure employment where they can be confident in the rostered hours they are able to work week to week. This will also lead to better outcomes for the individuals we support as they have a consistent workforce with whom they can build trusting relationships. Nulsen Group can envision a future working environment where well-trained employees interact with universally designed housing, combined with fixed and mobile assistive technologies in order to encourage the maximum amount of independence and community inclusion for the people we support. This will assist to provide a challenging and rewarding career for all employees.