

**JOB CAPACITY ASSESSMENTS: AUSTRALIA'S EFFORTS TO ASSESS
CAPACITY TO WORK**

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Descriptor:

This paper provides analysis of the Australian Federal Government's efforts to transform a passive disability support system into active labour market support.

Topic Track:

The State and Disability Management: Lessons learnt from Government Initiatives and Reforms: Government Laws and Policy.

Extended Abstract

The Job Capacity Assessment process was first introduced in 2006 by the Australian Federal Government, as a step in the evolution to change the assessment from a diagnosis-based approach to one based on work capacity.

Diagnosis is not a predictor of work capacity, nor does it predict employment duration. Consequently, the Australian Government introduced an assessment process which focuses on function and capacity as a way of streaming people into appropriate employment services and employment programs.

In its 2007 Four Countries report, the OECD described Australia's new comprehensive Job Capacity Assessment as a positive step towards an integrated assessment aimed at earlier intervention, and the last step in the shift from a medical to a functional view of disability.

Job Capacity Assessments, which were introduced in 2006, focus on identifying people's capacity to work and any barriers or impediments that prevent them from getting a job. This is a more comprehensive approach than in the other countries.

Source: OECD, Sickness, Disability and Work: Vol 2 Australia, Luxembourg, Spain and the United Kingdom,: Breaking the barriers, 2007

To facilitate early intervention, Job Capacity Assessments are completed along the life continuum of receiving benefits; therefore assessments are completed for customers in the following circumstances:

1. claim for Disability Support Pension or review of Disability Support Pension;
2. receiving unemployment benefits and applying for an exception to job seek for greater 13 weeks due to illness;

3. a medical condition or disability that impacts on their ability to work;
4. a significant change in circumstances, such as new medical evidence, homelessness; and
5. Centrelink screening identifies significant barriers to work e.g. drug and alcohol.

The current Job Capacity Assessment process is a face-to-face assessment completed by a range of health professionals. The assessment takes into account medical information from the customer's doctor and any other relevant information from the customer and other practitioners, such as mental health workers and employment service providers. This information, combined with an assessment of vocational and non-vocational barriers to work, is used to determine the following:

1. the job seeker's current capacity to work in band-widths as required by legislation (e.g. under 15 hours a week, over 30 hours a week);
2. the job seeker's future capacity to work with the appropriate intervention;
3. referral to appropriate employment and support services;
4. referral to any appropriate short term allied health professional services that may assist to resolve current barriers, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or pain management; and
5. where appropriate, eligibility for Disability Support Pension, reductions or exemptions from activity-test requirements.

Early intervention is being achieved with all assessments being completed within the set kpi timeframes.

Around 65% of all customers assessed have multiple medical conditions, about half have mental health conditions, and of those with anxiety or depression, 72% have another medical condition which is usually physical. Hence it is important that assessors work as a multidisciplinary team and can access appropriate advice and medical evidence.

To ensure that assessors have the necessary support and training, the consistent and comprehensive approach to training includes:

1. allied health professional qualifications;
2. in-house training by the provider and online training by the Australian Government;
3. special training modules developed with stakeholder groups, including on assisting people with mental illness, who are Deaf or hearing-impaired, parents with caring responsibilities; and people with other special needs.

This ensures that assessors have a breadth of knowledge to provide a fully evidenced report.

To deliver the second principle of rapid connection, assessors need excellent communication, not just with the customer, but also with employment service

providers, Centrelink and other health practitioners. The Job Capacity Assessor is a partner in ensuring the best outcome for the customer.

The Australian Government established a framework of Assessments and streaming called Job Capacity Assessments to ensure that work capacity not diagnosis is at the heart of ensuring that customers with a disability are one step closer to gaining work.

This paper analyses the results of the Job Capacity Assessments since 2006. It assesses how this initiative is evolving and its success in connecting people into the correct employment service to remediate barriers to work. Recommendations for the future of Job Capacity Assessments are made and linked to International Disability Management Best Practice.

OECD (2007) *Sickness, Disability and Work: Breaking the Barriers, Vol 2: Australia, Luxembourg, Spain and the United Kingdom*, OECD, Paris.

Australian Government (2008). *Job Capacity Assessment Review Summary Paper*.