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**BRIDGING THE GAP: WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE SOCIAL  
INCLUSION AND EMPLOYMENT PARTICIPATION**

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Management of mental health conditions, particularly acute and severe psychiatric disorders within the community necessitates collaboration between providers of mental health and disability management services. In Australia, Federal and State jurisdictions apply to different parts of the health care sector which can result in gaps in services. The new Disability Employment Services<sup>1</sup>, that commenced 2010, aim to increase access to individually tailored disability employment services and allow for greater support to employers to meet the needs of people with a disability. It also acknowledges the importance of early intervention by increasing opportunities for services to work directly with schools, hospitals and community organisations.

CRS Australia is the primary provider of disability employment services in Australia. CRS Australia has a network of over 170 offices in metropolitan, regional and remote locations and assists over 60,000 people with a disability, injury or health condition each year. It delivers services across the boundaries of insurer funded workers compensation, employer funded injury prevention and government funded disability employment services. An important part of CRS Australia's work is to develop and evaluate innovative projects that promote social inclusion and remove barriers to employment for people with disabilities.

This presentation describes CRS Australia's involvement in two collaborative mental health projects focused specifically on people with a psychiatric illness. In Victoria, a cooperative project arose between a local hospital and CRS Australia to engage a group of adults with schizophrenia to improve their social participation and reduce their dependence upon personal, family and community resources. CRS Australia

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<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *The Future of Disability Employment Services in Australia Discussion Paper*, December 2008.

staff provided tailored case management services and co-ordinated activities that complimented those provided by the mental health service. The project also provided consultation-liaison meetings with clients and staff that broadened the focus of the mental health care and improved clients' ability to live independently.

The second project is run in conjunction with the Queensland Centre for Mental Health Research, the Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services and CRS Australia. The Integrated Employment Program (IEP) aims to increase the number of people with a psychotic disorder obtaining employment. In the IEP project the clinical management of the illness and social case management are provided by the mental health service with CRS Australia providing an employment focus only.

The projects demonstrate the value of collaboration through raising primary health care professionals' awareness of the social and employment participation needs of people with psychiatric illness. This enables the clients to access more comprehensive mental health and social participation interventions. Through a shared awareness of service roles and responsibilities, the two agencies were better able to identify clinical pathways and points at which clients were most likely to benefit from accessing additional services and interventions. In turn this leads to improvements in the two agencies' ability to expand the availability and effectiveness of services to people with psychiatric illness.