

Submission to the Disability Worker Registration Scheme

February 2020

Submitted to:
Disability Worker Registration – Board of Victoria
February 2020

Overview

AMES Australia provides this submission to the Disability Worker Registration Board of Victoria.

AMES is a statutory authority of the Victorian Government and provides a comprehensive range of settlement services to support newly arrived migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Victoria. AMES also works with the community, business and Government to develop sustainable and effective settlement solutions for the whole Victorian community. AMES' evidence-based *Settlement Framework for Social and Economic Participation* addresses successful settlement of newly arrived migrants and refugees through four key domains: Employment, Education, Health and Wellbeing, and Safety and Security.

AMES experience lies in working with migrants and refugees from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and directly, or indirectly, their families. This submission draws on our extensive experience working alongside CALD communities within the disability space. AMES successfully received an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Grant from DHHS with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Awareness Project starting in November 2018. The project was designed to provide CALD people with disability with information in their first languages about how to access disability support services. AMES has achieved this through the recruitment of Community Champions who deliver information sessions to their communities. We have 12 Community Champions from seven target communities - Iraqi, Afghan, Syrian, Somali, Afghan, Chin and Karen. Together they speak over 20 languages. By the end of the project, the Community Champions had delivered over 60 information sessions to 1,050 community members.

More recently, AMES has been running two Peer Support Groups for the Afghan community in the South East of Melbourne and the South Sudanese community in the West for people with a lived experience of disability or their carers. Two Community Champions facilitate the peer support groups and the sessions are conducted in first language. The project builds knowledge and self-advocacy skills of participants through shared lived experience, learning from each other and group activities. Participants have responded positively as to their increased knowledge and awareness in relation to the NDIS.

Disability Worker Registration Scheme

AMES Australia recognises the importance of a scheme to regulate disability workers. However, this scheme needs to be effectively managed, as CALD communities could potentially be excluded from employment in the disability workforce. Concerns about the scheme are listed below followed by recommendations.

Registering the CALD disability work force

- An opt-in system could lead to the expectation that all people working in the disability sector need to be registered to be able to find employment with an organisation or as a self-employee.
- A publicly available register could be a deterrent for some CALD groups especially those from refugee backgrounds who could have fears or concerns around having their name and details made publicly available.

- Attaching a cost to the registration within the Disability Worker Regulation Scheme may prevent the CALD work force from registering, as many people may not be able to afford the upfront costs.

Recommendation 1: *The cost of registering needs to be affordable for all communities. Consider offering a criteria based subsidy to ensure access by all.*

- Information about the scheme needs to be appropriate and relevant to ensure that CALD communities are reached. Without a communications strategy CALD communities may not know about the introduction of the scheme and therefore not register.

Recommendation 2: *Ensure that there is a culturally appropriate communication strategy about the scheme. All information including the Code of Conduct needs to be available in a variety of languages and as simplified versions. This will ensure that all those who work in the disability sector are able to access relevant information. The communication strategy needs to include methods to target the CALD workforce.*

Language skills

- The ability to speak other languages is an asset to both the wider disability sector and for clients. It creates a more diverse workforce that can support and provide services to people with a disability in their first language or languages other than English.
- A requirement to test or have a certain level of English could deter CALD communities from applying for registration. Language skills are not static and are often improved over time, especially when working in an environment where English is the commonly used language.
- Language testing may result in a less diverse workforce in the disability sector. Language requirement should be self-declared, including any other language other than English.

Recommendation 3: *Recognise that functional English is not essential for all roles in the disability workforce.*

Recommendation 4: *Language testing should be dependent on the specific role.*

Professional development

- AMES community consultations indicate that there is a lack of culturally appropriate and first language resources with limited staff awareness of cultural understandings of disability and cultural preferences. Communities further identified a lack of access to interpreters as a barrier for CALD communities fully utilising disability services.

Recommendation 5: *Professional development should include cultural competency training for those working with CALD groups. Training material may include guidance on how to work with interpreters, translators and bicultural workers.*