

Reframing work, welfare and disability: a research report

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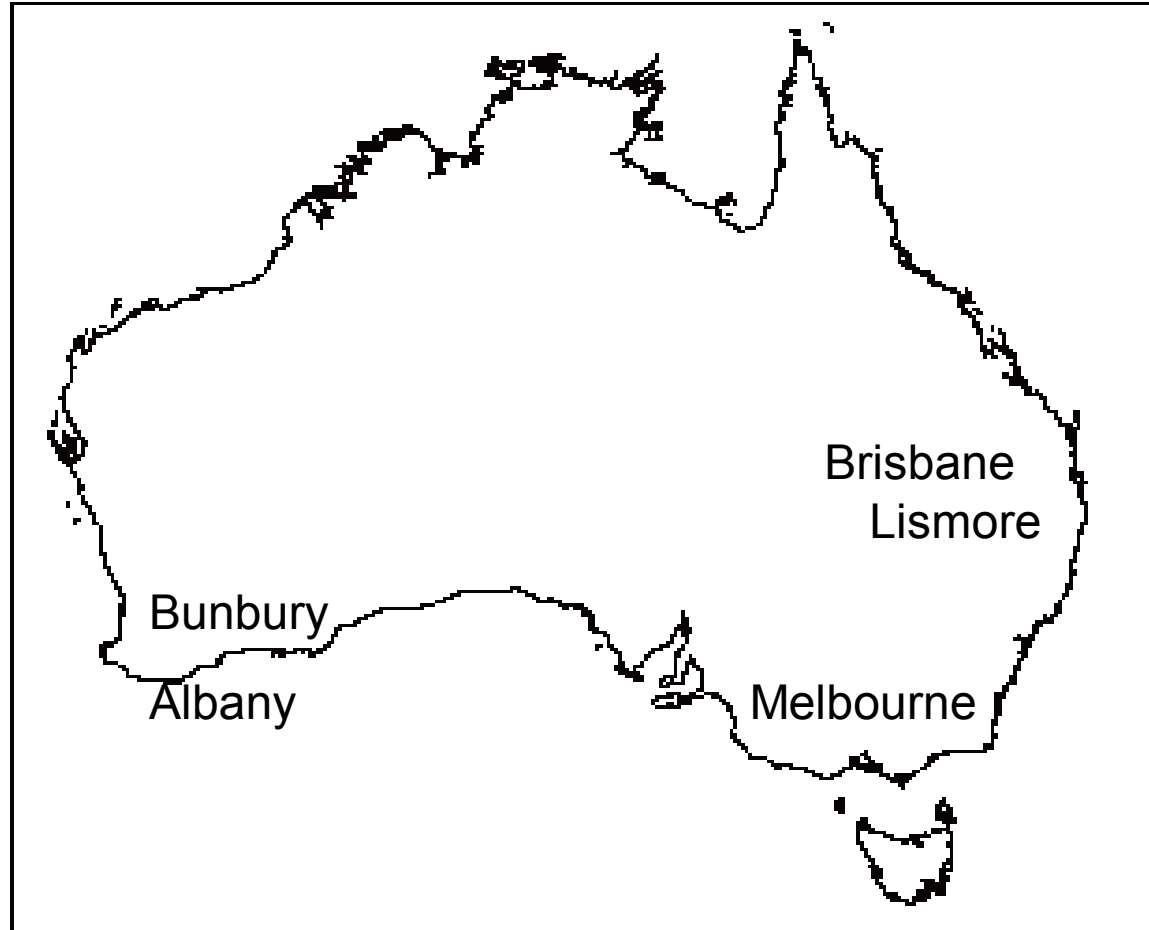
Overview

1. The changing policy context
2. Selective findings on barriers and facilitators to employment
3. Implications of research for the social inclusion policy agenda.
4. Ongoing ethical tensions

Research Project Aims

- Aim to provide a qualitative evaluation of how the 2006 welfare to work policy changes were impacting on clients and providers.
- Aim to capture work - life transitions. 2 rounds of interviews spaced 12-15 months apart. 2007 and 2008. 80 research participants in total, range of disabilities. 15 employment consultants interviewed.
- Research aim to provide perceptions of success and failure (barriers). A lot of published research misses *how* and *why* people with disabilities experience success and failure in the labour market.
- Aim is to analyse the practical and ethical issues associated with extending 'work first' policies.

Research locations



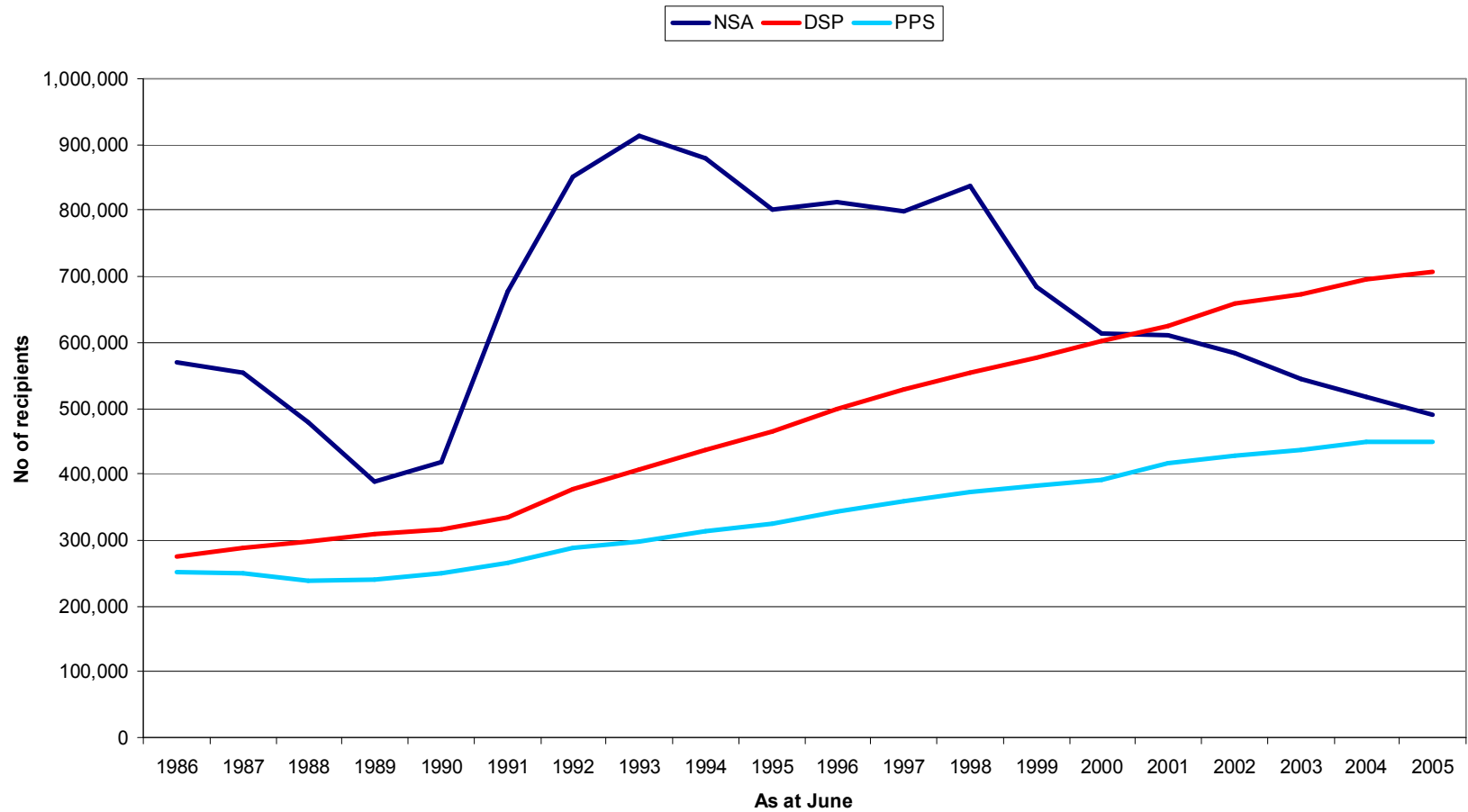
The context of research

- Australia, like other OECD countries, trying to increase labour market participation across the board.
- Numerous studies that have promoted ways to increase labour market integration of people with disabilities.
 - Job monitoring on representation of people with disabilities in all work environments (Roulstone and Warren, 2006)
 - Affirmative action (Raskin, 1994)
 - Job coaching (supportive employment) (Hoekstra, et al, 2004)
 - Social capital development to build social networks to overcome employment difficulties (Potts, 2005).
 - Customised employment (Griffin et al, 2009)
- Many of these policy prescriptions often miss actual experiences. Paucity of scholarship on perspectives of people with disabilities attempting to integrate into labour markets.

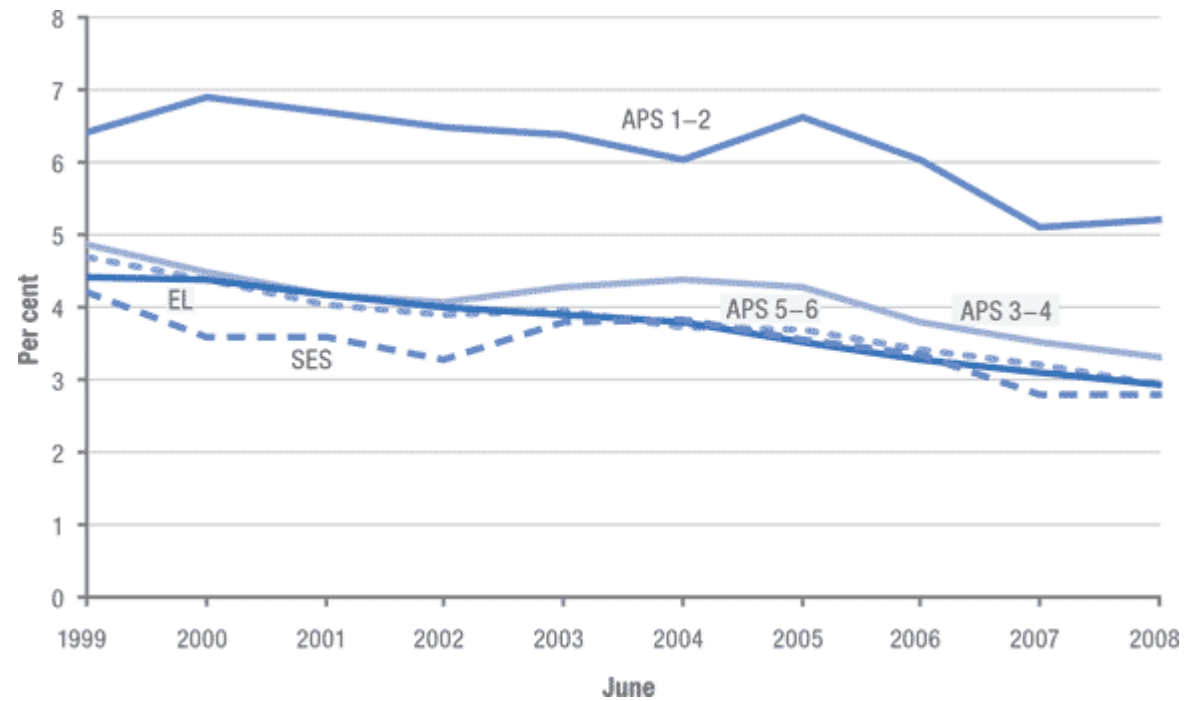
Framing the 'problem' of labour market integration (policy makers)

- *1990s and early 2000s* **mutual obligation** 'reduce welfare dependency; increase economic self-sufficiency'; rights to obligations; economic scarcity.
- *Late 2000s* **social inclusion** ('people with disability join the mainstream'; independency and autonomy primarily defined through economic status (paid work).
 - The shift away from individualistic thinking in disability policy during the 1980s has had less influence in the area of employment policy. Socio-political understandings of disability seem to have less traction in this area (Shier et al, 2009).

The case for reform in 2006



Representation of ongoing employees with disability, by classification in Australian Public Service, 1999 to 2008

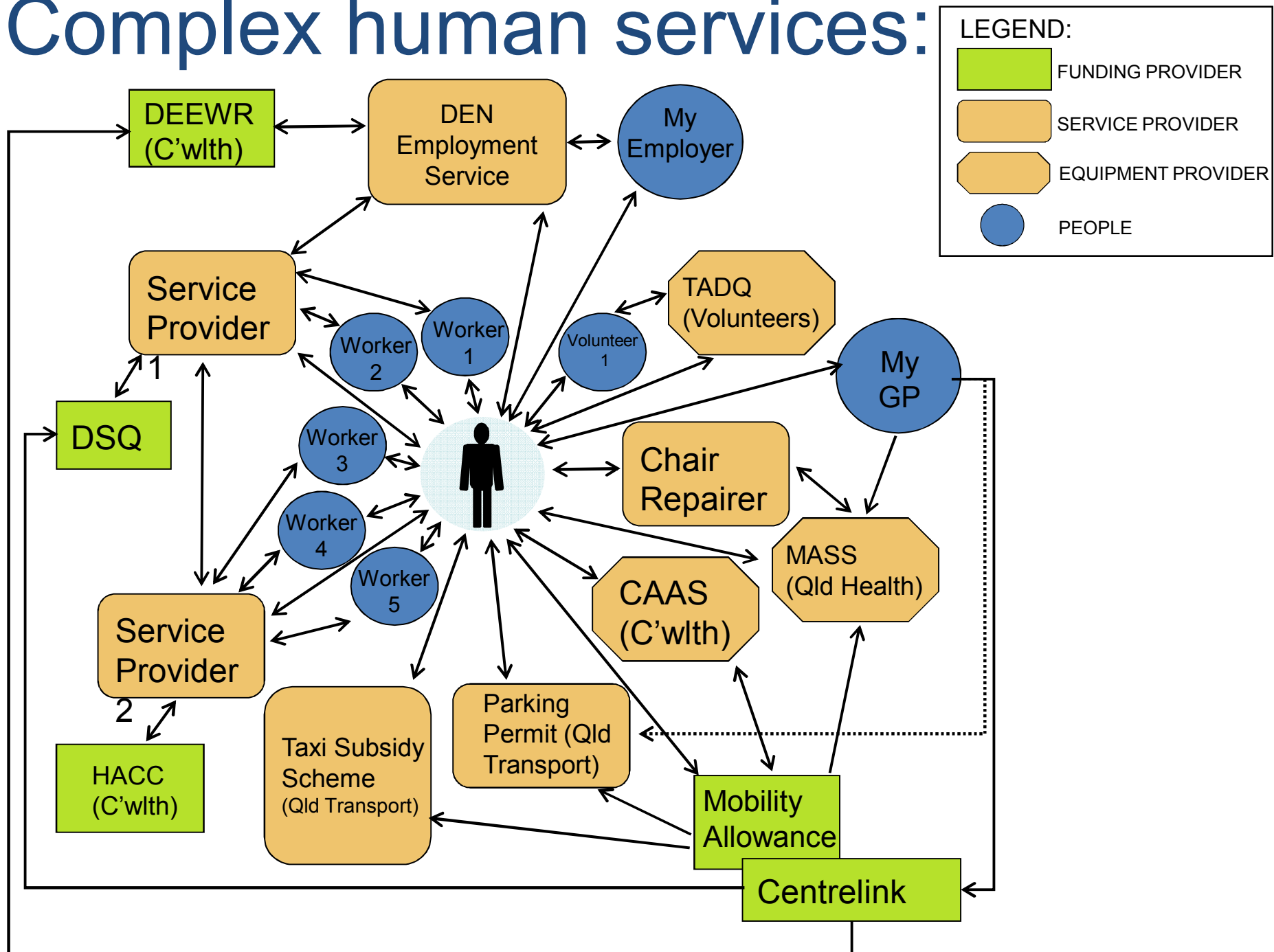


Source: APSED 2009

Barriers identified by participants (securing employment)

- Poverty (less impact if living in public housing)
- Past Experiences (abuse, stigma, rejection)
- Gaps in service delivery (c'wealth/state)
- Suitable jobs, discrimination
- Access to transport (more acute in regions)
("I worked for McDonalds for 3 years earning \$60 a day and it cost me about \$70 a day to get there")

Complex human services:



The role of disability in securing work

- Discrimination and labeling by employer negates human capital (devalues skills, experience and qualifications).
- To disclose or not disclose the disability to potential employers? (employer perceptions around workplace safety, capacity to perform)
- People with mental health related disabilities had a harder time securing and maintaining work than people with other disabilities in the study (fear of difference, interview performance).

The role of policy implementation job capacity assessment (JCA)

- *“That part [the JCA] is nerve wracking as all hell. I hate it because you feel like your being watched and you feel like your being assessed, and you are, and that’s never fun, but you do that because that’s what the process is.”*
- *“In many ways I think it’s proper and useful for governments to play a role in assessment but I think it needs to be far more subtle and nuanced and genuine than it has been up to date”.*

Other policy barriers

- The legacy of the 2006 W2W policies remains a potential barrier:
 - “Those people have been through enough already, they don’t need the pressure of having to find work when they’re clearly physically unable to do it and it's going to cause them a lot of stress and their families and perhaps even make their condition worse” (Albany, WA female, mid 20s, DSP).

Some of these issues have been addressed by Federal Government (separating assessment from payment type, reduced numbers of people 8 week no payment period)

Success factors for maintaining employment

Around 30% of participants had some form of ongoing work during the course of the project. Jobs ranged from community organization manager, policy and research position in govt, retail sector, administration, landscape and gardening, self employed auditor and odd jobs)

- Continuity with DEN provider, more than just job advice (holistic service model).
- Attitudes of manager in workplace, capacity to reduce hours to manage health.
- Access to public transport (or other forms of transport)
- Stable housing (public or community).
- Strong Informal Support network.
- Personal resilience.

Risk taking and security are two sides of the same coin. Participants were less able to take economic risks (paid work) when their lives were riddled by insecurity (insecure housing, isolation, family conflict and threat of withdrawal of income support).

Reflections on social inclusion

1. **Reframe policy problem to include social and political factors.** Discrimination and stigmatisation are significant barriers. Public perception is a major barrier to 'social inclusion' of people with disability. Need better collaboration between policy-makers and employers to promote success of people in the labour market.
2. **Rethink service delivery to put the individual at the centre.** Human services can be part of the problem (over-professionalised social spaces).
3. In terms of employment services, need to ensure that ***job seeker commitment*** drives change, not ***job seeker compliance***.
4. **Social inclusion must be a two-way street.** Too much focus on people joining mainstream. As one research participant said, "no one ever comes to my place".
5. **Social inclusion is a 'weak discourse'** (Levitas, 2005) if it doesn't include a focus on social and economic relations that sustain inequalities and injustices. May need to universalize the risk of disability to change public perceptions (eg disability insurance proposal)
6. **Reframe Independence** - does not have to equate with economic self-sufficiency, it means more than paid work, having control over everyday decisions. 'Life first', not 'work first' (Dean, 2006).

Can we do better? – material and cultural challenges

- There is an argument for increasing the base rate of income support payments (OECD data shows that higher payment rates leads to higher labour force participation rates for people with a disability)
- More education for large and small employers about benefits of hiring people with a disability. Commonwealth Government needs to improve its own track record in employing people with disabilities.
- Recognise the value of voluntary engagement and meaningful case management within the employment services system
 - *“It’s not about making sure there are extra provisions, it’s about leveling the playing field and I think where disabilities are concerned it’s about looking at, it’s not about coming up with a magical number, whether it be 15 or 30 hours or whatever, it’s about looking at each individual and their capacity to work. But then I also have a problem about paid employment being the only way a person can contribute to society as well. I think that’s essentially flawed” (Jenny, mid 40s, Brisbane).*

Ethical issues: Motivation

- **There is qualitative evidence that people with a disability, far from needing motivation by having their benefits cut, were already well motivated to find work.**
 - Prepared to take risks
 - Willing to work

“people with disabilities do want to work it’s just there are structural barriers or barriers that prevent that from happening and if the government was real about wanting to get people into the workforce, then they’ve got to look at the amount of carers there are to and by carers I don’t mean family members I mean actual paid support to help people get out of bed in the morning and go to work if that’s what they need”.

Ethical issues: Respect

Lack of trust

'...instead of this negative confrontational kind of, 'you're trying to steal our money' saying, 'righto you're here, these are the supports you need and we're prepared to support you but in exchange we want to work out what you can do and what you can contribute and work with people in that sort of really positive, not beating people with a stick saying, get out there and work' but just saying, 'we're going to support you and we think you've got a right to basic supports and assistance and things like that but we do expect you to get out there and give it a go wherever you can.'

Respect

- Many participants felt that they were not treated with respect
 - Assessments too intrusive
 - Benefits too small

Ethical issues: Reinforced stereotypes

Lack of motivation to work

- ‘I really believe that there are assumptions. That there are assumptions that some people are capable of working but that they’re just lazy. I think that there are assumptions that it’s very easy to go out there and find a job and that we have the same capacity as anyone else who is out there in the community. There is no discrimination. There’s easy access. There is all of these things that, you know, we’ve been working towards.’

Untruthful

- - ‘It’s the assumptions that they make that I find hard. They assume that the person getting a pension isn’t really truthful about what has happened in their life. They assume that the person is actually using the system to do what they want to do. They still make me bring in medical certificates even though I have the later stages of HIV. Hasn’t anyone told them that there is no cure.’

'Motivation model'

- **A range of moral reasons why the motivational model is inappropriate.**
- While there has been a welcome recent increase in funding to programs in Australia and elsewhere that assist people with a disability to find and maintain themselves at work is welcome, the current policies are still too heavily focused on the individual motivation of benefit recipients in the sense that they identify a major barrier to the disabled finding work as being their motivation.
- Lack of available jobs, willingness of employers to consider the disabled, cost of finding work and appropriate training are more important barriers. If this is the case, it is inappropriate to suspend or reduce benefits when the real cause of the problem does not lie with the individual but with a range of other barriers.
- Even if it were true that motivation was a major factor in determining why those with a disability could not find work, surely we should design our policies so that all of the other barriers were removed first, before we made a decision to cut benefits.

Unfairness in comparison with other types of welfare

Welfare comparisons

- Other groups of disadvantaged individuals do not have to bear the responsibility of their choices in the same way as some on DSP Newstart.
- For instance, farmers have been able to get drought assistance even where their farming practices may be unsustainable, through their own bad choices
- Different 'burden of proof'.
- It is in one sense unfair that those on DSP/Newstart benefits have to bear a higher risk of disastrous consequences than some on other types of welfare.

Goals of welfare policy

- Less emphasis on motivation and individual responsibility;
- Disconnection of harsh penalties from assessments;
- **Replaced with**
- Equal access to important goods (work, social interaction);
- 'No fault' standard of living;
- Achieving equality.