



There are significant barriers to employment for people with a mental illness and most of these are now well understood: a lack of support services, community stigma, the episodic nature of mental illness, few employer incentives, a shortage of appropriate program places and so on. However, these problems can be overcome and solutions found.

The *Let's Get to Work* Strategy¹

This strategy considers the principles which need to underpin good practice in the area of mental health and employment. There is a critical need for coordination and integration between employment and other services, including mental health services.

There must be a range of appropriate work options for people with mental illness. Just like the general community, people with a mental illness are not all the same, they have different employment goals, different levels of need, and employment preferences.

There does not have to be a 'one size fits all' approach. The principle behind employment programs and other services for people with mental illness must recognise the individual circumstances of people and provide

services and support that meet their specific needs.

Key Principles of Good Practice Services

- Assist people to overcome personal barriers to find and keep employment.
- Develop the skills, confidence and self-esteem necessary to be part of, and function in, a work environment.
- Provide opportunities to develop confidence and skills through transitional employment programs, volunteering, and supported work environments.
- Any partnerships between employment and mental health service providers should result in better employment outcomes for people with mental illness, and a positive shift in thinking within clinical teams regarding the benefits of employment.

- Establishing partnerships between health and employment sectors represents a positive step for delivering employment benefits.
- Work programs in businesses or corporations should assist people with a disability to develop professional skills, and develop a positive perception of people with a disability as competent and productive contributors to the workforce.
- For Australian Government funded employment services the best outcomes are achieved when the job seeker is matched and streamed to the most appropriate service to meet their individual needs.
- There should be increased flexibility for providers to assist jobseekers with support services, such as housing and health, which are needed to move people into employment.

¹ This strategy can be found in the MHCA's Report, *Let's Get to work*, which can be obtained by contacting the Mental Health Council of Australia on 02 6285 3100 or <http://www.mhca.org.au>

