

Employment, education and training

This fact sheet may be useful if you are looking at entering or re-entering the workforce after a spinal cord injury. Taking part in activities such as work, volunteering and study is an important part of most people's lives. As well as helping with finances, it has other benefits such as increasing confidence, improving mental health, feeling valued and learning new skills. Considering your return to work or study is an important part of your rehabilitation, and will begin soon after injury.

Employment, whether entering the workforce for the first time or returning to work, is possible for most people after a spinal cord injury. Consideration of your job opportunities will begin in rehabilitation, and there is much support available to help you enter or re-enter the workforce.

Studies have shown that factors that may influence early return to work after a spinal cord injury include age, level of injury, level of education, pre-injury employment and, in some cases, the cause of injury. There are also studies that have shown that attitudes are most crucial in successfully entering the workforce.

After spinal cord injury, some people are able to return to their pre-injury occupation with only minor workplace modifications. If you do have an employer at the time you are injured, it helps to keep in touch with them and talk with them early about returning to work. Others embark on education or retraining after their injury and find new paid work, volunteer work or other productive and interesting pursuits.

Paid work

There is assistance available to help you find and maintain suitable work, which is funded by the Federal Government. To get this type of assistance, you first need an Employment Services Assessment (ESA) to recommend the most appropriate type of assistance for you. This will be based on any barriers to finding

or maintaining employment and the extent of your work capacity. While referrals for an ESA are most commonly generated through Centrelink, you do not need to be receiving payments for a referral.

Once you have completed the ESA, you can select a Disability Employment Service which will give you information and support along every step of the way to employment.

Disability Employment Services can link you with the appropriate training and work experience, and support your skill development to better prepare you for work.

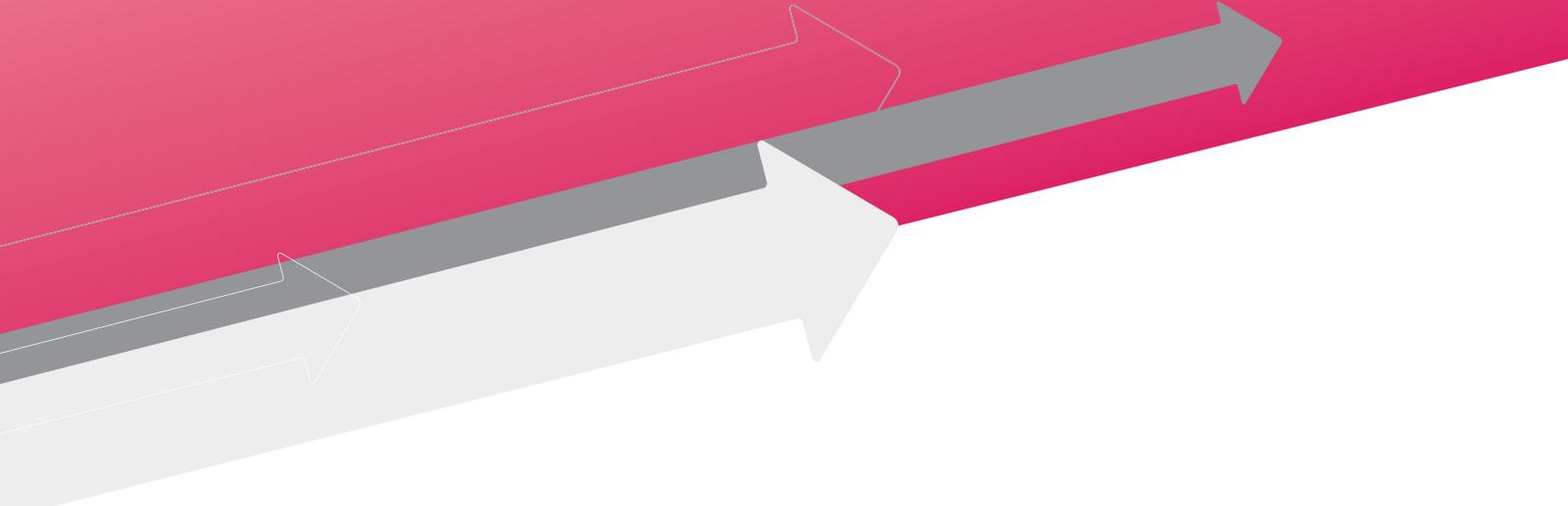
Disability Employment Services also work closely with employers to link them with assistance for workplace modifications, job design or specialist technology.

There are a number of different Disability Employment Service providers, with varying areas of specialisation. You can search for local providers at www.jobsearch.gov.au.

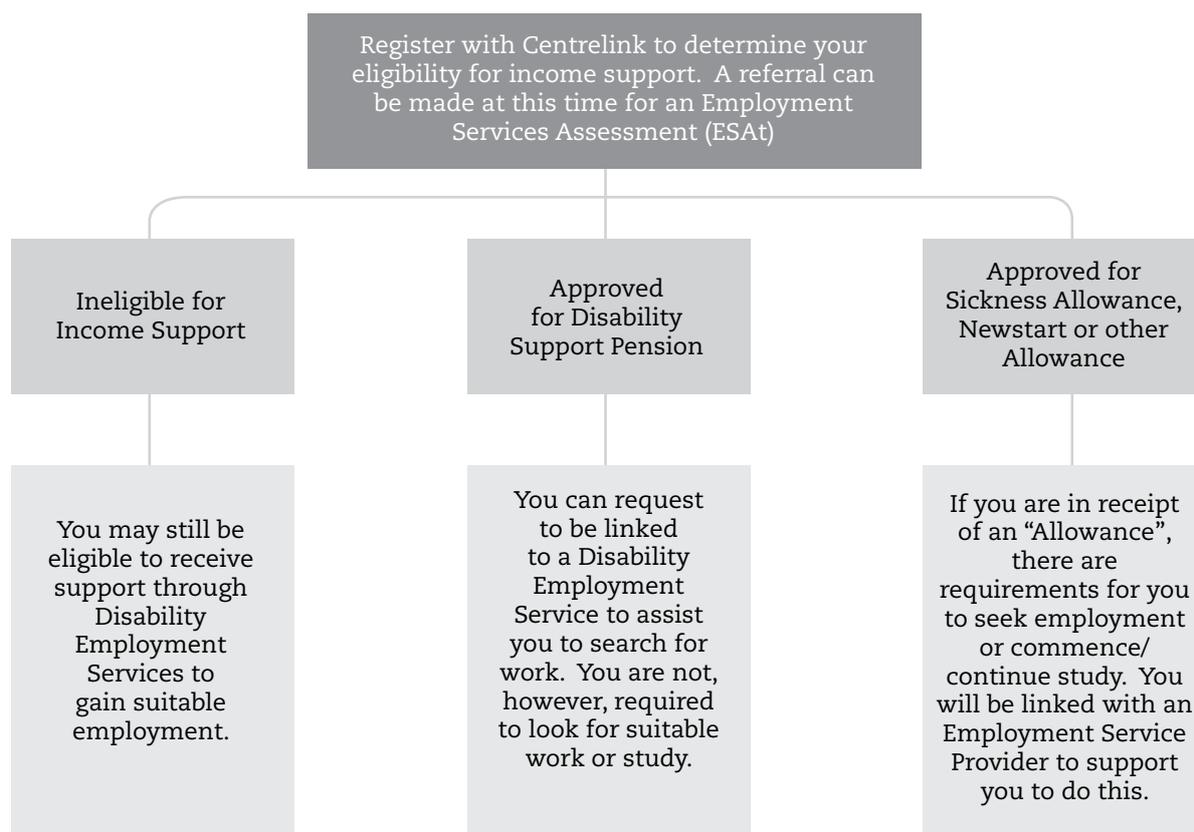
If you are a participant of the Lifetime Care and Support Scheme, or are covered under insurance, the process for accessing support to enter or re-enter the workforce is different from the process above. You should speak to your co-ordinator, case manager, or social worker to discuss the process required for suitable return-to-work support services.

There is additional information about services and support for job seekers at www.jobaccess.gov.au, including information for starting your own business and preparing for and attending interviews.





Path To Employment



Ongoing Support

Once you have secured employment, your Disability Employment Service will stay in contact with you and give you transitional support for the first 26 weeks of your employment. If required, additional support is available after this initial period. You should contact your service provider directly to discuss this.

What if I feel I am about to lose my job?

If you are already employed, and feel that you are at risk of losing your job due to your disability, then you may be eligible for support from a Disability Employment Service (DES) through Jobs in Jeopardy Assistance.

The type of assistance available includes advice on redesigning your role, workplace assessment and modification, sourcing specialised equipment to support your continued work with your existing

employer. For this type of assistance, you need to have been employed for an average of eight hours a week for the past 13 weeks and not already be receiving support through a Disability Employment Services Provider.

You need to register with a Disability Employment Service directly for this assistance. You can contact Centrelink for further information, or go to www.centrelink.gov.au.

Discussing your needs

Some people are concerned or unsure about talking with their employer, potential employer, or education providers about having a spinal cord injury. This can be especially relevant for people living with an incomplete spinal cord injury. If you are not using aids or equipment on a full-time basis, specific considerations or employment needs may be less obvious. An explanation of the rights and responsibilities for both



parties, and how to manage disclosing information about disability can be found at <http://pubsites.uws.edu.au/ndco/disclosure/index.htm>

Studying

If you decide that you would like to study to start a new career or change career direction, it may be worth discussing this with a specialist employment agency or with an educational institution before enrolling in a course.

Universities and TAFE colleges have Disability Service Units or Officers and have a number of services to assist students. It is advisable to discuss your study options with service providers to ensure the course you want to do can be supported and what sort of support is available.

There are some scholarships available to assist students with a spinal cord injury, which could help with some of your educational expenses. There is a list of available scholarships in the resources list, or you could talk to one of the Disability Service Officers at the institution where you intend to study. They will be able to talk to you about current government assistance to support you to study.

Volunteering

The Centre for Volunteering matches people with volunteer roles that might interest them. It also runs a short program called A Bridge to Volunteering, which

helps people understand the rights and responsibilities of volunteers and explains how to find the most suitable opportunities. Go to <http://www.volunteering.com.au>.

General Information

The National Spinal Cord Injury Association is a US association that aims to maximise the quality of life and opportunities for people with spinal cord injuries and diseases. Its website www.spinalcord.org has a large number of resources about employment for people looking for work. Some of it is specific to the US but much of the content is of general interest.

There is a fact sheet produced by the Queensland Health Department, which has useful questions to consider when planning your return to the workforce. Go to www.health.qld.gov.au/qscis/PDF/Handbook_of_Spinal_Cord_Injuries/4D.pdf

Spinal Cord Injuries Australia has information about employment and education in its Back on Track publication, which can be found at <http://scia.org.au/publications/back-on-track>

References and Further Resources

CRS Australia www.crsaustalia.gov.au
1800 277 277

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; Job Services Australia www.deewr.gov.au
1300 363 079

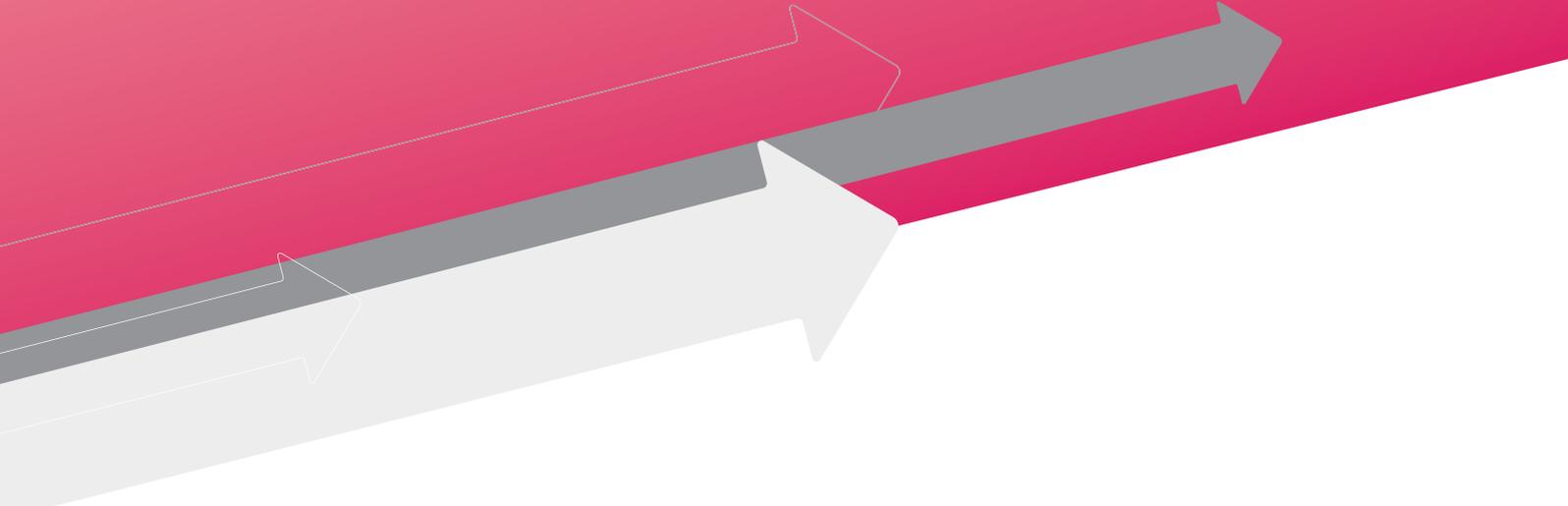
Australian Job Search www.jobsearch.gov.au/default.aspx 13 62 68

Job Access (including Workplace Modifications Scheme) www.jobaccess.gov.au 1800 464 800

Employment and workplace relations services for Australians www.workplace.gov.au
myfuture: Career information and exploration www.myfuture.edu.au

NSW Department of Education and Training; Disability access for services in Education and Training www.det.nsw.edu.au/about-us/who-we-are/an-inclusive-workplace

Disability Services Australia (DSA) www.dsa.org.au
(02) 9791 6599



Centrelink for Disability Support Payments, Mobility Allowance, ABSTUDY, Austudy, Pensioner Education Supplement www.centrelink.gov.au 13 27 17
SCI Workforce Australia www.scia.org.au (02) 9356 8201
Nova Employment www.novaemployment.com
(02) 9833 2500
Northcott Society Jobmatch jobmatch.northcott.com.au
(02) 9890 0970 or (02) 9890 0100
TAFE NSW has specialist teacher/consultants, for both prospective and enrolled students, to ensure people with a disability have access to education and training at TAFE campuses www.tafensw.edu.au 13 16 01
Open Education and Training Network (OTEN) provides extensive support through Disability Teacher/Consultants www.oten.edu.au (02) 9715 8601

Open Employment Websites

- www.careerone.com.au
- www.seek.com.au
- www.mycareer.com.au

JobGuide <http://www.jobguide.deewr.gov.au/>

NSW State Spinal Cord Injury Service Directory of Information and Support www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/155227/sci_directoryweb.pdf

Scholarships

ParaQuad offers Golden Stave Educational Fellowship to people with a spinal cord injury with support from the Australian Music Industry's Golden Stave Foundation www.paraquad.org.au (02) 8741 5669

The Northcott Society offers Thomas Hepburn Lennox Scholarship to past or present clients of the Northcott Society. Applications close September 1st each year www.northcott.com.au (02) 9890 0100

Administered by the SpineCare Foundation, Gregory & Delores Farrell Scholarships support wheelchair-users undertaking tertiary studies in NSW www.spinecarefoundation.org (02) 9890 0100