



Supported employment survey report

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1. Executive summary

1.1. NDIS Participant Employment Strategy 2024-26

In 2024 the NDIA released a refreshed **NDIS Participant Employment Strategy 2024 - 2026** (the Strategy), which sets out the Agency's vision, commitment, and plan for supporting participants to find and keep meaningful employment. The vision of the Strategy is that participants have the same opportunities to work as other Australians, and the confidence, support, and skills to take advantage of those opportunities. In 2023, the Minister for the NDIS committed the Agency to address employment in planning conversations with all working age participants and to include adequate funding in NDIS plans. This is necessary if the Agency is to achieve the goal of 26% of working age participants in meaningful employment. As at June 2024, 23% of working age participants were in paid employment. Of these, 78% worked in open employment and 22% worked in a supported employment service.

Following the findings of the Disability Royal Commission, the Australian Government has initiated a reform agenda for segregated employment. In consultation with state and territory disability ministers, people with disability, family and provider representatives, peak bodies and other sector experts, *Guiding Principles for the Future of Supported Employment* were agreed at the Disability Reform Ministers Council in November 2023. One of the key actions in the NDIS Participant Employment Strategy is a focus on inclusive employment which reflects these Principles.

1.2. NDIS funding for supported employment (supports in employment)

Some NDIS participants, with the assistance of mainstream employment services or employer reasonable adjustment, will successfully maintain work, others will need higher intensity support delivered in the workplace to maintain employment.

NDIS funded supports in employment can be used in a range of employment settings. These encompass private, public, or not for profit organisations, social enterprises, supported employment services, self-employment, micro or family run businesses.

The supports can include:

- on the job assessments of the impact of a person's disability on completion of work tasks

- job customisation
- on the job training and intermittent support with work activities
- supervision and assistance that enables meaningful participation in work
- managing disability related behaviours or complex needs at work.

Many NDIS participants use their funding to maintain their employment in a supported employment service. Most of these participants have worked in this setting for their entire working life as there was no alternative option at the time they commenced work. An increasing number of participants are now wanting to explore different work settings and NDIS supports can be used to assist this transition.

The Agency conducted research during 2023 to explore the barriers and enablers to supported employees moving from segregated to open employment. The findings demonstrated key enablers included¹:

- Building employment aspiration early. Involving families and carers in planning conversations about employment and including appropriate supports in plans at the right time.
- Building participant knowledge and understanding of employment options, workplace expectations and support available.
- Providing open employment work experience opportunities early through the school curriculum and after school. Ensuring employers are adequately supported to provide these opportunities.
- Building the capability of supported employment services to facilitate pathways to open employment.

1.3. Supported employment survey

During April to August 2024 the NDIA invited 145 registered supported employment services (previously known as Australian Disability Enterprises or ADEs) to participate in a survey to gather baseline information on the supported employment sector. The Agency received responses from 112 of these providers. The remaining 33 organisations were contacted to obtain some basic details, of these, 4 providers did not respond.

¹ National Disability Insurance Agency 2023. From ADEs to open employment research. Prepared by L Smith, S Mancuso, B Gardner, M Bennett, A Goodall. [From ADE to open employment | NDIS](#)

The survey was designed to collect key data to:

- develop a baseline for measuring how the sector is responding to the reform environment
- identify what providers need to prepare for the changes to supported employment
- identify how providers are planning to increase work opportunities for participants
- assist DSS, NDIA and peak bodies to support the sector with reform.

The following report summarises the survey results focussing on 4 key areas:

Provider demographics: Analysing the location by state and territory, types of businesses operating, which customers are purchasing their goods and services and the value of contracts.

Employee demographics: Analysing total headcount of organisations, support worker demographics, supported employee demographics, information on interaction with mainstream employment settings and transition of employees to mainstream employment, exit data for employees leaving supported employment, and training and skill development for staff.

Support for employees: Analysing types of support delivered to supported employees including planned changes and those already implemented.

Changes to operation: Analysing changes implemented after 2020 changes to NDIS pricing and organisational plans in relation to supported employment reforms. Provider feedback on the type of support that could assist with implementing reforms.

1.4. Key survey findings

Providers were asked to provide details about their operation as of 31 December 2023. Key survey findings include:

- 112 of the 145 supported employment providers responded to the survey. The remaining 33 organisations were contacted to obtain their number of employees. 4 Four providers did not respond to NDIA contact.
- Supported employment services are commonly located in New South Wales and Victoria, with three quarters of respondents operating in those states.
- Manufacturing, property and garden services were the most common business activities undertaken by supported employment services.

- As of 31 December 2023 a total of 15,153 supported employees were reported as working in supported employment services (data sourced from survey responses and follow up telephone contact).
- 35% of respondents stated their workforce was a mix of supported and non-supported employees.
- 91 supported employees transitioned into a non-supported role in 2023.
- 75% of supported employment services reported they did not share premises with another business.
- Respondents reported a total of 3,881 supported employees exited from supported employment in 2022 and 2023, half of whom moved to another supported employment service. Only 5% of respondents plan to cease supported employment business operations in the next 5 years.

2. Background

2.1. What is supported employment under NDIS?

Supported employment was historically provided through the Department of Social Services (DSS) with funding provided directly to a contracted Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE) as the employer and provider. During 2019 to 2020, the NDIA and DSS worked together to enable approximately 16,000 supported employees who work in ADEs to transition to the NDIS.

In July 2020, to help increase the number of working age participants in paid work, the NDIA enacted strategies to diversify the range of employment settings where on the job support can be provided. This included individualised pricing for supports in employment.

The changed pricing gave participants greater choice and control about where and how they work, and who provides their support. Participants may choose to purchase support in a variety of employment settings including private enterprise, the not for profit or public sectors, a family business or self-employment, or a social enterprise or a supported employment service.

2.2. Reform of the supported employment sector

In 2022, the Australian Government and all state and territory disability ministers agreed on a set of guiding principles for the future of supported employment for people with disability with high employment support needs. [Read the Guiding Principles](#).

To ensure the guiding principles are enacted, a supported employment plan was agreed by the Commonwealth and all state and territory ministers in November 2023. The plan includes a range of practical initiatives and actions, with a specific focus on employment for people with disability who have high support needs. [View the Commonwealth, State and Territory Supported Employment Plan](#).

The plan is focused on providing people with informed choice and control about their employment, by creating genuine opportunities to work in a wide range of settings, be it a supported employment service, social enterprise, in open employment or in their own business.²

² Source: [Supported Employment | Department of Social Services, Australian Government](#)

In addition, as part of the 2023/24 Commonwealth Budget, the Australian Government announced a commitment of \$57 million over four years towards supported employment initiatives and measures. These include Grants through the Structural Adjustment Fund (the Fund) to assist the sector to evolve in-line with the guiding principles for the future of supported employment.

The Structural Adjustment Fund is administered via an open competitive process and will enable providers to develop and implement projects designed to:

- create pathways to open employment
- allow supported employment workplaces to better meet community expectations, and
- create sustainable employment opportunities for people with disability.

2.3. Why the supported employment survey?

NDIA is working with the Department of Social Services (DSS) on the initiatives outlined in the Commonwealth, State and Territory Supported Employment Plan.

As part of this work, we are exploring opportunities to assist providers prepare for changes to supported employment and increase work opportunities for participants.

To-date, it has not been known how many NDIS participants are currently working in a supported employment service and there has been limited information available regarding the supported employment sector. Data collected through the survey will provide NDIA and DSS with a baseline understanding of how the sector is currently operating, improvements the sector has, or is planning to introduce and the assistance that can be provided to support providers to respond to the Guiding Principles.

3. Survey findings

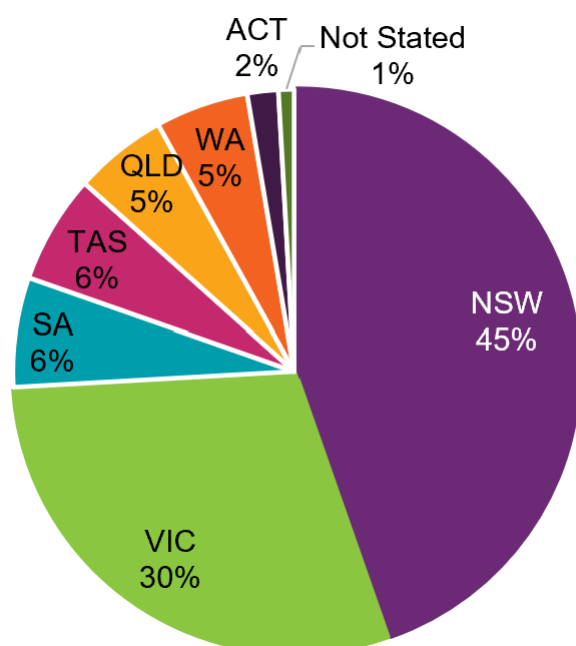
The survey ran between April and August 2024. Of the **145 supported employment services** in operation during that time, **112 (77%) responses** were received.

All data presented is based on provider responses in relation to their operation up to 31 December 2023. No other data has been included in this report.

This section provides an analysis of these responses.

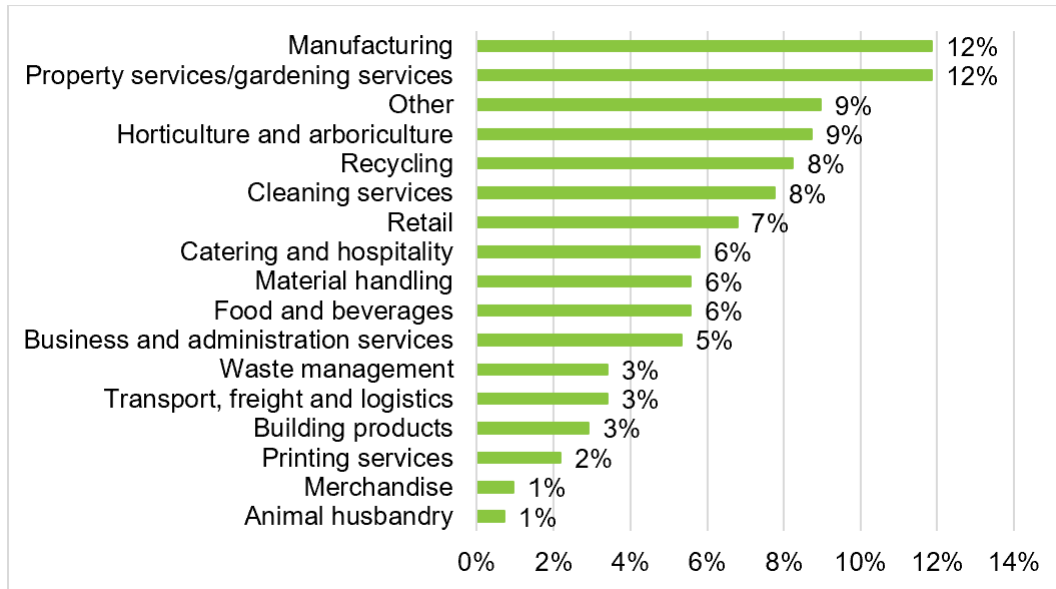
3.1. Provider demographics

3.1.1. State or territory head office

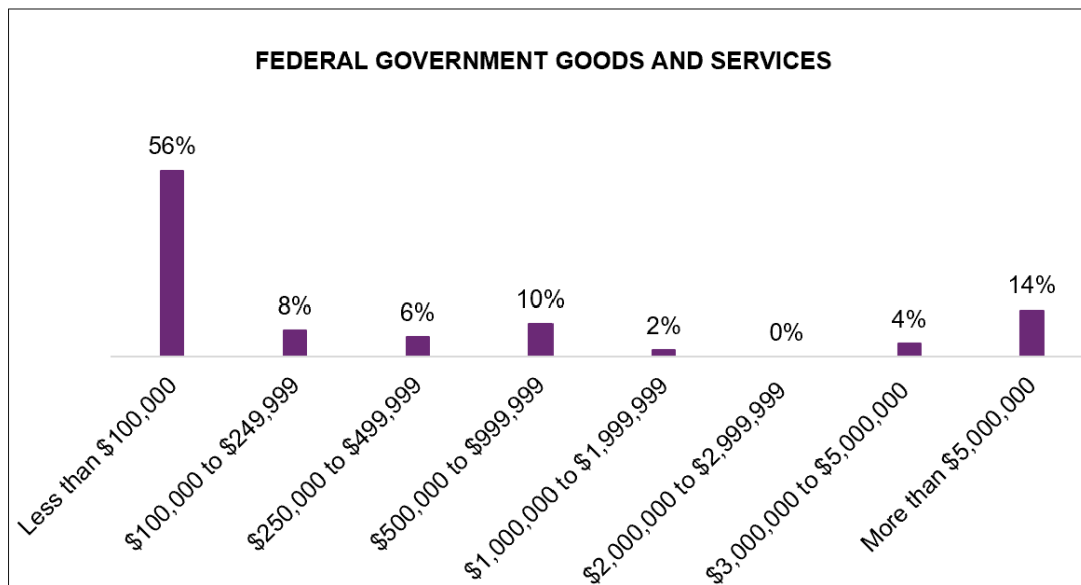


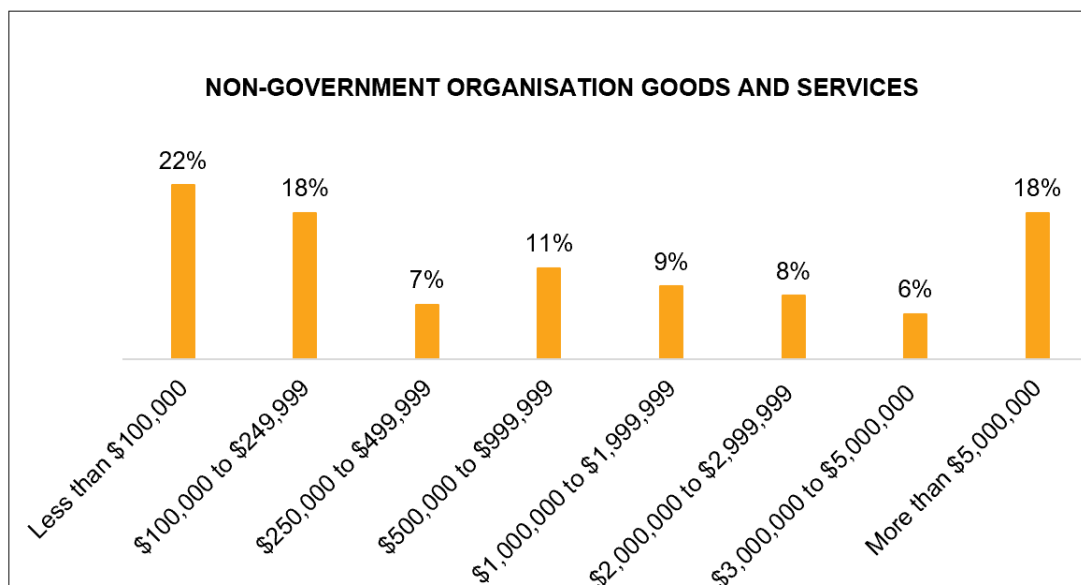
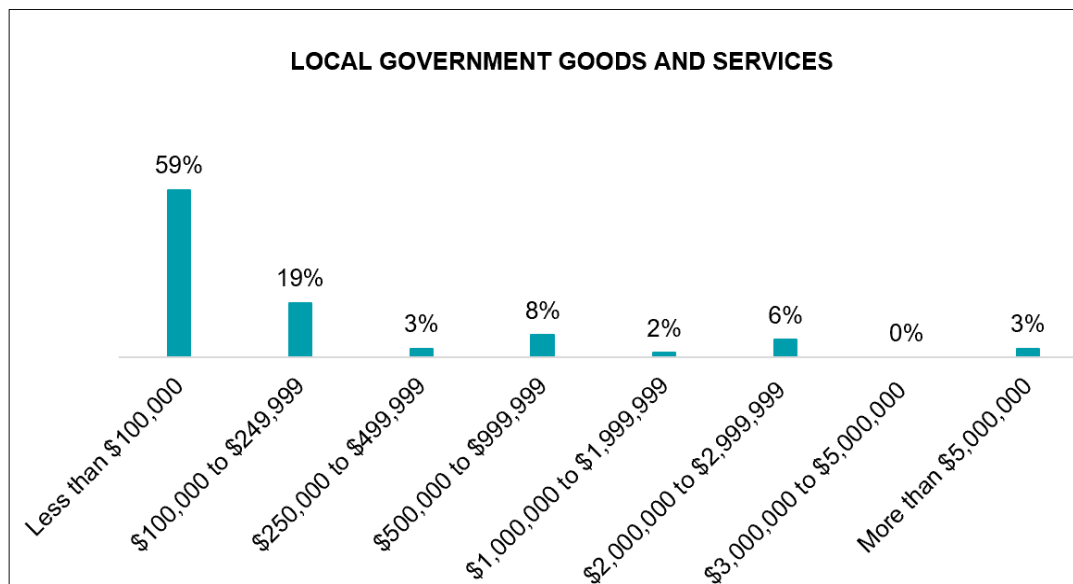
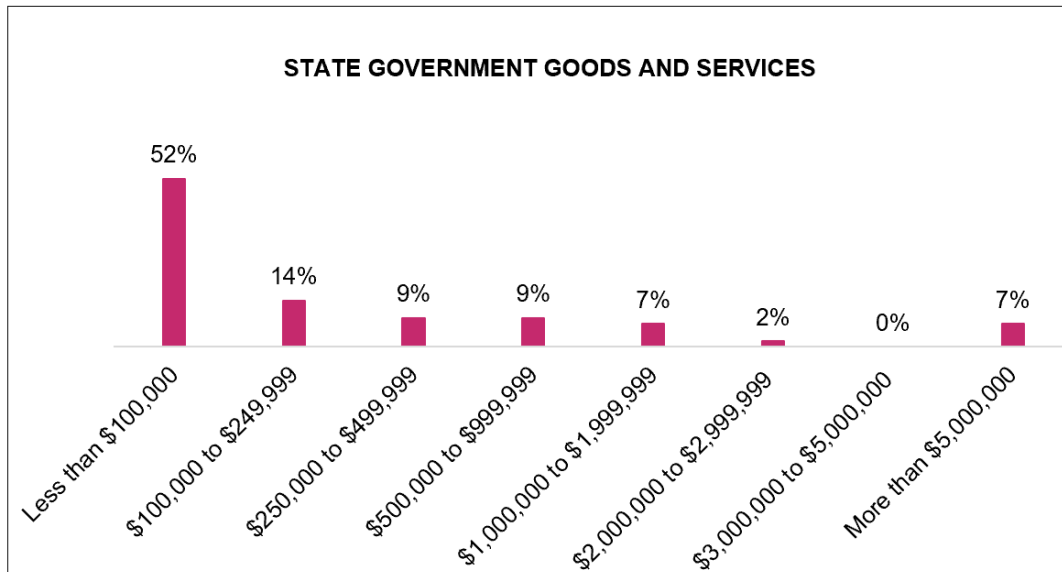
3.1.2. What type of business activities does your organisation engage in? Select all that apply

36 survey respondents provided detail on 'other' industries with the most common responses being packaging, commercial laundry services, commercial business services such as shredding and support in the creative arts.



What was the total value of government and non-government purchases of goods and services from your organisation in 2023?

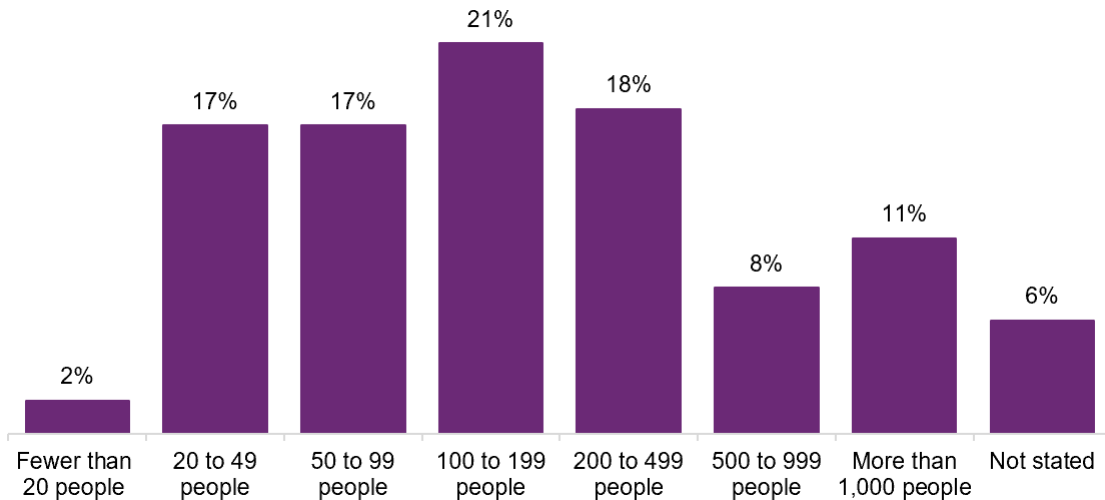




3.2. Employee demographics

3.2.1. Total headcount (management, administrative, support workers and supported employees).

7 survey respondents (6%) did not provide a response.



3.2.2. Total number of support workers in your supported employment services.

Respondents reported a total of **6,095 support staff** in their organisations. One organisation did not respond.

Organisations with a total head count of **fewer than 20 employed 4 support workers** in their supported employment operation.

Organisations with a total head count of between **20 and 49 people employed between 2 and 15 (average of 8)** support workers in their supported employment operation.

Organisations with a total head count of between **50 and 99 employed between 3 and 65 (average of 20)** support workers in their supported employment operation.

Organisations with a total head count of between **100 and 199 employed between 4 and 125 (average of 32)** support workers in their supported employment operation.

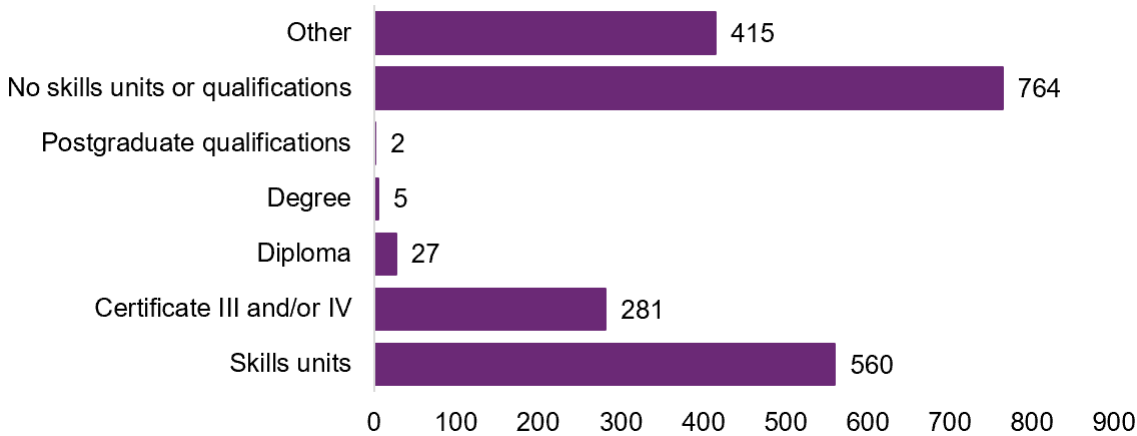
Organisations with a total head count of between **200 and 499 employed between 3 and 160 (average of 50)** support workers in their supported employment operation.

Organisations with a total head count of between **500 and 999 employed between 17 and 502 (average of 108)** support workers in their supported employment operation.

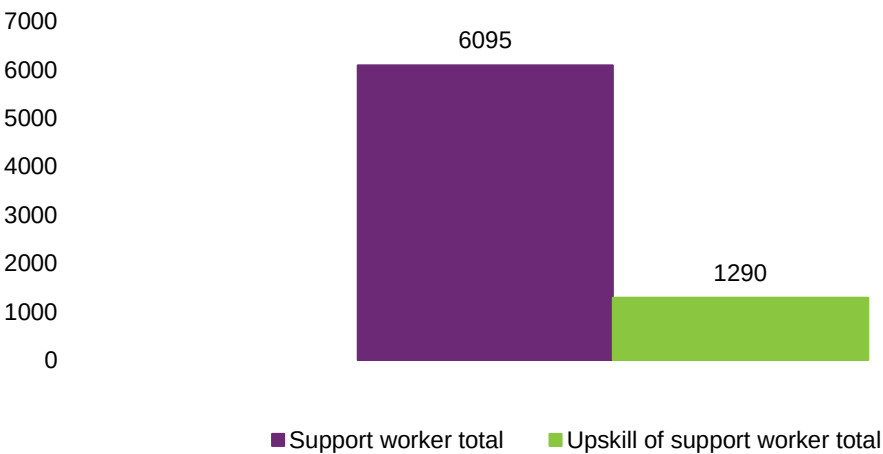
Organisations with a total head count of more than **1000 employed between 15 and 1600 (average of 212)** support workers in their supported employment operation.

3.2.3. Total number of support staff who gained relevant skills and qualifications during the 2023 calendar year.

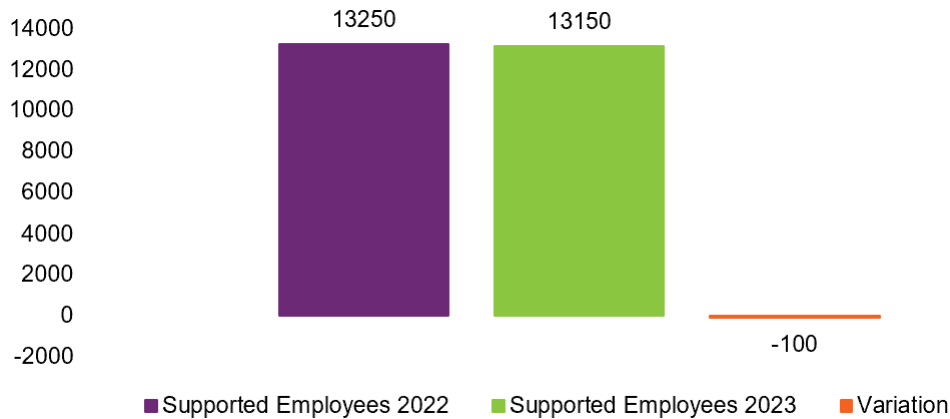
31 providers did not respond.



Out of the 6,095 total reported support workers, 1,290 gained skills or qualifications, meaning 21% of support workers upskilled during calendar year 2023.

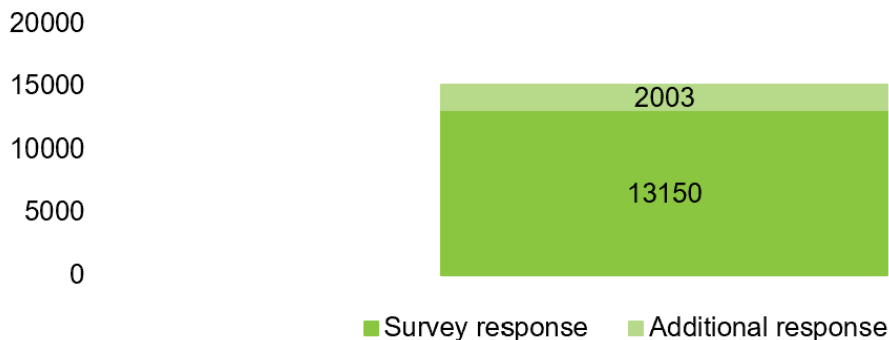


3.2.4. Number of supported employees employed by organisations as at 31 December 2022 and 31 December 2023



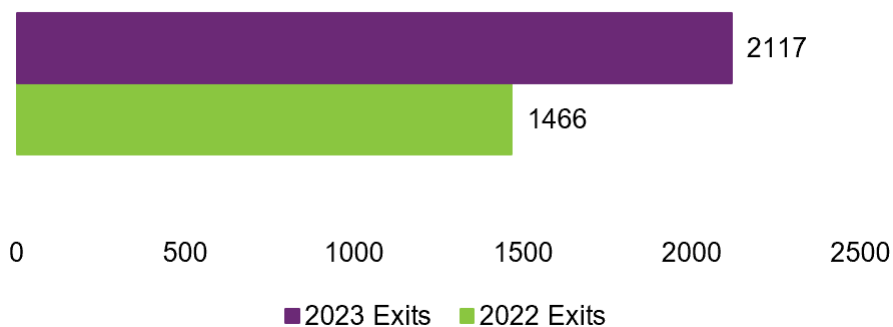
In addition to survey responses, emails and phone calls were made to 33 providers adding a further **2,003 supported employees for a total of 15,153**. 4 providers did not respond to repeated requests for information.

TOTAL number of supported employees = 15,153

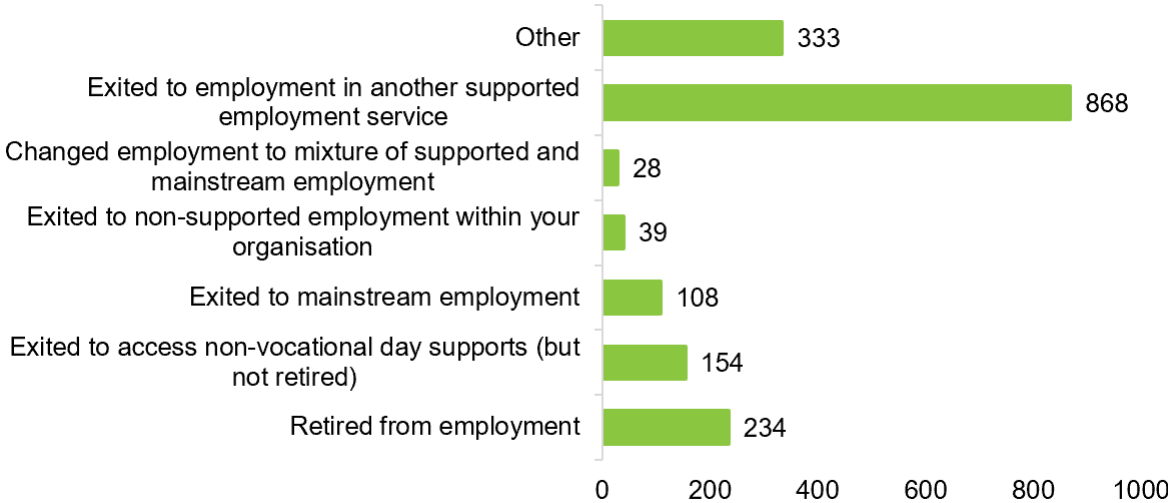


3.2.1. Enter the number of supported employees who exited supported employment during the 2022 and 2023 calendar years.

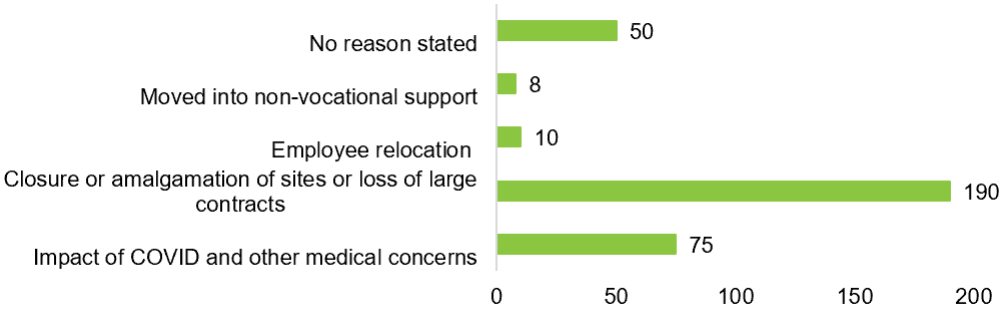
Not all exits were captured in the data. 22 organisations didn't report an exit in 2022 or 2023 and of those who did report an exit, a number didn't report reasons for exits.



3.2.2. What were the reasons for supported employee exits in 2023?



Details of ‘other’ reasons

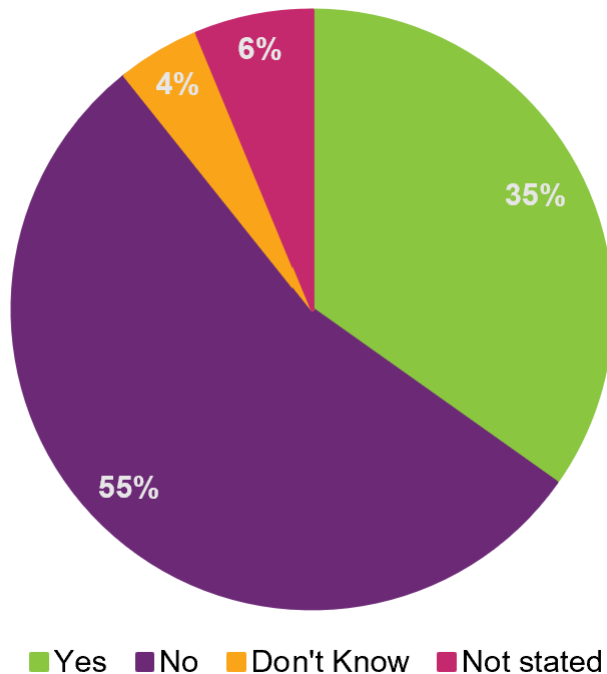


3.2.3. Enter the number of supported employees also working in mainstream employment in other organisations or businesses?

40 survey respondents reported 473 supported employees were also working in mainstream employment.

3.2.4. Do you have a mixed workforce of NDIS participants – supported and non-supported?

7 survey respondents did not provide an answer (reflected as 'Not stated' in the chart below).



3.2.5. What is the number of non-supported employees employed by your organisation?

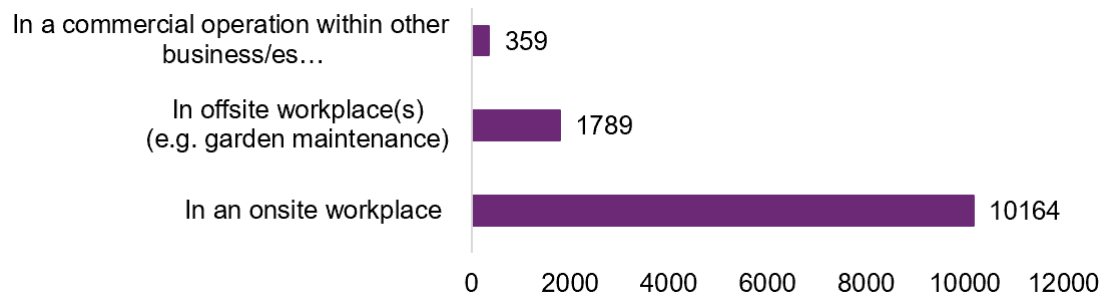
A high number of survey respondents misinterpreted this question making data unreliable and therefore it is not included in this report.

3.2.6. What is the number that progressed to new non-supported roles in 2023?

17 survey respondents noted that 91 supported employees moved into non-supported roles in their organisation in 2023. 95 survey respondents didn't answer this question.

3.2.7. Please tell us where supported employees primarily work.

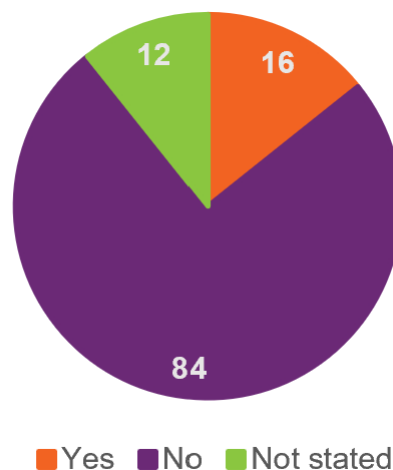
10 survey respondents did not answer



3.2.8. Do you share premises with other businesses?

The 16 survey respondents who said yes all provided further detail. Other manufacturing businesses were the most common (in line with most common business type of respondents), followed by care and other NDIS support businesses.

12 respondents did not answer the question.



3.2.9. Enter the total number of supported employees who have received any type of training during the 2023 calendar year

8,734 were reported as receiving training by 88 survey respondents. 24 survey respondents did not answer.

3.2.10. Enter the total number of supported employees who have gained relevant skills/qualifications through your organisation in the 2023 calendar year:

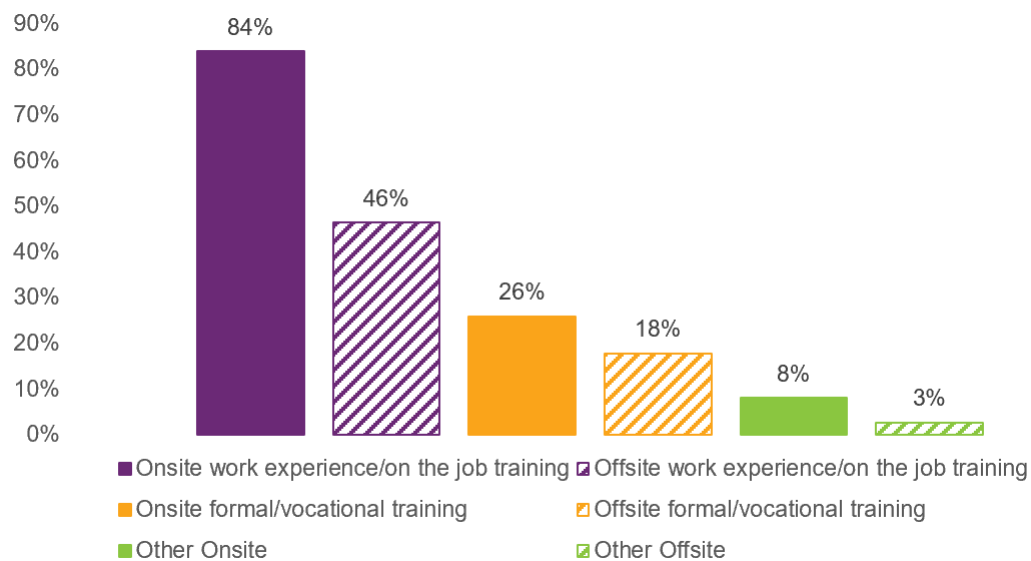
- Skills units total = 2878, 43 providers answered
- Certificate II, III or IV total = 135, with 16 providers answering

- 60 selected “Other (please specify)”.

Of these, 40 survey respondents provided multiple options such as internal training and occupational health and safety. A further 7 listed attaining licenses (drivers and forklift).

3.2.11. Enter the total number of supported employees who have received training on and off site in the 2023 calendar year.

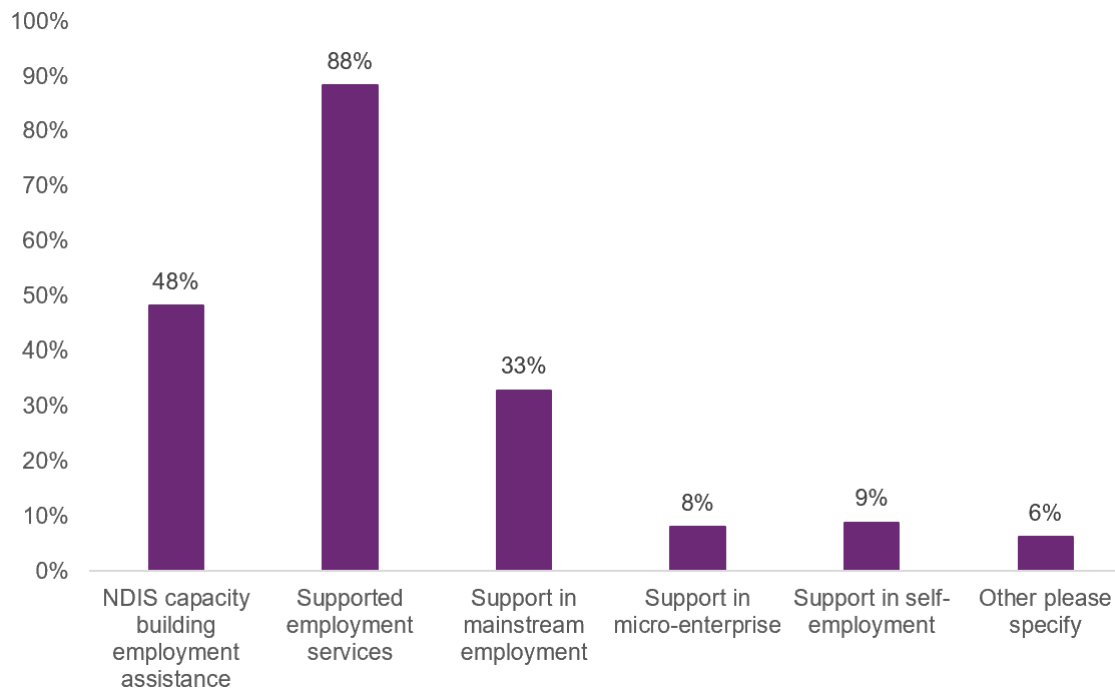
14 survey respondents did not respond.



3.3. Support for employees

3.3.1. What employment related supports and options does your organisation offer? (select all that apply)

104 survey respondents selected one or more of the options. 8 survey respondents did not select any option. The 7 survey respondents who selected 'other please specify' provided further detail on their support options, with most citing customised employment.



3.3.2. Enter the total number of employees accessing these supports during 2023

A high number of survey respondents misinterpreted this question, making data unreliable and therefore it is not included in this report.

3.3.3. Do you have any comments about your supported employment workforce?

68 survey respondents provided comment. The top themes include the challenges of working with an ageing workforce and attracting and interacting with a younger workforce.

Some providers stated their supported employees are keen to remain in their workforce and are hesitant to move into open employment because they are engaged and committed in their current workplace, enjoying their job roles, a positive workplace culture and strong friendships with colleagues. Some expressed supported employee concern about losing access to the Disability Support Pension if they were to move to open employment.

Survey respondents mentioned they were actively interacting with a younger audience through community engagement to show how supported employment could be an option.

Some providers took the opportunity to highly praise their skilled supported employee workforce noting their strong work ethic and dedication.

3.3.4. What would you like to see in future years regarding your supported employment workforce?

79 survey respondents provided comments.

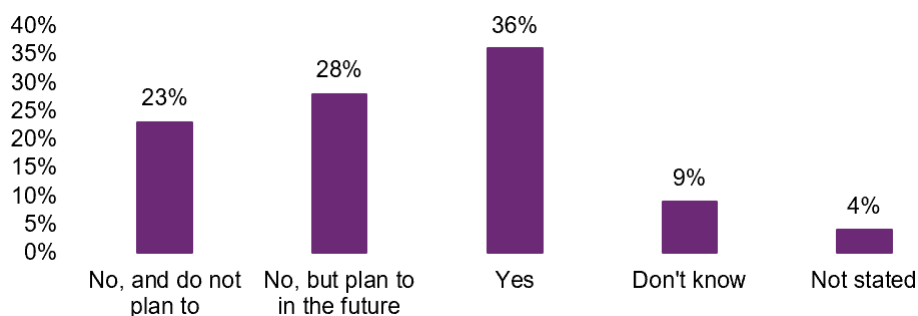
The top themes were open employment and career growth opportunities by improving the delivery of their service and educating participants about how to explore all types of employment supports available including NDIS capacity building supports and mainstream services as appropriate.

Some survey respondents want to grow their business and service offerings so they can support more people; some want to explore better connections to DES.

3.4. Changes to operation

3.4.1. Since the NDIS pricing structure change in 2020, has your supported employment service changed how you do any of the following?

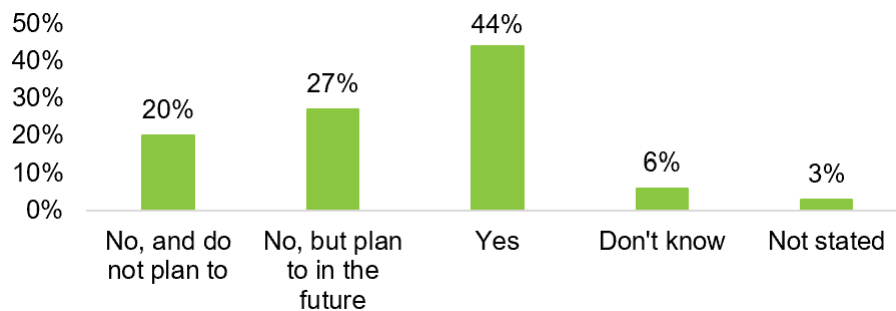
3.4.1.1. How you identify employees suitable for mainstream employment



38 survey respondents who **answered yes** provided further detail. The top themes were using employee plans and goal setting, changing or increasing types of supports offered on the job, and directly asking or enquiring if participants wish to explore open employment.

27 survey respondents who **answered no but plan to in the future** listed actively offering and asking participants about choosing open employment, intending to offer improved services with more support staff, and wanting to expand business model offerings and partnering with other organisations.

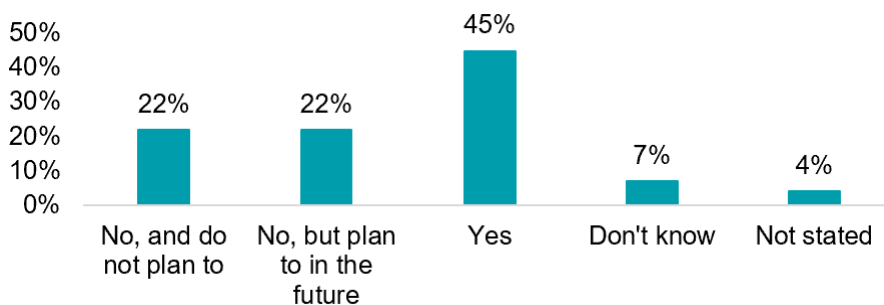
3.4.1.2. How you support employees to work towards their mainstream employment goals



48 survey respondents who **answered yes** provided further detail. The top themes were goal setting and training toward goals, expanded service offerings and connections with local employment services.

23 survey respondents who **answered no but plan to in the future** provided additional information. The top themes were similar to the yes responses in wanting to expand supports and service offerings and build on supported employees' goals and skills.

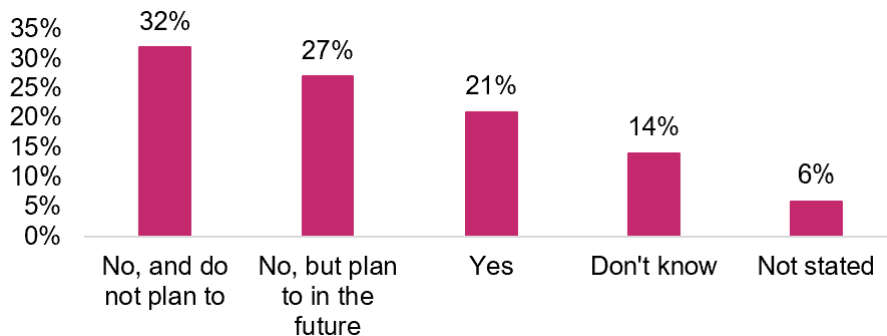
3.4.1.3. How you support employees to learn new skills for mainstream employment



49 survey respondents who answered yes provided further detail. The top themes were providing internal training and expansion to teach skills in house, referrals to external accredited and pre-accredited training, expanding other supports and working with the employee to identify goals. Also mentioned utilising supported employment workplace for skill building as stepping-stone to alternative employment of participant choice and creation of positions and teams to implement *Individual Employment Plans* to support successful transition to new employment opportunities.

20 survey respondents who answered no but plan to in the future provided details such as offering and expanding internal training, offering more on-the-job support and identifying skills and goals. Some respondents also indicated they want to link with external training organisations.

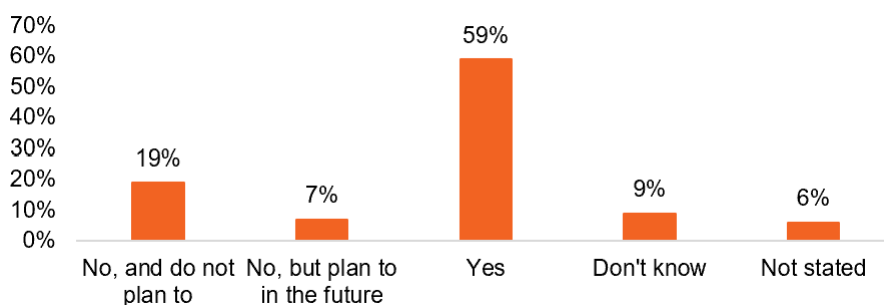
3.4.1.4. How you support mainstream workplaces to successfully employ and maintain employees with disability



22 survey respondents who answered yes provided further detail. The top themes were disability awareness training for employers, communication between employer and employee to discuss their specific needs, building community and business connections in local area. Some providers continue to provide post placement support and a couple cited DES contracts and work experience as being relevant.

22 survey respondents who answered no but plan to in the future provided further detail. The top themes were making community and business connections, training for potential employers and on the job support and check-ins post placement.

3.4.1.5. How you decide employees' ratios of support

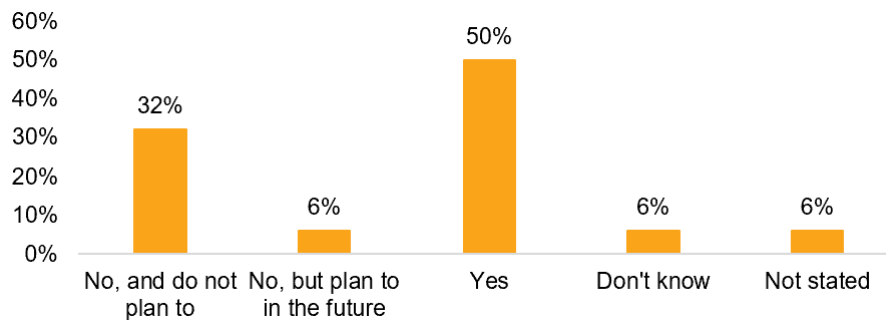


61 survey respondents who **answered yes** provided further detail. The top themes were individualised assessment through observation, monitoring of capability and capacity, being able to offer appropriate levels of support in the workplace due to individualised funding. They also report they assist employees to request appropriate funding in their NDIS plan by providing details of the support necessary to maintain employment and/or to build skills for alternative jobs.

4 survey respondents who **answered no but plan to in the future** provided further detail. These providers indicated they did not need to adjust their ratios

based on current work and participant need. In the future, they will assess support needs of each participant and assist them to request more suitable funding if required.

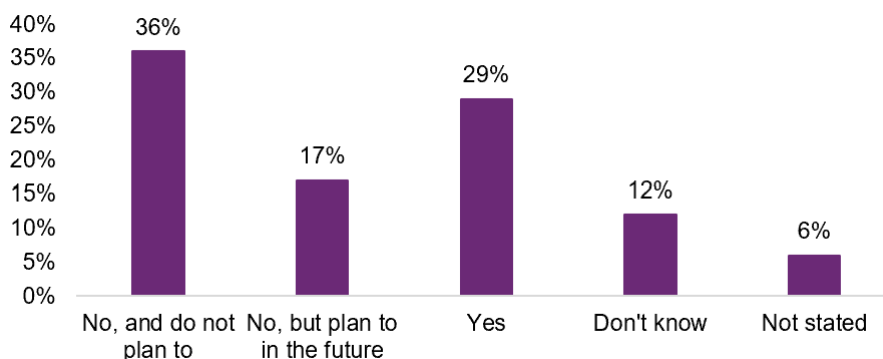
3.4.1.6. How you support employees to apply for NDIS funding



52 survey respondents who answered yes provided further detail. The top themes were providing evidence for planning purposes, some assist with gaining NDIS access and providing support during plan meetings. Other responses mentioned assisting with documentation as requested by NDIA and support to request changes to plans.

6 survey respondents answered No, but plan to in the future without providing further detail.

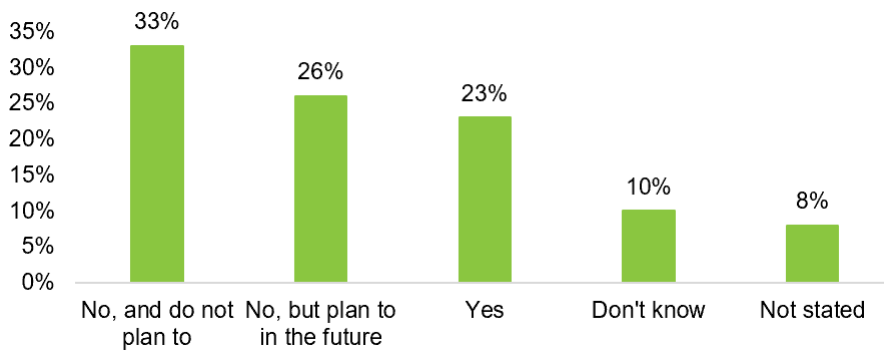
3.4.1.7 How you interact with local DES providers



31 survey respondents who answered yes provided further detail. The top themes were having internal DES services for quicker collaboration on support needs, networking with DES providers, and referring and offering support together with DES.

14 survey respondents who answered no but plan to in the future provided further detail. Most plan to build networks and relationships with DES services in their local area. Some are currently referring or will increase referrals to DES.

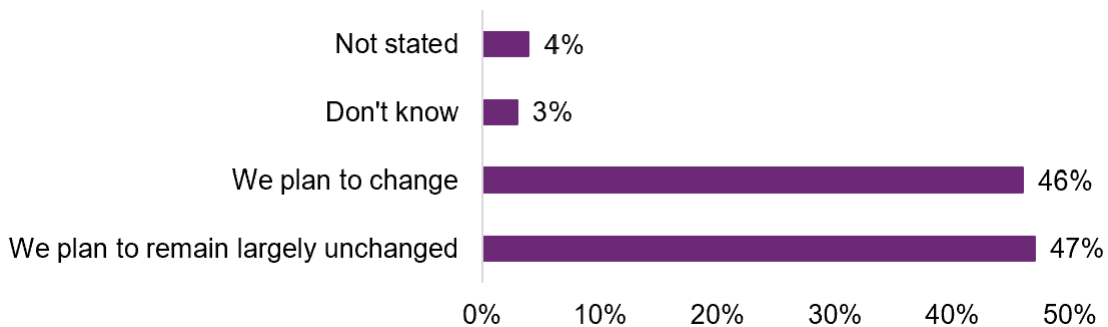
3.4.1.8. How you provide on-the-job support in mainstream workplaces



25 survey respondents who answered yes provided further detail. The top themes were partnering with other businesses and offering them on-site training and maintaining the supports after placement. Some mentioned implementing customised employment, mentoring and coaching on the job. Several providers have arranged labour-hire arrangements within mainstream industry to transition supported employees to employment within these businesses, with the required support.

23 survey respondents who answered no but plan to in the future provided further detail. Many were unsure and intended to explore options for future work. Some plan to provide on-site support in placements through partnering with other businesses and exploring open employment options in their local area.

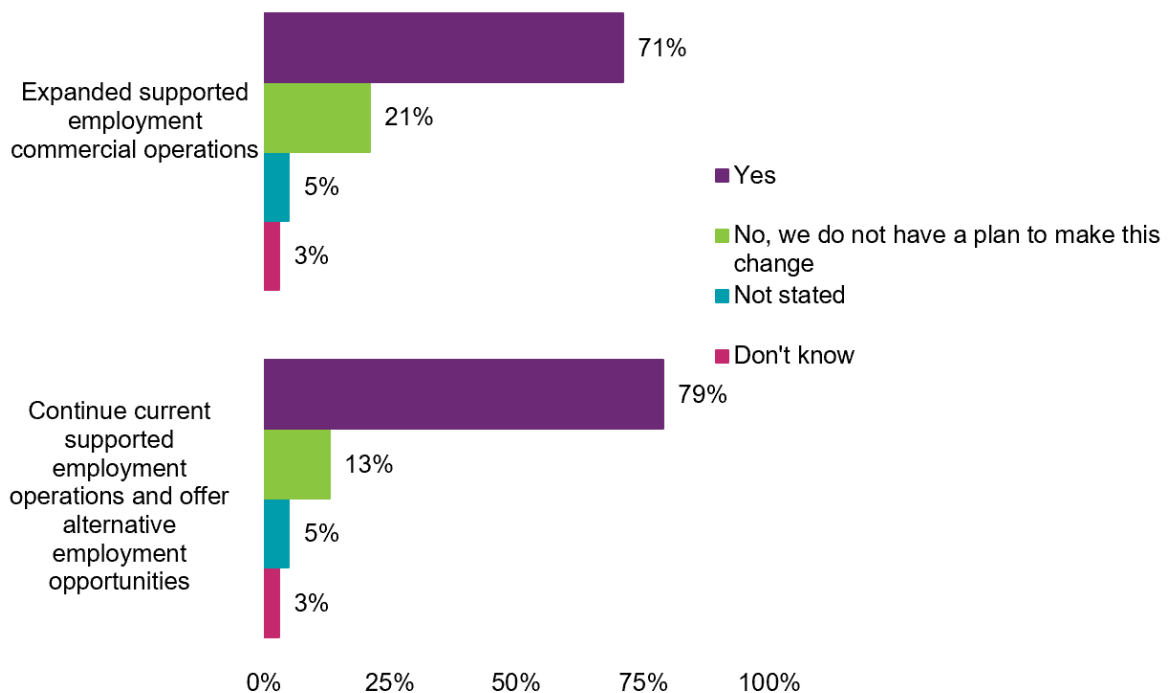
3.4.2. Overall, what are the future plans for your organisation?



5 survey respondents did not answer the quantitative questions in this section.

Of the 47% who stated they plan to remain largely unchanged, 55% went on to describe changes that are already in place or planned. Respondents may have misinterpreted this question.

3.4.3. What types of change do you plan to make?



5% indicated they were planning to cease operation. 81% stated they do not plan to cease operation, 9% didn't know and 5% did not respond.

3% are looking to merge or have their service(s) acquired by another organisation. 82% do not plan to make this change, 11% don't know and 4% did not respond.

4% plan to phase out provision of employment supports and deliver other NDIS services/supports. 84% do not plan to make this change, 8% don't know and 4% did not respond.

3.4.4. Any other future plans for your organisation?

68 survey respondents provided an answer. Most are intending to expand the scope and supports within their business model. Some are exploring a move away from the traditional supported employment model and into more open employment and skill building opportunities.

3.4.5. Do you have any feedback regarding the current operating environment for supported employment services?

71 survey respondents provided an answer. The top themes were discussions around resources and business funding, policy and practice within supported employment and uncertainty about the future of supported employment. Several

survey respondents expressed a desire for the industry to have a future direction with demonstrated best practice examples in supported employment, and more guidance and training to achieve best practice.

3.4.6. What would you like to see in future years regarding the operating environment for supported employment services?

70 survey respondents provided an answer. The top themes were government recognition of the sector, removing perceived stigma associated with supported employment, and improved collaboration and networking between businesses.

3.4.7. Please outline any assistance you would like from DSS, NDIA or NDS to support your organisation

65 survey respondents provided an answer. A number of themes were identified:

- Ensuring the right level of support is included in participants' plans.
- Grant funding to assist with future changes to more innovative models of support and ongoing support from DSS, NDIA and peak bodies to understand impacts on their business.
- Assistance to respond to wage changes.
- Further consideration of Disability Support Pension and employment.
- Promotion of supported employment models to job seekers and industry.
- Training for providers and opportunities for collaboration/sharing of best practice.

3.4.8. If you have any further feedback, please add your comments here

26 survey respondents provided an answer. The top themes were wanting to support more people with supported employment and to agree a future direction for the sector. Some respondents took the opportunity to acknowledge the importance of the support that is currently provided.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Next steps

NDIA will continue to support participants and families, supported employment services and employers to understand and consider assistance required to evolve businesses and provide pathways to open employment and career progression for employees.

The results of the survey will be shared with providers in information sessions and published on the NDIA website.

NDIA will work with Department of Social Services to consider findings from the survey and respond to the identified requests for assistance.

NDIA will also assist with measuring outcomes of initiatives for reform under the national Supported Employment Plan and changes in line with the Guiding Principles for Supported Employment.