

**Inclusion Australia, Disability Advocacy Network Australia, Women With Disabilities Australia**

## **Media Release**

Thursday 2 April 2020

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# **Keep us safe: Government-funded workplaces putting up to 20,000 Aussies with intellectual disability in the firing line of COVID-19**

**Australian workers with intellectual disabilities and their families are concerned they are being exposed to a high risk of contracting coronavirus at work at their Australian Disability Enterprise.**

Inclusion Australia (IA), the Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) and Women With Disability Australia (WWDA) say people with intellectual disability need greater ongoing support to follow current health guidelines regarding hand washing and social distancing. They say Australians are better placed to receive support at home rather than in workplaces in close proximity with their colleagues and friends.

Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) are organisations that provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The Australian Government provides funding to support each person the ADEs employ. IA, DANA and WWDA are slamming the move by many ADE operators to continue business-as-usual despite their vulnerable workforce.

Yesterday (1 April), a worker with intellectual disability at a West Australian ADE was diagnosed with COVID-19. Disability advocacy groups expect numbers to rise dramatically right across Australia if all ADEs do not close their doors immediately until the pandemic passes.

IA, DANA and WWDA are urging many of Australia's 600 ADEs to stop putting their vulnerable staff at risk, and for the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to provide an avenue for individual funding support should ADEs temporarily close. It is believed only a percentage of ADEs have currently ceased operations, with the overwhelming majority open.

IA, DANA and WWDA are now calling on the Federal Government to convene a working group to determine a path forward to temporary ADE closure. They want NDIA funding to be temporarily diverted from the ADE into home-based supports for workers with intellectual disabilities. Under the current model, if the ADE closes, the worker will lose that NDIA funding – meaning they are likely unable to access extra support while they are at home.

### **Quotes from Catherine McAlpine, CEO, Inclusion Australia**

*"This is an incredibly worrying situation for tens of thousands of Australian workers and their families, who are petrified that every day their loved ones go to work they are at a very high risk of contracting COVID-19.*

*“The 20,000 Australian workers with intellectual disability need every support possible to help them keep safe right now. For many, that simply won’t be possible as they continue to go to work alongside their colleagues and friends in a situation that many cannot fully understand could have dire consequences for their health.”*

**Quotes from Mary Mallett, CEO, Disability Advocacy Network Australia**

*“It’s time to stop putting Australians with intellectual disability and their families in the firing line of this incredibly contagious – and potentially devastating – virus.*

*“Urgent action is needed now to shut down ADEs and to work alongside business and government on a safe and fair path forward.”*

**Quotes from Carolyn Frohmader, CEO, Women With Disabilities Australia**

*“Women with disabilities already have it tough enough without having this additional – and extremely frightening – concern placed right before them. Enough is enough and all ADEs must close now.”*

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