## NEWS

training for education providers to assist students with mental health issues.

Deputy chair Rowan Ramsey (Grey, SA) said fostering a supportive educational and work environment through these measures is crucial to help people with a mental illness participate fully in society.

"The loss of employment, or the inability to engage in it in the first place, because of mental illness is a debilitating barrier which can lead to disconnection from society and exacerbate the original condition," Mr Ramsey said. "The cost to society of this disconnection is far higher than the cost of positive programs to engage these people."

The committee also called for a communication campaign to clearly lay out the eligibility and workforce participation requirements that apply to the Disability Support Pension for people with a mental illness.

Ms Rishworth said a third of DSP recipients have a mental illness, and fear of losing access to payments is holding many back from the workforce.

"The system must encourage and engage rather than discourage and disengage job seekers," she said.

"Participation requirements need to be sufficiently flexible for people to venture into employment without the fear of losing their benefit entitlement and in the knowledge that there is a safety net for them should a job not work out."

Ms Rishworth said given the high prevalence of mental illness in the broader community and current workforce shortages in parts of the country, helping more people with a mental illness into work would have broad economic and social benefits.
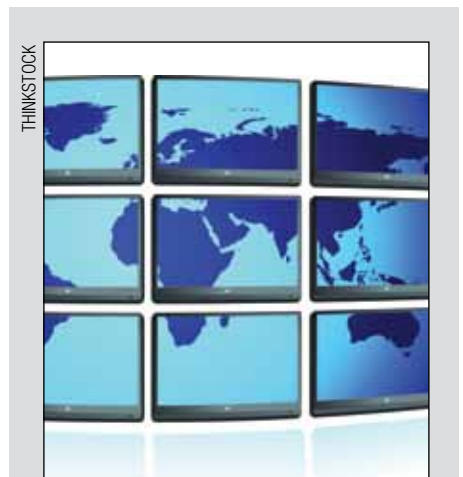
"The statistics are such that, even if we ourselves do not experience a mental illness, we will certainly know someone close to us who does.

"It is in everyone's interest to help job seekers with a mental illness secure sustainable employment.

"They want to work, and work is part of their recovery – and this report shows that there are ways for them to find work." ●

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THINKSTOCK

**TENDER SUBJECT:** *Australia Network controversy continues*

### PM'S DEPARTMENT DISPUTES TENDER CONFUSION

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has denied there was an "atmosphere of uncertainty" about the role of cabinet during the Australia Network tender process, which was scrapped in November 2011.

Responding to a critical report from the Auditor-General on the tender process, the department's deputy secretary Renee Leon said the Prime Minister had advised the final decision would come back to cabinet before the tender was released.

"The department's view is that there was no uncertainty," Ms Leon said. "The Prime Minister had made clear – and as the report indicates ministers had agreed in October – that it was to come back to cabinet."

However the Auditor-General Ian McPhee disagreed, telling federal parliament's Public Accounts and Audit Committee his investigation clearly found confusion about the role of ministers in choosing a preferred tenderer to operate the network.

"I think we have put a fair bit of evidence in there to say there is quite a deal of uncertainty amongst ministers about the processes both before the tender arrangement and subsequently," Mr McPhee said.



**Video news from the House now available at www.aph.gov.au/ath**

The Australia Network is Australia's international television service, which broadcasts local and international news, sport and lifestyle programs in more than 44 countries across Asia, the Pacific and the Indian subcontinent. It has been operated by the international arm of the ABC since 2001, and the operation contract was put out to open tender at the start of 2011.

The tender process was halted by the government in November last year on public interest grounds following repeated leaking of tender information to the media, with the service eventually to be transitioned to the ABC permanently by the government.

While the Auditor–General's report did not make any specific recommendations, it identified several "lessons learned" that could be applied to inform future procurement activities. As well as finding there needed to be more clarity about the role of senior decision makers in the tender, the Auditor-General's report also suggested a greater focus on following information security protocols to reduce the risk of leaking of sensitive and confidential material.

"Briefings prepared for ministers should have had greater regard to the confidentiality and sensitivity of the information being provided for what was still a 'live' tender process," Mr McPhee said.

"Ultimately, information was not as tightly controlled as it should have been."

The report also highlighted the importance of departments adhering to conventional procurement arrangements and effectively managing the range of risks involved, given they can change significantly over time. ●

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AAP

**HOMEGROWN HORROR:** *Australians implicated in potential attacks*

# Terrorist attacks foiled but threats remain

## More than 150 active investigations pursued.

Four potential mass casualty attacks have been disrupted in the past decade by the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO).

In a submission to federal parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee, ASIO said while the threats have been inspired by ideologies imported from overseas, the individuals involved have largely been Australians.

ASIO also told the committee during 2010/11 it pursued more than 150 active counter terrorism investigations.

"The threat of home grown extremism will continue, particularly given the increased technological sophistication of international extremists," ASIO said.

There has been an increasing prevalence of stand-alone or small terrorist cells with little international or group affiliations, making them difficult to detect by security organisations.

ASIO said one important way to limit internal threats is to withhold passports to certain individuals, preventing them from travelling overseas to train, support or participate in terrorism.