Leap in! ebook series



Inclusive employment

A comprehensive guide to creating a culture of inclusion for people with disability in your organisation.

Leap in!



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Introduction.

Diversity and inclusion are fundamental pillars of a caring, strong and understanding society. In our communities, they foster connectivity, compassion and empathy. In our workplaces, they drive creativity, innovation and insight.

Australian workplaces are increasingly reflecting the diversity in our community, with progress made in some areas including gender and cultural representation. However, equality of opportunity in employment for people with diverse abilities is lagging.

In fact, the Australian Human Rights Commission reports that "labour force participation for people with disability in Australia has changed little over the past twenty years." People with a disability are grossly underrepresented in our workforces and workplaces with workforce participation rates at only 53% compared with 84% for people without disability.

People with diverse abilities can contribute enormously to the workplace. And studies show that there are significant business advantages to be gained by embracing workplace inclusion.

There is a common perception that people with disabilities are only suitable for low skilled or blue collar work. This is untrue. All over the world, people with diverse abilities thrive in roles beyond the traditional "disability employment" sector and make positive contributions to their workplaces. Many people with disabilities hold formal qualifications including trades, certificates, undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications. However fulfilling, relevant post-qualification employment is difficult to find.

Studies show that people with diverse abilities bring unique talents, skills and insights to the workplace that can lead to improved morale, better staff retention rates and competitive advantages.



However people with disabilities continue to have fewer options when it comes to employment and access to career development opportunities. While many organisations set an intention to become more diverse, it can often be difficult to convert that intention to action due to uncertainty about legal requirements and preparing an accessible workplace. There are also misconceptions around costs and employee performance.

Leap in! plan management has prepared this ebook to bust some of the myths around employing people with a disability, support businesses to overcome their concerns and provide detailed information to help organisations create a culture of inclusion.

Our ultimate aim is for a society where workplace diversity is the norm, where people with a disability have equal opportunity to forge career paths that ignite their passions and businesses reap the many benefits of workplaces that are more reflective of the community in which they serve.



Part 1

People with a disability and work in Australia.

Almost **1 in 5** Australians have a disability.[1]

Workforce participation rate:
84% people without disability 53% people with disability.[2]

More than 2x rate of unemployment.
10.3% in 2018, compared with
4.6% for people without disability.

Labour force participation rate declined with severity of limitation:
59% for those with a mild limitation
45% for those with a moderate limitation
27% for those with a profound or severe limitation.

People with disability are less likely to be employed full-time (27.0%) than people without disability (53.8%).[3]

90% of employees with disability record productivity rates equal [to] or greater than other workers.[4]

86% of employees with disability have average or superior attendance records.

Students with disability 7.3% of all domestic university undergraduates in 2018.[5]



Part 2

Defining diversity and inclusion.

What is diversity?

Diversity has been defined as the “full spectrum of human differences”. Dimensions of diversity include age, gender, disability, ethnic background, sexual orientation and marital status.[6]

In the workplace, diversity is intentionally creating a workplace that provides equal rights and opportunities for all workers regardless of gender, age, race, ethnicity, physical abilities and disabilities, socioeconomic background and other characteristics.

What is inclusion?

Inclusion is a “cultural and environmental feeling of belonging.” In the workplace, it can be assessed as the “extent to which employees are valued, respected and encouraged to fully participate in the organisation.[7]

Thought leader and internationally recognised inclusion and diversity specialist, Verna Myers says inclusion is about feeling expected, reflected and respected.

Inclusion is diversity in practice. While diversity is about representation, inclusion is about supporting and celebrating the unique characteristics of each employee and creating an environment in which every member feels safe to bring their authentic self to work.



Part 3

Advantages of workplace inclusion.

Adopting more inclusive employment practices delivers benefits for businesses, employees and the community as a whole. Studies show that many people with a disability want to work and, given the opportunity, they can become a valuable asset to the business.

Employing people with diverse abilities also makes good business sense. They bring a wealth of new ideas, talents and experiences, help to build organisational resilience and improve the businesses' ability to connect with customers in a meaningful way.

"It's been said that organisations with inclusive cultures are three times more likely to be high performing, eight times more likely to have better overall business outcomes, and twice as likely to exceed financial targets."[8]

More diverse talent pool.

One in five people in Australia live with a disability. A more inclusive approach means a larger pool of prospective talent. By investing in inclusive people and culture strategies, your business may access to up to 20% more candidates.

Fill skills gaps.

Broadening your talent pool can also help to fill internal skills gaps and bring new proficiencies. And the statistics tell us that people with disabilities are investing in education and skill development. According to ADCET, up to 17% have a bachelor degree or higher and 28% a certificate level qualification.

Improved morale.

Workplaces where team members show empathy towards each other have more cohesive teams, increased productivity and better morale. Learning about the experiences and challenges of other people, develops empathy, improves mutual understanding and enhances team spirit.

Greater resilience.

In a dynamic and continuously evolving business landscape, resilience is critical for organisations to survive and thrive. Diverse firms are more innovative, develop more accurate forecasts and are better at proactively adapting to crises, contributing to resilience and long-term success.[9]

Self-empowerment.

The advantages of being employed are the same for people with a disability as they are for all members of our community – a sense of purpose and a feeling of belonging. Being employed makes us feel more empowered and more in control of our lives while also decreasing reliance on social services and other agencies.

"We know that sustained, meaningful employment gives people a sense of identity and self-worth, increased confidence and expanding social networks. It also leads to financial independence and opportunities to gain skills, knowledge and develop a career."

Matt Little, CEO of CoAct.[10]

New perspectives.

People with diverse abilities bring a different perspective to the workplace and their teams. Some may have experienced challenges and hurdles that develop resilience, determination and courage, essential skills for innovation, solving problems and overcoming challenges.

Reflect your community.

As a business, it is in your best interest for employees to reflect the community you serve. With more than 4 million Australians living with disability, chances are some of those people are your customers. Having a more representative workforce helps you to connect with customers, understand their needs and develop more creative ways to engage.

Positive customer perception.

Companies that recruit from a wide range of backgrounds and are known for embracing differences build a reputation as an employer of choice. Being inclusive can generate goodwill which delivers competitive advantages, builds your brand reputation and provides a point of difference from the competition.



Part 4

What does the law say?

Equality of opportunity in employment is enshrined in federal and state legislation in Australia. Businesses that discriminate against a person in employment because of a disability may be breaking the law. This covers all aspects of employment, from recruitment through to career progression.

Some basic familiarisation can demystify the legal requirements and inform the development of more inclusive policies and procedures. Having an understanding of your obligations under the law is important regardless of where your business is up to in its diversity journey.

Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person because of a disability in many areas of public life including employment, education, obtaining services and accessing public places.

To be covered by the act, a disability may be temporary or permanent and can include intellectual and physical disabilities, learning disabilities, sensory or behavioural disabilities, workplace injuries, medical conditions and diseases or illnesses.[11]

The act provides protections for people with a disability from discrimination in employment and specifies rules covering employees, commission agents and contract workers. There are also provisions for employment agencies.

Discrimination in employment.

It is unlawful for an employer or person acting or purporting to act on behalf of an employer to discriminate against a person on the ground of the other person's disability:

a. In the arrangements made for the purpose of determining who should be offered employment
b. In determining who should be offered employment
c. In the terms or conditions on which the employment is offered.

It is also unlawful for an employer or their representative to discriminate against an employee on the grounds of their disability related to:

- The terms and conditions of employment
- Denying or limiting access to opportunities for promotion, transfer or training or any other benefits
- Dismissal
- Subjecting the employee to any other detriment.

A failure to make appropriate accommodations for a person with disability, so that they are able to work or participate equally in some aspect of work, could amount to direct or indirect discrimination.[12]

Exemptions:

- If because of a disability the person is unable to carry out the inherent requirements or the work even if reasonable adjustments were made
- Differences in the provision of insurance and superannuation
- Combat duties and peacekeeping services in the Australian Defence Forces or Australian Federal Police
- Performing domestic duties in an employer's residence
- If avoiding the discrimination would pose an unjustifiable hardship on the employer.

Employers must also be proactive about avoiding and preventing harassment of employees with a disability.

For more information, check out the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Disability Discrimination Information* sheet.

What are reasonable adjustments?

Reasonable adjustments are designed to eliminate barriers to enable people with disability to more fully participate in employment.

Under the *Disability Discrimination Act*, employers are required to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate a person's disability so that they enjoy equal opportunity with others, providing this does not pose unjustifiable hardship on the employer.

Reasonable adjustments may include:

- Changing work hours or methods
- Modifying equipment
- Implementing new or additional software
- Purchasing new equipment
- Changing the format of onboarding or training documentation
- Training.

Fair Work Act 2009.

The *Fair Work Act* provides a range of workplace protections for employees including the right to be free from unlawful discrimination. These rights are protected from unlawful actions including adverse action, coercion, undue pressure in relation to guaranteed earnings, dedications from wages and individual flexibility arrangements under modern awards and enterprise agreements.

Under the act, it is unlawful for an employer to take adverse action against a person who is an employee, a former employee or prospective employee because of the person's physical or mental disability.

It's worth spending some time familiarising yourself with what the act defines as "adverse action" which includes dismissal, altering a position to the detriment of the employee, and discrimination against an employee in terms and conditions of employment. For more details, visit the Fair Work website.

State and territory legislation.

Additional anti-discrimination laws have also been enacted in each Australian state and territory that relate to various types of discrimination in a wide range of circumstances including employment.

For details, check out the Quick Guide to Australian Discrimination laws.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Australia is a signatory to the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* which recognises the rights of people with a disability to "work, on an equal basis with others".

This includes the right to opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.

While the UN convention is not binding, many of its principles are enshrined in legislation. It also offers some guiding principles that are useful for businesses.

Signatories to the convention commit to legislation that:

- Prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability relating to all matters of employment including recruitment, continuation, advancement and safe working conditions
- Protects the rights of people with a disability, on an equal basis with others, to just and favourable conditions of work including equal employment opportunities and equal remuneration for work of equal value

- Enables access to technical and vocational guidance and continued training
- Ensures reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disability in the workplace
- Promotes the acquisition of work experience in the open labour market.[13]

Job targeting.

While it is legal to specifically target people with disabilities for roles in Australia, it gets a little tricky if you want to target people with a certain type of disability.

For example, if you want to target a role specifically for people with autism. It is best to obtain legal advice if you want to explore this option.

Disclosure obligations.

An employee or prospective employee is only required to disclose they have a disability if it will affect their ability to do their job or impact their ability or the ability of others to work safely. Otherwise, disclosure is completely at the discretion of the employee or prospective employee.

If an employee does disclose a disability:

- The employer must consider appropriate responses including specific training or work adjustments. Disclosing a disability often involves sharing information of a personal and sensitive nature and people have different levels of comfort around sharing such information.
- The employer cannot treat the person less favourably than a person without disability would be treated in the same circumstances.
- The employer is obliged to keep information about the disability confidential. Written consent is required from the employee before this information can be disclosed to others.[14]



Part 5

Smashing misconceptions and myths.

While there are myriad benefits for businesses that employ people with diverse abilities, uncertainty around providing adequate support, lack of awareness of the legal obligations and difficulties in ensuring appropriate access are often cited as potential barriers for employers.

Some of the common barriers include:

- A perception that workplace adjustments are costly and difficult
- Not knowing about the relevant laws or finding it hard to follow them
- Uncertainty about how to provide access and flexibility
- Not having enough money or people in the business to provide support
- Perceived additional reporting requirements
- Not having enough knowledge to support workers with a disability
- Lack of information about how to recruitment and retention
- Lack of knowledge about the business benefits.

However for employers that embrace more diverse workplaces, there can be "real cost savings through reduced staff turnover and lower recruitment and training costs".[15]

"People with disabilities make good, dependable employees. Many cases document comparable productivity, lower accident rates and higher job retention rates for people with a disability compared with a company's general workforce." [16]

Myth: ***People with disability take more days off.***

Fact: 82% of employed working-age people with disability do not need time off work because of their disability.[17]

Fact: On average, people with disabilities take fewer days off, take less sick leave and stay in jobs longer than other workers.[18]

Myth: ***People with disability need more support to perform their duties.***

Fact: 88% of employed working age people with disability do not require additional support from their employer to work.[19] For those that do, there are a range of schemes, funding and support options available (see Part 10).

Myth: ***Expensive workplace adjustments will be necessary to accommodate people with a disability.***

Fact: Most people with a disability will not require major adjustments to be made and many won't require any adjustments. Financial support is often available to help with workplace adjustments.

Myth: ***People with disability will be less productive.***

Fact: There is mounting evidence that people with a disability demonstrate high productivity levels in open mainstream employment.[20]

Fact: Once in the right job, people with disability perform equally as well as other employees.[21]

Myth: ***Employment costs will be higher for people with disabilities.***

Fact: Employment costs for people with disability can be as low as 13% of the employment costs for other employees.[22]

Myth: ***People with disability are most likely to be employed in low skilled jobs.***

Fact: Of the 1 million Australians with disability who are employed, 34% are managers or professionals.[23]

Myth: ***People with disability are more likely to have accidents or be unsafe at work.***

Fact: Contrary to the common perception of increased OHS risk for people with disability, a 2007 study of Australian employers found that workers with disability have a lower number of OHS incidents compared to an average employee.[24]



Part 6

Taking the first steps towards inclusive employment.

Committing to change is important but change only takes place through action. Some companies may choose to start with small steps while others are prepared to take the leap into a more formal and public commitment.

Ultimately, inclusive employment should not be viewed in isolation but be part of an organisation-wide culture of inclusion and accessibility that incorporates your products or services, employment policies and community engagement.

In this section, we'll review some of the initial steps employers can take and how to convert intention to action with an Accessibility Action Plan.

Reaching out to others.

Many Australian organisations across a range of sectors are already on the journey to inclusive employment or are leaders in this space. Talking to others can provide valuable insights into the hiccups, quick wins and greatest successes along the way.

The Australian Human Rights Commission keeps a register of company accessibility plans. This is a great place to review what others are doing and find organisations that may be worth connecting with to talk about their experiences.

In Queensland, a group of organisations has launched the Inclusive Employment to build momentum for people with different abilities, so that whenever there is a recruitment process they are unreservedly engaged, considered and employed. Businesses are using information sharing to create change faster.

Getting people involved.

Any steps towards inclusion should involve people with diverse abilities across the organisation and from different roles and levels of seniority. You might be surprised how much in-house expertise you have on hand when you start speaking with some of your team members.

Unique insights may be drawn from existing employees with disabilities, people who have family members with disabilities or staff who are carers, as well as board members and customers with lived experience.

Developing an Accessibility Action Plan.

An Accessibility Action Plan (AAP) sets out an organisation's commitment to establishing and promoting an accessible, equitable and inclusive environment. It is both a public statement of intent and a strategy that includes key performance indicators and the actions that will be taken to achieve them. Developing an AAP is an important accountability piece on the path towards more inclusive organisation.

AAPs are as different and diverse as the organisations that create them. Some organisations choose to follow the guidelines of the Australian Human Rights Commission and focus their action around the provision of goods or services. The reason for this is the Disability Discrimination Act's Action Plan provisions target businesses as service providers rather than as employers. However, it recommends actions plans include employment reforms together with a review of employment policies and practices.

What to include in an Accessibility Action Plan.

- An introduction from the Board Chair or General Manager
  - Relevant background information or statistics
  - Motivation for building an accessible and diverse workplace
  - Benchmarking information (your starting point)
- Initiatives already underway including:
  - Programs and other initiatives
  - Personal stories or case studies
- Goals for accessibility and inclusion around:
  - Employment and recruitment
  - Customers
  - Community
  - Education.

- For businesses focusing on growing representation in the workplace, set goals and detail actions relating to:
  - Leadership
  - Recruitment
  - Onboarding
  - Building an inclusive workplace
  - Retention and career development.
  - Establish timelines and respon sibilities for the action steps.

Be sure to set specific and measurable targets as well as define who is accountable for the various actions.

A comprehensive guide to the steps for developing an AAP is available on the HRC website.

Benchmarking your organisation.

The Australian Network on Disability's Access and Inclusion Index is Australia's most respected tool for benchmarking inclusion of people with a disability in the workplace. It can help organisations to gain an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, set measurable goals, build awareness and formulate a plan.

Organisations self-assess against 10 criteria:

- Commitment
- Premises
- Workplace adjustments
- Communication and marketing
- Products and services
- Information communication technology
- Recruitment and selection
- Career development
- Suppliers and partners
- Innovation.

This is an ideal place to start and provides a framework around which to develop an inclusive employment strategy. The index is only available to members of the Australian Network on Disability (AND). However, anyone can access a free self-assessment tool called the Quick 10 which provides a snapshot of your organisation's current performance

Publishing your Accessibility Action Plan.

It's important to make your AAP publicly available. Employees with a disability may be looking for signs of inclusion and acceptance during their job search and it may make your organisation more appealing to prospective customers or clients.

It's a good idea to have the plan available in different formats which may include a web page, pdf and captioned video to make it more widely accessible.

You can choose to submit your AAP to the HRC so it is on the public record if it follows the HRC guidelines. This is also a great place for inspiration from other companies that are already leading the way.



Part 7

Recruiting people with diverse abilities.

Inclusive workplaces start at the job design phase, with roles and job descriptions created with accessibility and inclusion in mind. An inclusive workplace is one in which every team member feels welcome, is accepted for who they are, is supported to perform at their best and is given equal opportunity for career advancement.

In this section, we provide some tips for creating recruitment processes to make roles more attractive to suitably qualified prospective employees with diverse abilities and what to consider when it comes to position descriptions, advertisements and interviews. We also explore what it means to become a disability confident recruiter.

Job design for diversity.

- Consider the **skills and attributes** that are essential to the role and limit the job requirements to "must-haves" only. Non-essential attributes such as having a driver's license may discourage some people with a disability from applying.
- **Flexibility** is an important part of job design for many people, not only people with disabilities. Many businesses are now more confident in their ability to support employees to work from home. Being able to work remotely and allowing employees to determine their work hours, location (such as the ground floor) and how the work is carried out can attract a more diverse talent pool.
- **Procedures should accommodate the different ways people learn.** For example, make processes, policies and induction manuals available in different formats (print/large print, video, audio) and develop simplified, visual versions of workflows instead of relying on written descriptions.

- Be willing to **re-allocate tasks** that a person finds difficult to do so the focus remains on ability and what they can bring to the team. Alternatively, be prepared to offer additional training or mentoring if the person indicates a willingness to learn.
- **Adjust onboarding, training and mentoring programs** based on needs and skills rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach.
- Remember that every person with a disability has different needs and requirements. Be prepared to **customise** some of the above aspects of job design after hire based on the individual.
- Include information about the organisation's approach to job design in position descriptions.
- Include **mental health awareness** and training in your onboarding process.

Advertising and promotion.

The NSW Public Service Commission has some great tips for creating a disability friendly job ad. We have summarised the tips below and added some of our own.

Use clear and simple language – avoid acronyms and jargon.

- Focus on what should be achieved, not how
- Provide a clear and concise description of the role
- Be clear about the essential and non-essential duties
- Include a diversity statement indicating your organisation has adopted inclusive employment practices and is a welcoming environment for all employees
- Provide information about the accessibility of your work environment, public transport options and any flexible work arrangements available
- List more than one method of reaching the contact person to accommodate different communication needs
- Make online forms and application processes user friendly and clear
- Provide an alternative contact person to talk through role adjustments if necessary
- Include a link to your Accessibility Action Plan
- Ensure online forms, information and position descriptions are accessible and screen reader friendly.

Attract a broader field of applicants by using alternative advertising pathways beyond traditional platforms such as Seek. Job vacancies suitable for people with a disability can be lodged through a registered Disability Employment Service provider.

Examples of diversity statements on job advertisements.

Optus believes in the strength of a vibrant, diverse and inclusive workforce where backgrounds, perspectives & life experiences of all our people help us innovate & create strong connections with all of our customers.

ANZ recognises the value of an inclusive and diverse work environment. We take pride in the diversity of our people and encourage applications from diverse candidates. Our recruitment decisions are based on the key inherent needs and requirements of each role, and candidates are selected based on their unique strengths and characteristics.

If your business is on its way to becoming a disability confident recruiter but you're not there yet, consider working with an agency that has experience recruiting people with diverse abilities and use the process as a learning opportunity.

Inclusive interviews.

Prior to the interview, ask if the candidate needs any adjustments to demonstrate their suitability for the role. If you are working with a Disability Employment Service (DES) provider, their representative will usually advise if special arrangements need to be made. In some cases, funding from the federal Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) may be available to cover the costs of special arrangements.

Adjustments may include:

- Making changes to the location or environment
- Scheduling at a time to suit the candidate
- Conducting interviews via Zoom or other online platform
- Allowing applicants to bring a laptop and other assistive technology such as screen readers
- Providing an AUSLAN interpreter or scribe
- Alternative options for assessments.

It's helpful and encouraging to candidates if there are people of diverse abilities and backgrounds on the interview panel.

Many businesses are unsure about asking candidates disability-related questions. It is important to be aware your legal obligations to prevent discrimination and avoid breaking the law. You can ask about how an applicant's disability might relate to doing the job. This gives them the opportunity to talk about their strengths and what they can bring to the role.

It is also appropriate to ask how the workplace could be changed to help the applicant perform the tasks associated with the role as well as anything that should be done to keep the workplace safe. However, you cannot ask about the person's health or disability.[25]

JobAccess provides clear guidelines on the types of questions you can and cannot ask.

Types of questions you can ask:

- Will you need any special work arrangements so you can do your job?
- Have you got any ideas about good ways to do your job?
- Do you take any medication that might make it unsafe for you to do any of the job's tasks?
- How will you let us know about medical appointments so we can change your work roster?

Types of questions you cannot ask:

- Do you take a lot of medication?
- Are you sick a lot?
- Does your disability make you get angry with other people?
- Have you ever lost a job because of your disability?

Becoming a Disability Confident Recruiter.

The Australian Network on Disability (AND) has developed a program that provides tools and resources to help agencies and organisations to grow their ability to recruit talented people with a disability.

The Disability Confident Recruiter (DCR) program, which is open to AND members and non-members, provides support to identify and address barriers which may prevent people with a disability from applying for roles.

The program can help you to:

- Become an employer of choice for people with disability
- Access skilled and talented applicants
- Better reflect the diversity of the community in which you operate
- Analyse your recruitment process to identify and remedy unintended barriers
- Reduce the risk of receiving a disability discrimination complaint.[26]

Organisations that successfully complete the DCR program and adhere to its charter obtain Disability Confident Recruiter status and are able to use the DCR logo. Some noteworthy organisations who have achieved DCR status include Telstra, RMIT University and Life Without Barriers.



Part 8

Preparing your workplace.

Inclusive workplaces have been described as the "next frontier of corporate social responsibility".[27] But how do you prepare for welcoming more diverse employees into your workforce and workplace?

In this section, we consider a whole of business approach, the importance of internal engagement and the role of assistive technology. We also explore some of the funding and grant options that can support you as an employer.

As you work through the information in this section, consider how you can create a safe, accessible and dignified experience for all employees, beyond simply meeting your legal Occupational Health & Safety obligations.

Personalisation of supports.

It is important to remember that people with a disability are not an homogeneous group so there is no one size fits all approach. For each disability type, there is a range of associated, specific requirements that might need to be met to maximise the productivity of each individual.[28]

For example:

- People with mobility impairments may need additional attention to accessibility and the physical layout of the workplace
- People with intellectual disabilities might need individual job tasks to be broken down into clear steps
- People who are deaf may require coworkers to use alternative communication methods.
- People with psychosocial disabilities may require more frequent breaks.[29]

Consult with the employee to find out what workplace customisation, adjustments or supports they need. If Disability Employment Services (DES) has been involved in the hire process, the DES representative can advocate on behalf of the person and discuss any workplace needs during

the recruitment phase. Funding is also available for additional training and workplace modifications (see *Funding and grant options*).

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reports that "most (88% or 684,000) employed working-age people with disability do not require specific arrangements from their employer to work. Of those who do:

- 50% (or 47,700) need special equipment or modified buildings/fittings, or to be provided special/free transport or parking
- 25% (or 23,700) need a special support person to assist or train them on the job (applies to salary or wage earners only) or to be provided help from someone at work, or to be provided training/retraining
- 26% (or 25,000) need to be allocated different duties." [30]

Considerations may include:

- How to create a safe environment such as the installation of lighting, signage, rails or non-slip mats
- Any access requirements – to the workplace, building, floor and individual work location or station
- Parking requirements
- Accessibility in common areas, kitchens, boardrooms etc.
- Bathroom requirements including accessible toilets
- Additional space for storage of personal items
- Any accommodations for a support worker to attend with the employee
- Additional or custom onboarding and training requirements.

Some things can be done immediately and at little or no cost such as rearranging furniture to accommodate a wheelchair or placing non-slip mats in common areas, while others may take more time.

Health and safety in the workplace.

Under Australian law, businesses must ensure the health and safety of employees and not put the safety of other people at risk by providing a safe work environment, safe ways of working and providing and maintaining adequate facilities. And all employees have a responsibility to play an active role in workplace safety.

Access and signage considerations:

- Recent changes to the National Construction Code cover the minimum necessary requirements for safety and health, amenity and accessibility that new Australian buildings must meet. These include provisions for accessible adult change facilities and requirements around access to approach a building, walking surfaces, doors, stairways and ramps.

- Some adjustments may be required such as:
  - Clear markings on steps or pathways
  - Better lighting
  - Ramp access
  - Providing a close car parking space
  - Braille and tactile signage.
- Access to safety information may need to be supplied in various different formats such as video, large fonts, audio or Braille.[31]

Evacuation considerations:

- Ensure your evacuation procedure is inclusive of people with a disability
- Develop a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) for each person with a disability
- Consider a "buddy" system for any employees with disability that may need support to evacuate
- Ensure fire wardens know who requires additional assistance and understand the PEEP for each person
- Refer to the Australian Network on Disability guidelines for more information.

Safe Work Australia is the Australian government organisation responsible for national policy related to Workplace Health and Safety and workers' compensation. For more details on your obligations, visit the Safe Work Australia website.

Mental health.

Around 45% of Australians will experience some sort of mental illness in their life so it makes good business sense to support the mental wellbeing of all staff.

Mental illness is covered by the Disability Discrimination Act so it is unlawful to discriminate against another person on the grounds of mental illness, mental health issues or psychosocial disability when it comes to employment.

Many people with mental illness are aware of their triggers and have strategies for managing symptoms. Some people with psychosocial disability will be receiving supports under the National Disability Employment Service (NDIS). Other mainstream programs are also available to help employees to manage psychosocial disabilities or mental health issues including Mental Health Care Plans.

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, *"employers should consider what reasonable adjustments, or changes to the working environment, could support a worker with a mental illness to perform their duties more effectively."*[32]

The HRC provides the following example:

An employee told their employer that they had been diagnosed with anxiety. After discussing what would work best for them both, they agreed that the worker could change responsibilities to provide administrative duties rather than telephone contact with customers. [33]

Many organisations have a dedicated Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), an independent work-based program designed to enhance the emotional, mental and psychological wellbeing of employees. They provide free confidential and professional psychology and counselling services, usually up to a certain number of consultations per year. Funding for mental health awareness training may be available through the JobAccess Employment Assistance Fund.

It is also worth investing in training for staff members in Mental Health First Aid, to teach them skills to help co-workers, family members or friends experiencing a mental health crisis.

Helpful resources:

- Australian Human Rights Commission: Workers with mental illness: a practical guide for managers
- Beyond Blue: Our work in improving workplace mental health
- Heads Up: Strategies for healthy workplaces
- JobAccess: Understanding mental health in your workplace
- Health Direct: Mental Health Care Plans

Internal champions.

Consider how your organisational structure can support diversity and inclusion. Having a dedicated internal resource with the responsibility of breaking down barriers is critical to the implementation of any Accessibility Action Plan. Accountability and responsibility should start at the top, with a manager or senior leader, supported by employees across the business.

Inclusion champions can take many forms and ideally everyone in the organisation should be an inclusion champion. However, it is helpful to have passionate and committed people throughout the organisation to highlight and help break down barriers as well as support people who may be feeling excluded.

An inclusion champion is someone who helps to create a sense of belonging for everyone in the workplace in a day-to-day context.

People with the following characteristics make great inclusion champions:

- **Intuitive**: Can sense how another person is feeling or when they may be being excluded and respond appropriately
- **Engaged**: Well connected with and respected by their peers

- **Courageous**: Unafraid to speak up on behalf of others and drive difference
- **Responsible**: Willing to take responsibility for their actions and interactions
- **Supportive**: Comfortable speaking with colleagues about difficult topics.

Assistive technology.

Assistive technology is a device, system or design that allows an individual to perform a task that they would otherwise be unable to do, or increases the ease of which a task can be performed.[34]

People with diverse abilities may access a wide range of assistive technology spanning everything from simple, low cost aids like non-slip mats or walking sticks, to more complex items such as laptops, screen readers and custom wheelchairs.

The Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) can cover the cost of some work-related assistive technology such as buying equipment, modifications and communications technology. For more information, visit Funding for changes to the workplace.

Working with support workers.

Support workers are vital carers for some people with a disability who may provide support with key functions of the person's role and/or personal care while they are at work.

A new type of funding was recently made available through the National Disability Employment Service (NDIS) called Supports in Employment – Specialised supported employment. This funding may be made available to NDIS participants who are less independent in performing their work tasks.

They may need additional coaching to be able to operate in the workplace such as help to stay focused, assistance with communication or support with managing behaviour. Supports may be provided individually or in groups and include:

- On the job assessments related to the impact of their disability on their ability to work
- Job customisation
- On the job training
- Support with work tasks
- Physical assistance and personal care at work
- Supports to manage disability related behaviour or complex needs.

Depending on how the participant's NDIS Plan is managed, they may be able to use a support worker of their choice to assist with these tasks which may include someone within the organisation.

Support workers are there to help the employee be more effective so it is in your best interests to work with them and genuinely consider any suggestions they have to improve accessibility and inclusion.

Funding and grant options to assist you as an employer.

There are a range of government and non-government supports that can assist employers to create more inclusive workplaces including financial assistance with workplace modifications and training.

For example, if a modification is required to help ensure an employee with a disability can do their job, the cost may be covered by the federal Employment Assistance Fund.

Participants in the NDIS may also be receiving reasonable and necessary personal supports and services as part of their NDIS funding package. However, the NDIS will not generally fund supports and services that are covered by other mainstream providers.

What the NDIS can cover:

- Personal assistive technology such as mobility aids
- Support workers to assist with personal care
- Other items included under 'Working with support workers' above.

What the NDIS won't cover:

- Workplace modifications such as handrails, signage, ramp installation and non-slip surfaces
- Assistive technology in the workplace such as modified computers
- Vocational courses.

For more details about Assistance and support, check out Part 10.



Part 9

Creating a culture of inclusion.

Creating a culture of inclusion is everybody's responsibility. Studies show that employees are more productive and happier when they are supported and encouraged to bring their true and authentic selves to work.

What that means to each individual is a personal thing. Some disabilities such as psychosocial disabilities are invisible. Those people may choose to be "out" at work or not. Many people with a disability are fearful of being treated differently. Some people are happy to talk about their disability openly and others prefer to avoid it.

An inclusive workplace is one where people treat each other with respect and consideration, where every individual feels comfortable in their own skin and has equal opportunities to contribute, thrive and progress their career goals.

10 tips for workplace etiquette.

1. A wheelchair or other mobility aid is a part of a person's personal space. Do not touch it without permission.
2. You should offer to shake hands with a person with disability even if they have limited use of their hands/arms or an artificial limb. If you cannot shake hands, be sure to speak to the person and offer a friendly smile.
3. Be patient with anyone who has difficulty speaking. If you do not understand what they are saying, do not pretend you understand. Instead, ask them to repeat it or communicate it in a way that is comfortable for them.
4. Always ask before offering to help.
5. Avoid unnecessary touch that you would not use for any other colleague such as patting on the shoulder.
6. If the employee has a service dog, the dog is there as a worker, not a pet. Do not talk to, feed or pat the dog. Speak to the handler, not the dog.

7. Take care with your wording. Unless the person starts the conversation, or indicates they are comfortable speaking about it, do not ask about their disability.
8. Do not speak in a condescending way or treat the person as if they are a child.
9. Be humble and prepared to make mistakes. You won't always get it right. If you are unsure how to address a person or what their needs are, ask them. They will probably appreciate your candour.
10. Avoid using terms like brave, courageous and inspiring.

Finally, if a colleague has confidentiality spoken with you about their disability, you are obliged to honour that confidentiality both within and outside of the workplace.

Using inclusive language.

Use person-first language that focuses on the person, not the disability.

☒ Disabled person
☑ Person with disability

☒ Blind person
☑ Person with vision impairment

☒ Mentally disabled person
☑ Person with a mental health condition

☒ Special needs
☒ Slow
☑ Learning disability/difficulty

☒ Non-disabled
☒ Able bodied
☒ Normal
☑ Person without disability

Avoid negative terms

☒ Invalid
☒ Handicapped
☒ Wheelchair bound
☒ Confined to a wheelchair
☑ Person who uses a wheelchair

Use inclusive language for facilities and signs
☒ Disabled toilets/parking
☑ Accessible parking, accessible toilets

Some people with disability embrace specific terms as part of their identity. It's important to ask each individual what they prefer.

Employee awareness and training.

Disability awareness training can be beneficial for educating managers and staff on a variety of issues associated with disability as well as gaining insights into creating a more inclusive workplace. It can help your team identify barriers and opportunities for improvement.

Depending on the nature of disabilities in your workplace, staff may also benefit from deaf awareness training or sign language training.

Course providers include:

- Disability Awareness – offers a range of online courses that are interactive, easy to follow and inexpensive.
- National Disability Services – offers a 60 minute online course on disability awareness and inclusion.
- EPIC Assist – offers disability awareness workshops including specialised courses for customer service and leaders.

Free disability awareness training is available for businesses that partner with the National Disability Coordinator which helps larger employers access the skills and talents of people with a disability.

Career progression.

A truly inclusive workplace offers all employees equal opportunities to progress towards identified career goals. People with disability have career aspirations and goals like any other employee and need assurance they can openly identify as having a disability without it negatively affecting their opportunities or career progression.

It's not only the law to ensure there is equal opportunity for career progression but it may be beneficial to your business to invest in supporting employees to engage in continued learning and development.

On the job training, formal training, mentoring, coaching and offering more challenging projects can all develop new capabilities and help identify potential.

The Disability Leadership Institute recognises the imbalance in representation of people with diverse abilities in leadership roles and offers an ongoing program of resources, training and connection for organisations and their staff. There's also a dedicated program to support people with disability who have leadership aspirations to build their leadership skills.



Part 10

Assistance and support.

Job Access.

JobAccess is a government information and advisory service that provides information about government services and incentives for employing people with a disability.

There's information on the support available to employers, your rights and responsibilities and an employer toolkit that covers hiring, recruiting, preparing your workplace and managing your team.

JobAccess also offers a confidential free service for managers of workers with disability, providing expert advice on matters relating to employment, assistance with specific issues, advice about reasonable adjustments, referral to experts and access to funding. JobAccess Advisors can be reached on 1800 464 800.

The Employment Assistance Fund.

The Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) is a federal government program that provides financial assistance to eligible people with disability and mental health conditions and their employers to purchase work-related modifications, equipment and support services.

It is available for people with a disability who are starting a job or currently working as well as people who need Auslan assistance or special work equipment to look for and prepare for a job.

EAF can be used to fund:

- Adjustments to the workplace
- Modifications to work vehicles
- Workplace equipment
- Information and communication devices

- Auslan interpreting services
- Disability awareness training for the workplace
- Specialist services for employees with specific learning disorders and mental health conditions
- Mental health awareness and first aid training.

A free workplace assessment is available to determine the modifications or supports required to help the person perform the duties of their job and make the workplace more accessible and flexible.

National Disability Recruitment Coordinator.

The National Disability Recruitment Coordinator (NDRC) helps larger employers attract the skills and talents of people with a disability. The government-funded program can help managers design jobs for people with disability and write clear position descriptions focusing on the fundamental requirements of the job.

The NDRC can be contacted by speaking with a Job Access Adviser on 1800 464 800.

Disability Employment Services.

Disability Employment Services (DES) help people with a disability find and keep a job. DES providers may be large, medium or small non-profit or for-profit organisations that are experienced in supporting people with a disability. They can also provide assistance to employers to put in place practices to support the employee in the workplace.

Prospective employees can register via Centrelink or visit a service centre.

The Australian Network on Disability.

The Australian Network on Disability is a membership based organisation that supports organisations to advance the inclusion of people with disability in all aspects of business.

National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) funds reasonable and necessary supports for eligible participants with a disability which may include personal care at work, support workers and aids and equipment related to a person's disability (eg. wheelchairs).

Supported Wage System.

The Supported Wage System was set up for employees with disability who cannot perform jobs at the same capacity as other employees. Under the program, special workplace arrangements are created so employers can pay wages to a person with a disability based on how productive they are in the job. This is a formal process and requires an onsite workplace assessment.

Wage subsidies.

As an incentive for hiring people with disabilities, employers can negotiate wage subsidies directly with a Disability Employment Services Provider (DES) to hire a new employee. Wage subsidies are by agreement and have specific requirements including minimum time commitments. The amount paid depends on the program and agreement.

- The Wage Subsidy Scheme provides up to $1,650 (inclusive of GST) for jobs of at least eight hours per week, over 13 weeks.
- Wage Start provides up to $6,000 (inclusive of GST) for jobs of at least 15 hours per week, over 26 weeks.
- Restart provides up to $10,000 (inclusive of GST) for jobs of at least 20 hours per week, over 26 weeks.

Disabled Australian Apprentice Wage Support Program.

The Disabled Australian Apprentice Wage Support Program is a payment that assists employers of eligible Australian apprentices with disabilities. The payments may be made to employers who:

- Employ an eligible Australian apprentice with a disability who finds it difficult to get an approved apprenticeship because of their disability
- Currently employ an Australian apprentice who has acquired a disability during their apprenticeship and needs help as a result.

Work Assist.

Work Assist provides support to eligible employees who have difficulty fulfilling the essential requirements of their role due to disability, injury or ill health. A disability services provider works with the Work Assist participant and their employer to provide support so the participant can continue to work.

The types of assistance can include:

- Face-to-face support
- Advice about job redesign
- Workplace assessments
- Workplace modifications or special equipment
- Support in the workplace to manage the impact of the disability or health condition
- Interventions such as physiotherapy or pain management.

Other state or industry-based incentives may also be available.



Part 11

Resources and further reading.

Recruitment and retention.

DSS: Employers guide to recruiting someone with a disability

NSW Public Services Commission: How to recruit people with a disability

NSW Government Public Service: How to recruit people with a disability

Australian National University: Recruiting people with a disability

Australian Human Resources Institute: Recruiting people with a disability – an employer perspective

Hays: Discovering talent, improving quality of life – a guide to disability in the recruitment process

Job Access: Recruiting and retaining the right people

Australian Human Rights Commission: Adjustments in the workplace for people with disabilities

Australian Government: Workplace adjustments to support employee performance

Policy, planning and benchmarking.

Australian network on Disabilities: What is an Accessibility Action Plan?

International Labour Office: Disability in the workplace: company practices

People with disability Australia: Accessibility Action Plan Template

Australian Network on Disability: Access and Inclusion Index

Australian Human Rights Commission: Willing to work – National Enquiry into Employment Discrimination against older Australians and Australians with disability (2016)

Australian Human Rights Commission, National Enquiry on employment and disability: Report 2 – Information, needs costs and risks for employers

Australian Network on Disabilities: Employer responsibilities

Toolkits and guides.

Job Access: Employer Toolkit

Heads up – better mental health in the workplace: For employers

Australian Network on Disability: Becoming a disability confident recruiter

Inclusion and participation.

Accenture: Getting Equal, the disability inclusion advantage

Australian Network on Disabilities: Business benefits of hiring people with disability

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: People with disability in Australia

Power, Tony; International Labour Office: Recognising ability – the skills and productivity of persons with disability

Disabled People's Organisations Australia: Factsheet – Employment of persons with disability

Job Access: Benefits of employing people with a disability

Australian Human Rights Commission: Barriers to employment

Job Access: Supporting staff to disclose disability

Forbes: Fostering an inclusive culture is a business imperative, not a trend

About Leap in!

Leap in! is Australia's leading NDIS plan manager, supporting thousands of Australians across the country. As a registered charity we believe in people over profits and exist to help people with a disability live their best life by getting the most out of their NDIS Plans.

We specialise in supporting our members at each step of the NDIS process – from preparing for a first NDIS Plan to managing budgets and paying providers.

Get choice and control over how NDIS funds are used, with financial and administrative support that saves time and reduces stress.

At Leap in!, we have a fundamental belief that all people should have equal access to meaningful employment. We are committed to playing a leadership role in breaking down barriers to meaningful employment for people with disabilities, starting with our own organisation and our involvement as a founding member of the Inclusive Employment Movement.

Contact Leap in!

Call **1300 05 78 78**

Email **crew@leapin.com.au**

Visit **leapin.com.au**

Other titles in the Leap in ebook series

- Future planning: A guide for parents and carers.
- The Essential NDIS Guide: An introduction to NDIS basics.
- Supported Independent Living: Achieving your goal to live independently.

About the Inclusive Employment Movement

The Inclusive Employment Movement was launched to build a momentum across the employment landscape nationally for people with different abilities, so that whenever there is a recruitment process they are unreservedly engaged, considered and employed.

Our aim is to create a shift in perception, so that people with diverse abilities have equal opportunities for enriching, fulfilling jobs and supported career progression doing whatever sets their heart on fire.

The Inclusive Employment movement is committed to breaking down barriers to meaningful employment for people with disabilities. We want to drive change so that people with diverse abilities can work in mainstream workplaces and have mainstream careers, instead of limited opportunities in “safe and secure” environments.

Together we embrace workplace cultures where people can openly identify as having different abilities without fear of prejudice. We will raise awareness, build connections and share information to learn from each other and help other organisations on their journey towards accessibility and inclusion.

Current members include:

- Leap in! Australia
- Troocoo
- Endeavour Foundation
- Social Scaffolding
- UnitingCare Queensland
- Goodstart Early Learning

To find out more about the Inclusive Employment Movement connect with:

- Andrew Kiel at Leap in! on 1300 05 78 78 or andrew.kiel@leapin.com.au
- Scott Horton at Troocoo on 07 3054 1121 or scott.horton@troocoo.com

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The Leap in! Crew acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we work and live. We acknowledge the stories, traditions and living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on this land and commit to building a brighter future together.

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