

Your guide to disability **inclusion** in the workplace.





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Introduction

It goes without saying that employing people with disability can change lives. The financial, social and health benefits to them, their families and the community are clear.

What may not be so well understood, are the benefits and opportunities people with disability can create for a business.

A research report published by Accenture, in partnership with Disability:IN and the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), found that companies that embrace best practice for employing and supporting people with disabilities have outperformed their peers.¹

In fact, these leading companies were, on average, twice as likely to have higher shareholder returns than their competition.²

There are a few reasons. One of the most significant is they don't realise they are missing out on a huge untapped resource.



Why isn't every company creating a more inclusive workforce and culture?

Around one in six Australians are estimated to have a disability. That's 4.4 million people. Yet they are incredibly underemployed.

Only 48% of working age people with disability are employed, compared with 80% of Australians without a disability.³

What this tells us is that there's a lack of understanding of not only the untapped talent pool but also the potential benefits to business - both to the bottom line and the culture within the workplace.

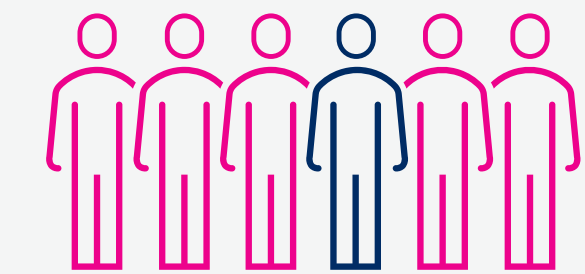
People with disability bring more diverse ways of thinking, viewpoints, experiences, skills and talents. They have a positive attitude to work and great work ethic. And they improve workplace culture and boost productivity across an organisation.⁴

If you're an employer wanting to make the most of these opportunities and unlock a wider pool of employees, creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace is easier, and probably cheaper, than you think.

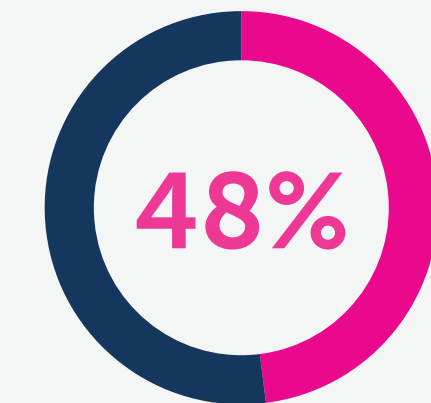
This guide is designed to help you understand disability diversity and inclusion, and the many benefits it has for individuals, business, and the broader community.

We'll take you through the benefits, and provide information, tools and strategies so you can build disability inclusion in your workplace.

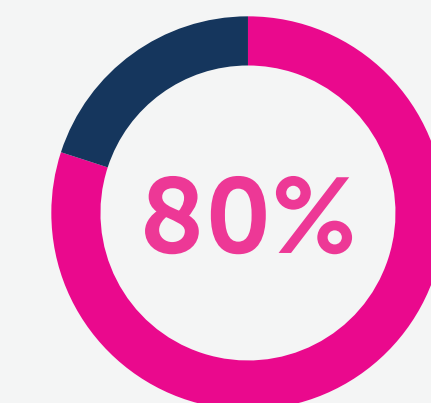
We also share how APM's services can help you make it happen.



1 in 6 Australians - 4.4 million people - have a disability



Only 48% of people 15-64 with a disability are employed



80% of Australians without disability are employed

Benefits of disability inclusion



It's a win for both people and workplaces

Disability is more common than you think. It's just one of the many things that add to the diversity of people. We know disability is part of everyday life, and we also know that disability inclusion in the workplace is good for business.

Many disabilities are not always visible. With mental health, for instance, which is so prevalent in our community, the chances are a member of your team, or yourself, have a disability.

Yet people with disability are significantly underrepresented in Australia's workforce.

People with disability also experience social isolation – 17% compared to 8.7% of people without a disability.⁵

A secure job gives them a sense of belonging within their local community while significantly improving their health, social and economic outcomes. This, of course, flows onto their family life and reduces welfare dependency.



We all benefit

In 2011, research showed that increasing workplace participation for people with disability would deliver numerous benefits to our economy and community.

If we could increase the employment of people with disability by one third, it's estimated there would be a cumulative \$43 billion GDP increase over a decade.⁶

While this report is over a decade old, employment rates have not improved by even one-third. In fact, they've not improved by any significant amount.⁷

The simple fact is, people with disability are people you know – you, your family, neighbours, friends. It's easy to understand how hiring a job seeker with disability provides life-changing opportunities for people in our communities.

Plus, it helps employers build better and more successful businesses. It's a win for everyone.



Building a better business

On top of the economic and social benefits, a diverse workforce creates a range of organisational benefits.

In APM's own annual study into Australian businesses, the 2022 Disability Diversity and Inclusivity Index, 65% of employers said they recognised direct workplace benefits of employing people with a disability, up from 58% in 2021.⁸



The top 8 benefits

Widen your talent choice

There are 2.1 million people in Australia who have a disability and are of a working age. With a 48% employment rate, there is a resource of over 1 million people looking for work. When you give them a job, chances are they'll help give you many or all of the other benefits on this list.

Increase your customer base

People with disability have often had to navigate and overcome multiple barriers in life. So they often bring skills in innovation, creativity and problem-solving. An inclusive workforce is nine times more likely to innovate.⁹ This can help an organisation develop products and services that appeal to a much wider audience and open up their markets.

Keep your staff

Right now, it's just as difficult to keep good staff as it is to find them. Which makes employing people with disability an even better option. Safework Australia reported the retention rate of people with a disability is higher than those without.¹⁰ And it's

not just people with disability. Employees in inclusive workplaces have more job satisfaction and are four times more likely to stay longer in an organisation.¹¹

Better reflect your customers

Your customers are diverse, and it makes sense that your staff reflect that. A diverse team gives you wider skills and perspectives to understand a broader market and improve your customer experience. An inclusive workplace is five times more likely to have excellent customer service.¹²

Build a more dependable team

Many people wrongly believe that people with disability will need more days off work. Employees with disability have lower absenteeism rates, higher rates of retention, better attendance and fewer occupational health and safety incidents than those without a disability.¹³

Build a stronger brand

A more diverse and inclusive workplace will enjoy better brand reputation and customer loyalty

and create more opportunities for winning new business. Successful brands are seen to be doing good in the community, beyond simply pursuing a profit, build a trusting and loyal customer base.¹⁴ A good brand means customers are more likely to purchase from them, people want to work for them, and organisations want to do business with them.

Increase your productivity

If you want to build a more productive workforce (and who doesn't?) studies show that employing people with disability will help you achieve it.¹⁵ In fact, in a recent review the most common reason for employing people with disability was cost effectiveness due to their productivity.¹⁶

Create a better culture

Employing people with disability has a positive impact on workplace culture. Inclusive workplaces benefit everyone because they attract and embrace people from all walks of life. All people feel good where they feel welcome. Building disability inclusion can improve workplace morale and foster better teamwork in a more positive workplace culture.¹⁷

Better performance from a better team

If you want to grow your business, it's good to show existing and potential clients that you are open and welcoming to everyone.

The best way to do that is to reflect the diversity of your community within your team.

By removing barriers to participation, people of all ages, genders, races, religions, and abilities can engage with you. An inclusive workplace with a more diverse employee base is better equipped to serve, empathise with, and respond to a diverse range of customers.

Research has found that businesses with more diversity and inclusion enjoy better business performance. It makes sense when you think about it.

People who feel accepted, heard and respected are happier at work. When you feel happier, you're more motivated, and that enhances productivity across your whole workforce.

But it doesn't stop at productivity.

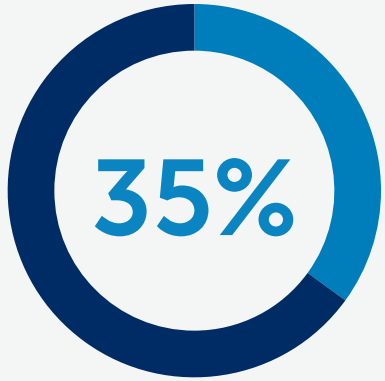
Diversity creates a more intelligent team. A diverse range of people will give you more knowledge and different perspectives. Fresh approaches often help with tackling challenges and driving growth.

We all know the importance of teamwork when it comes to creating and growing a successful business. Happier, more productive employees will naturally work better with the people around them.

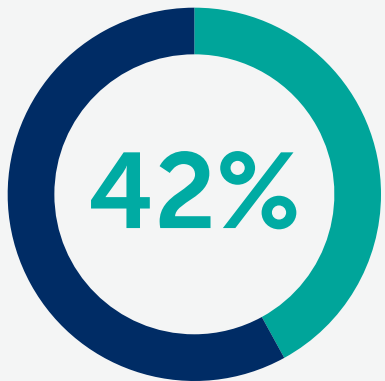
An inclusive culture that respects the perspectives and voices of everyone is more likely to have strong team collaboration.

As well as opening up a wider pool of talent to consider, a workplace that embraces and celebrates diversity will be a more attractive proposition for potential candidates from diverse backgrounds, enhancing talent engagement and retention.

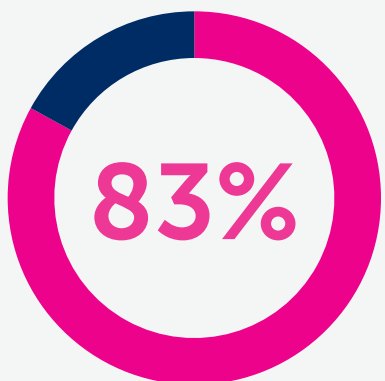
In short, more people will want to work for you, and more will want to work with you. A more diverse and inclusive workplace is good for your brand reputation and improved customer loyalty.



An inclusive team will be 35% more productive.¹⁸



More diverse and inclusive workplaces experience a 42% improvement in team collaboration.¹⁹



Inclusive workplaces saw an 83% improvement in their ability to innovate.²⁰

Breaking down barriers in your workplace

We want to look at how you can help people with disability overcome the barriers to employment and build diversity and inclusion in your workplace.

First it's important to understand what disability is and identify of the misconceptions that can prevent organisations from employing people with disability.



What is disability?

The Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, gives us two ways you can look at disability:²¹

The medical model

The medical model looks at disability as an impairment or condition that impacts a person's daily activities, communications and/or mobility.

It may be an impairment, limitation, or restriction to their mental, mobility or sensory functions. And it can be temporary or permanent, total or partial, lifelong or acquired.

It can be many things, and people are surprised to realise that more often than not, the disability can't be seen, such as anxiety and depression.

They can be:

- Physical (affecting mobility or dexterity).
- Intellectual (affecting ability to learn).
- Mental illness (affecting thinking processes).
- Sensory (affecting ability to hear or see).
- Neurological (affecting the brain and central nervous system).

- Learning disability.
- Physical disfigurement.
- Immunological (the presence of organisms causing disease in the body).

The social model

The social model of disability says that people are disabled by barriers in society, such as buildings not having a ramp or accessible toilets, or people's attitudes, like assuming people with disability can't do certain things.

Because the medical model of disability says it's impairments or conditions that cause disability, some people believe this focuses on what impacts a person, not what a person needs.

This can create low expectations and lead to people losing independence, choice and control in their lives.

The social model helps us recognise barriers that make life harder for people with disability. By removing these barriers we can drive equality and offer people with disability more independence, choice and control.



Removing barriers in society

When barriers are removed, people with disability can be independent and equal in society.

There are several barriers that make it difficult or even impossible for people with disability to enjoy independence and opportunities many people without disability have.

Attitudinal barriers

Are created by people who only see the disability when associating with people with disabilities in some way.

Environmental barriers

Natural or built environments can create barriers to inclusion, such as sidewalks or doorways too narrow for a wheelchair, desks that are too high for a person who is using a mobility device, poor lighting for a person with low vision, or door handles that can be difficult to grasp for a person with arthritis.

Institutional barriers

Include many laws, policies, practices, or strategies that discriminate against people with disability. Things like not making reasonable adjustments so people can perform the essential functions of their job, or public transport being inaccessible.

Communication barriers

Are experienced by people who have disabilities that affect hearing, speaking, reading, writing, and/or understanding. These can include written health messages or videos that don't include captioning or Auslan.



Understanding leads to diversity and inclusion

The more we understand about disability and employment, the more likely we are to give people with disability secure work.

Unfortunately, many misconceptions about people with disability create bias often unconscious, that prevents them from finding satisfying and fulfilling jobs.

There are many wrong assumptions, such as a person's desire to work, level of skills and abilities, HR and OHS issues, and workplace accessibility.



Busting myths and misunderstandings

Here we look at some of the most common misunderstandings.

Skills are low

Some mistakenly think that people with disability have a low level of skills and won't be able to do the job. But people with disability bring a range of skills, talents, and abilities to the workplace. They work in all sorts of jobs and hold a range of tertiary and trade qualifications.

Many have completed tertiary education, and one-third are managers and professionals. In fact, almost a quarter (22.5%) of working-age people with disability who were employed, worked as professionals.²²

Costs are high

Contrary to popular belief, it doesn't cost more to employ a person with a disability, nor does it create more OHS issues.

Workers' Compensation Premiums are based on accidents at work and not the characteristics of particular groups of employees.

In fact, people with disability have fewer compensation incidents and accidents at work compared to other employees and lower levels of absenteeism. And they have no more sick days than others.²³

It's not just about wheelchairs

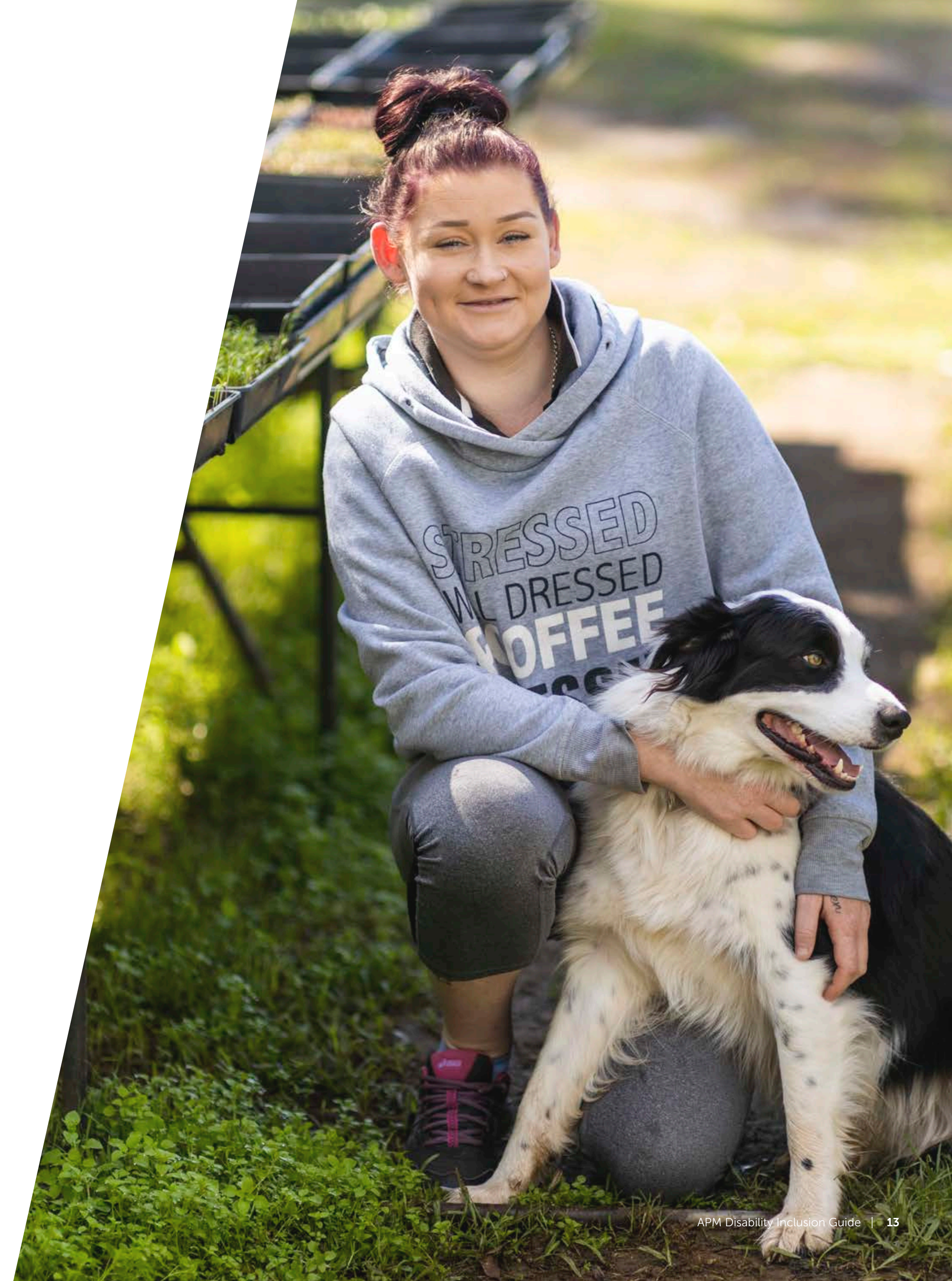
The stereotypical image of a person with disability in a wheelchair couldn't be further from the truth. Less than 5% of people with disability use a wheelchair.²⁴

Many people with disability need little to no adjustments in the workplace. If modifications are required for a person with a physical disability, financial assistance is often available.

Productivity is lower

Some employers might believe that it is not financially viable for them to hire people with disability as they work too slowly.

The reality is most people with disability work at productivity levels equivalent to other employees and receive full wages. And an inclusive team will be 35% more productive.²⁵



Customer service is impacted

Rather than negatively impacting customers, a diverse workforce is more reflective of our society.

People with disability can build relationships with customers across a wider community. That must be good for business.

Overcoming the bias

In the simplest terms, building diversity in your workplace is about creating a mix of people with different beliefs, backgrounds, preferences, behaviours, ages, genders, and abilities.

Conscious or unconscious (intentional or unintentional) bias based on stereotypes is often deeply ingrained and can influence our behaviour.

It's important you are aware of them and challenge them within yourself and your team. This can inspire change and build a better understanding between your employees.

If your exposure to people with disability is outside the workplace, your unconscious bias may lead you to believe that most people with disability can't work.

One of the best ways of countering unconscious bias is through direct exposure to people with disability in your own workplace.

It's a great way to learn about the diversity of disability, break down myths and stereotypes, enhance understanding and, most importantly, build a more inclusive team from a wider talent pool that's even more productive.

Support is out there

If you think there's little or no support available for employers who hire staff with disability, it's good to learn that the Australian Government provides support through the Disability Employment Services (DES) program.

This includes no-cost recruitment, wage subsidies and financial support for workplace modifications. You can find out more information [here](#).



Getting it right

It's all about respect

The basic underlying foundation of diversity and inclusion is respect.

When each team member feels respected for their different abilities, beliefs, and ideas, they feel valued. It creates a culture where they will be able to contribute better to the company, meaning both they and the business can benefit.



A toolkit for building disability diversity and inclusion

Now that you know some of the many benefits, here's some simple ways you can create, refine or improve disability inclusion in your workplace.

Making a commitment to disability inclusion is the important first step, and following the guides, principles and resources should help you build a good workplace for everyone.



Start by talking about it

It begins by promoting the benefits and values of diversity and inclusion. And this starts with conversations.

- Speak with your staff about inclusion and accessibility and why it's important.
- Bring your leadership team on board by sharing some of the benefits included in this guide.
- And do your own research about the benefits that apply directly to your industry. It's hard to argue with facts and figures.

One of the most important things you can do is listen to your staff. Find out from the most diverse range of people you currently employ about their experiences, good and bad, to get a real insight into your culture.

Have a good look into the culture and how management has dealt with any discrimination issues. Have you taken the opportunities to build diversity when you've had them?

Involving the widest range of people from as many backgrounds and at all levels within your organisation is the best way to create, build and maintain a culture of inclusion.

- Has your team discussed the importance and benefits of diversity and inclusion in your workplace?
- Have you hosted a lunch and learn with a local disability organisation to build awareness and relationships?



Take a diversity and inclusion workplace health check

An important step is to get a clear picture of where your workplace is right now. This sets your benchmark and gives you a baseline on which to improve.

It starts by asking yourself the right questions:

- How many employees have a disability? And what proportion of your workforce is this?
- In what levels of your business do they work? How many are in leadership roles or entry-level positions?
- Do they receive the same pay as others in the same roles?
- Are they progressing at the same rate as others in your workforce?

Regular anonymous surveys are a good way to get honest responses on any issues, observations, and insights, as well as getting a sense of the culture in your workplace and employee satisfaction.

Things you can ask them include:

- Do you have access to appropriate training and professional development?
- Do you feel valued? Are you recognised for the quality of your work, and are your managers recognising your potential and using it?
- Is there genuine interest in your career with opportunities for growth and advancement?
- Is there good leadership and support from your managers?
- Do you have a cohesive team, and how well do you support one another?
- Do you feel that you can bring your whole self to work?
- How comfortable do you feel disclosing your disability at work?



Put it in writing

It's time to walk the talk. Nothing cements your intention better than public statements and putting it into words for all to see.

In your day-to-day actions, make a public commitment to disability inclusion on your website, social media, inside your premises, in job descriptions and advertisements.

- Do you have a statement on your job ads encouraging people of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities to apply?

Organisational policies are more formal ways to state and capture your company's culture and values and give your whole team a better understanding of the behaviour that's expected of them.

A great policy to start with is a disability inclusion policy. You can find a useful guide to developing a policy [here](#).

- Have you created a team or committee to develop your disability inclusion policy?

Another example is an equal opportunity and anti-discrimination policy. This demonstrates that you recognise and value the diversity of your community, will try to attract the best skills from a wider talent pool, and ensure all your employees can realise their potential.

This policy makes sure people are treated as individuals, respected for their unique attributes and not excluded, harassed or bullied in any way.

This can be through unconscious bias, stereotypes or unlawful actions that may form the basis of discrimination.

By signing this policy, all your employees will understand that any form of discrimination is unacceptable.



Develop internal advocates

Policies are not enough to set the standards. Use people within your organisation to set an example and lead your disability inclusion strategy. Share the contents of this guide and your research with them and help them understand the importance this has to your workplace, organisation, and future growth and success.

It's a good idea to regularly meet with them to discuss any issues and develop ways to improve diversity and inclusion. Most importantly, these

leaders can drive your strategies. They are having conversations with people and ensuring they uphold the principles and policies. And they are in the best position to listen to people's thoughts, ideas, and concerns and how best to address any issues and make improvements.

- Can you identify any current team members who would fit this role?
- Do you have regular meetings to develop and evaluate strategies?



Make time for training

At least once a year, set time aside for all team members to attend training and ongoing guidance on disability awareness and inclusiveness.

There is no surer way to build understanding and develop a culture of inclusion than to educate your team on how they can help support people from marginalised groups and gain an understanding of their experiences. They can also develop the skills and techniques to eliminate discrimination from your organisation.

Using outside training suppliers is recommended as they are neutral and will be more objective.

We always learn something from someone different with their own expertise or experiences.

To build a more diverse team, it's also important to ensure your recruitment team receives training on inclusive and accessible recruitment practices, which we'll expand upon in the next section.

- Is your recruitment team trained in, and implementing, recruitment practices that attract and employ people of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities?



Building through recruitment

Get your recruitment processes right

We know businesses that effectively recruit and manage a diverse workforce have a clear competitive advantage. The recruitment process is the most obvious way to increase disability diversity and inclusivity.

It helps when everyone is on the same page and has the skills and understanding to increase disability diversity and inclusivity.

It's vital that your recruitment team receives training on inclusive and accessible recruitment practices.

Consider appointing a corporate executive champion and an affinity group to support employment for people with disability.

Be more attractive for job seekers

The first thing you should do is actively encourage job applications from people with disability.

You can even consider designing a job that can match the skills of a person with disability.

The job advertisements you use to encourage these applications should be available in accessible formats, such as large font and screen reader compatible.

It's good to ensure the descriptions include information about the accessibility of your facilities and working spaces. And even put a short statement on the ad that invites people of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities to apply.

- Are all your job ads in accessible formats?
- Can you design roles that match the skills of a person with disability?



Create an accessible and adaptable interview process

The interview process is a key part of filling any position.

When you're interviewing someone living with injury, illness or disability, there are a few things you can do to make sure you do it well.

It's important that all parts of the application and information on the position are in accessible formats.

Because some applicants may not disclose a disability, you should ask all people if they require any adjustments or assistance for the interview. Your building and interview room need to be accessible, as does any paperwork which may need to be in alternative, accessible formats.

Questions are the basis of every interview, so ask the applicant the same questions you would anyone else.

Let them show where they gained their skills and abilities, regardless of the context.

The only questions you can lawfully ask about a disability or injury are about how they will perform

the job requirements, and any adjustments that may be needed to complete these.

Any other questions about an individual's disability are inappropriate.

- Are you asking every applicant if they require any adjustments or assistance for the interview?
- Are your building and interview rooms accessible?

Constant improvement in your workplace

Even if you've achieved your goals and created the diverse and inclusive workplace in which you and your employees can thrive, you shouldn't stop trying to improve.

When a new employee starts, ensure orientation and induction programs are accessible and as adaptable as possible. And put in place a clear and simple procedure for employees and managers to request workplace modifications, aids, or assistive technology.

Employee training and ongoing guidance on disability awareness and inclusiveness are important to ensure everyone stays up to speed

on current thinking and best practices. And you can keep everyone up to date with support offered to employees with disability through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and Disability Employment Services programs.

- Are all your induction programs accessible?
- How simple is it to request workplace modifications or assistive technology?

Development and promotion

Once securing a job, people with disability often find they have less opportunity for career advancement. Everyone deserves an equal chance of development.

Have regular catchups with every employee to check how they are going and to discuss career goals and professional development.

You can also chat about opportunities to build skills, knowledge, and qualifications, and put strategies and pathways in place for them to achieve their short-, mid- and long-term goals.

- Are you regularly catching up with individuals to discuss professional development?

Improve your flexibility

Being more flexible creates opportunities for a more diverse range of people to work for you.

You'll become a more attractive place of work to more people, ensuring you attract the best candidates.

Workplace changes over the COVID-19 pandemic have helped organisations become used to new ways of working.

Work from home options and flexible hours can be more appealing to a more diverse range of candidates, giving parents, people with injury or disability, carers, and people whose location can make it difficult to get to work, an equal opportunity to fill and maintain a position.

- How can you improve workplace flexibility to accommodate a diverse range of people and their needs?

Communication and information

How you speak and portray your business on a daily basis is a vital part of showing your understanding and how much you value diversity and inclusion in your workplace.

And it's a great way to attract a more diverse range of employees and like-minded customers and organisations that want to do business with you.

How people find information about your business, products, and services is important, as is communicating your commitment to being an inclusive business.

A simple and effective way to do this is to make a public commitment to diversity and inclusion on your website, social media, inside your premises, in job descriptions and advertisements.

People always need to get in touch, and offering multiple contact methods such as phone, email, SMS, face to face and National Relay Service is the best way to make it easy for everyone.

Accessibility of information is essential, so ensure your website meets Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

Use large and easy-to-read fonts in all your marketing and promotional material, including signage, brochures, and menus.

Inclusive language across all your marketing and promotional material should be used. In all this promotional material, and on your website and social media, always include images of people from diverse backgrounds.

Share 'good news' stories about being an accessible, inclusive business on your social media. And if you post a video or other digital content, ensure all images have descriptions and videos have captions.

- Do you supply and support a variety of contact methods?
- Do you actively promote your organisation's commitment to accessibility and diversity in your marketing and communications materials?

Get customer feedback

One of the best ways to ensure you are on the right track is to invite feedback from your customers about their experience with your business, especially people with disability or from diverse backgrounds.

It's all about being open, authentic, and inclusive.

- Do you send customers and clients a short survey to get more insight into their experience of interacting with your organisation?

Make your workplace accessible and inclusive

While often a disability can't be seen, ensuring your building, facilities and spaces are accessible is critical.

The most important physical access considerations include:

- Accessible parking and toilets.
- A step-free entrance (including a ramp).
- Automatic doors.
- Counters and door handles at an accessible height for people who use wheelchairs
- Non-slip floor surfaces.
- Easy to read signage, including Braille.
- Good lighting throughout.

- Accessible seating and waiting spaces, free from hazards.
- Wide doorways and hallways.

Funding and grants

A barrier to improving the physical access of some workplaces is a perception that modifications will be expensive. But that's not often the case.

If you need to make modifications to your business premises for employees with disability to perform a particular job, you may be able to access grant funding to assist with the cost.

The Australian Government provides funding for eligible employees through the Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) to cover the costs of making these workplace changes.

Items often covered under EAF include communications technology, Auslan (Australian Sign Language) interpreting, disability awareness training and specialist support for people with mental health conditions or learning disorders.

- Have you looked into the Employment Assistance Fund? - Here's a [link](#).





We're here to help

Changing your processes and practices to increase disability diversity and inclusion in your workplace may seem a big task, but it's easier than you think.

There's help out there.

We understand the importance and positive impact of disability inclusivity in the workplace.

It couldn't be easier to start building disability diversity and enjoy all the cultural and business benefits of a truly inclusive workplace. And we would be proud to be part of it with you.

To find out more, please visit apm.net.au

To find out more,
visit apm.net.au or
call 1800 276 276

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