



AUSTRALIAN
NETWORK
ON DISABILITY



MANAGER'S GUIDE

TO CREATING A DISABILITY INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

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Welcome

“Over the past three decades I have managed and developed people with disability and people without disability. My experience is that disability is irrelevant to success. Success is all about the right job fit and the right attitude.”

Suzanne Colbert AM, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Network on Disability

INTRODUCTION

Building an inclusive, diverse workforce benefits everyone – your employees, your organisation and your community as a whole. As a people leader, you play a vital role in creating and sustaining a positive workplace where everyone can thrive.

This guide will help you recruit, develop and retain employees.

A SNAPSHOT OF DISABILITY IN AUSTRALIA

More than four million people in Australia¹ – or one in five people – have some form of disability. This includes any condition that restricts a person’s mental, sensory or mobility functions and could be caused by accident, trauma, genetics or disease.

Among Australians of working age (15 to 64 years), 2.1 million people have disability.² Of these, just over 1 million are employed and many more are seeking employment.³

Although Australia’s employment rate for people with disability is on par with developed countries, it takes graduates with disability 56.2 per cent longer to gain full-time employment than other graduates.⁴

At some point in your career as a people leader, you’re bound to have a vacancy to fill. The best person for the job could be someone with disability. You’re also likely to work with team members or colleagues with disability. With a basic understanding of what an inclusive work environment is, you’ll be better equipped to recruit, support, develop and retain employees with disability.

INVESTING IN DIVERSITY, INVESTING IN YOUR BUSINESS

Managers who actively embrace employment of people with disability are ‘doing the right thing’, and are also making a sound business investment. Employees with disability often stay with an employer for longer, have lower absenteeism and have fewer workplace accidents than employees without disability.⁵

Fostering a disability inclusive workplace and culture has enabled companies like Walgreens to tap into a wider pool of talent, retain valued team members who acquire disability due to accident or illness, and gain insight, into the needs of an important and expanding segment of the customer base.⁶

¹Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016, 4430.0 - Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2015, viewed 24 February 2017.

²Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016, 4430.0 - Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2015, viewed 24 February 2017.

³Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016, 4430.0 - Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2015, viewed 24 February 2017.

⁴Grad Stats’, 2015, Graduate Careers Australia, viewed 24 February 2017.

Creating a barrier-free work environment also means you’ll attract applicants from the entire talent pool, enabling you to find and hire the best match for your organisation while reflecting the community’s diversity. This is an important way that you can help uphold the rights of people with disability and demonstrate fairness.

Diversity is crucial to your business from a brand and customer point of view too. People with disability are three times as likely to avoid an organisation and twice as likely to dissuade others because of an organisation’s negative diversity reputation.⁷ An inclusive environment can do more than enhance the workplace itself; it can also boost your organisation’s brand image and relationship with the community and customers.

There are many ways you can create a level playing field for people with disability. And there are many resources. Read on to find out more how you can effectively develop an inclusive workplace, support potential and current employees with disability.



Illness, injury or disability is diverse and **can change over time**



Disability may be permanent or temporary; it may have **existed from birth** or may have been acquired due to **an accident** or as part of the **ageing process**



Disability is often **invisible**. For some people, disability may be episodic, while for others, it may be stable.



Each year, up to **one** in **five** Australians will experience mental illness **45%** of people will experience in their life.⁸

⁵Graffam, J, Shinkfield, A, Smith, K, and Polzin, U, (2002), ‘Employer benefits and costs of employing a person with a disability’, Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, vol. 17, pp. 251-263.

⁶Walgreens Social Responsibility, Disability Inclusion. Viewed July 2017.

⁷‘Missing out: The business case for customer diversity’ 2017, Australian Human Rights Commission, viewed 15 March 2017.

⁸Australian Bureau of Statistics 4326.0, National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results, 2007.

CHAPTER 1: DISABILITY ESSENTIAL

Your role as a manager requires you to deal with complexity. There's no greater complexity than human diversity.

Understanding what disability is – and actively working to negate stereotypes surrounding disability – will help you build confidence in managing people whatever their personal circumstances.

DEFINING DISABILITY AND RIGHT TO PRIVACY

Signed by Australia and more than 139 other countries, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provides the following definition:

"Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."

Keep in mind that disability is incredibly diverse, just like individuals. For example, one person with Multiple Sclerosis may be a wheelchair user while another may have trouble with their vision and experience extreme fatigue from time to time.

A current or potential employee has no legal obligation to share information about disability unless it is likely to impact their performance, ability to meet the job's essential requirements or to work safely.

The Privacy Act 1988 requires you to respect every individual's right to privacy. If an employee does choose to share information about disability with you, it's vital (as well as legally required) that you maintain their privacy, unless they give you permission to discuss their situation with others or are authorised or required by or under law.

For more information on your role in maintaining privacy, read our Sharing and Monitoring Guide [visit www.and.org.au/infosharing/](http://www.and.org.au/infosharing/)

What are some examples of disability? Disability may or may not be visible. Examples include blindness or low vision; deafness or hearing loss; mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety; disabilities affecting mobility, such as cerebral palsy or spinal injury; or chronic conditions such as diabetes or arthritis.

The Australian Government provides funding, for eligible persons, through the Employment Assistance Fund that is designed to cover the costs of making workplace changes. This can include buying equipment and accessing services for people with disability. Visit www.jobaccess.gov.au for more information.

USING INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Employees with disability may have no reason to discuss their disability with you if they are doing their job well and don't require any adjustments to their working environment or working practices.

Even so, knowing how to use inclusive language will help you as a people leader build confidence so that you are prepared for conversations about disability with current or prospective employees. It will also help you create a workplace that is welcoming so that people feel comfortable talking to you about the support they need in order to excel in their role.

One key to a successful conversation is using "person-first" language rather than focusing on the disability or impairment. "Person with disability" or "people with disability" are commonly accepted terms in Australia.

Looking at more specific examples, it's preferable to talk about "a person who uses a wheelchair" rather than someone who is "wheelchair-bound". Avoid describing people solely by their impairments, such as "an epileptic" or "a diabetic". Instead, say "a person who has epilepsy" or "a person with diabetes". Again, the key is emphasising the individual. You don't want to use phrasing that lets the person's disability overshadow their individual identity and capabilities.

Phrases such as "accessible parking space" or "accessible toilet" are also preferred over "disabled".

As with any conversation with any of your employees, it's important to relax and focus on the person. Be a good listener and thank the person if they choose to share their personal information with you.

REMOVING BARRIERS THROUGH WORKPLACE ADJUSTMENTS

When it comes to providing all employees with an environment where they can thrive, the best advice is to **avoid making assumptions**. If an employee has approached you about their disability, have a conversation about what you can do to remove barriers and make it easier for them to perform to the best of their ability. Best practice is to ask all of your team members if they require any adjustments.

What is a Workplace (or Reasonable) Adjustment? It's the administrative, environmental, or procedural alterations required to enable a person with disability to work effectively and enjoy equal opportunity with others. Workplace Adjustments enable candidates or employees with disability to participate effectively in the workplace including undertaking the essential requirements of the job. Workplace Adjustments can enable a person to perform to their best and minimise the impact of disability.

Workplace adjustments run the gamut from environmental adaptations to technological aids and much more. A few examples of workplace adjustments include:

- Screen magnification for people with low vision.
- Changing start and finish times.
- Screen-reading technology for people with dyslexia or who have significant low vision or are legally blind.
- An Auslan interpreter for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- The provision of documents in advance of a meeting for people who may require extra time to review.
- Matching expectations of performance against required outcomes rather than against standard process.

CASE STUDY

WORKPLACE ADJUSTMENTS IN ACTION

Andy noticed that Bree, his graphic designer, became stressed when he gave verbal briefs on projects. As a result, she often forgot certain design elements and experienced anxiety. After a chat, Andy and Bree decided to implement written briefs. They created an easy-to-use form for Andy to fill out. Because Bree was able to reference the form, she could complete her work more effectively and also manage her stress and anxiety. This small adjustment resulted in a more productive – and positive – team environment for everyone.

You can provide your team members with the option of creating a Tailored Adjustment Agreement, which allows an employee to document specific requirements. (Tailored Adjustment Agreements are also referred to as Reasonable Adjustment Passports or Workplace Adjustment Passports.) The agreement or passport outlines all the adjustments that have been agreed upon, including any communication adaptations, the provision of assistive devices or changes to the physical office environment or technology.

A significant benefit of this process is that when there is a change in circumstances -e.g., the employee with disability moves to a new team, a new manager is employed or the employee transfers to another part of your organisation - the employee does not have to undergo a complete repetition of explaining to the new manager/team the adjustments that have been agreed to and put in place.

CHAPTER 1 KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Just like individuals, disability is unique and the impact is different for every person.
- Disability may or may not be visible.
- The best approach is to ask all of your team members about their needs and preferences, including workplace adjustments and safety procedures, and avoid making assumptions.
- Use “person-first” language that emphasises the individual, not their disability or impairment.
- Remember that creating a positive, inclusive work environment for employees with disability will benefit all employees and the organisation as a whole.

CASE STUDY

DEVELOPING A DISABILITY-CONFIDENT CULTURE AT THE AUSTRALIAN TAXATION OFFICE (ATO)

The ATO has launched an electronic Reasonable Adjustment Passport, which allows employees to describe how their disability, illness, medical condition or injury impacts them on the job and outline any workplace adjustments needed. Stored in the Human Resources system, the information is easily accessible if the employee changes position or a new manager comes in, making transitions seamless for the employee.

The ATO also addresses the issue of workplace adjustments right from the outset when someone applies for a job. This ensures that all potential employees have an opportunity to discuss any support they need. If an individual chooses to share information on their disability, managers advise them on what’s available.

CHAPTER 2: CREATING AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

Your performance as a manager and people leader sets the tone for the rest of your team. By demonstrating a positive attitude toward the skills and abilities of team members with disability you are taking important steps to develop an inclusive work environment.

An inclusive workplace that supports individual differences has many benefits, including:

- Increased employee engagement.
- A safe work environment.
- Reduced absenteeism.
- Improved productivity.

INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

Leading by example, and using inclusive language, will help your colleagues feel more confident in addressing disability in the workplace too. Here are a few general tips for creating an inclusive workplace:

- Use common expressions. For instance, it’s ok to say “see you later” to a person who is blind or has low vision.
- Only refer to a person’s disability when necessary and appropriate.
- Refrain from asking how a person acquired their disability.
- Be polite and patient when offering assistance.
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take someone to respond or perform an activity.
- If you feel like you’ve embarrassed someone then acknowledge it and apologise, but don’t dwell on it. (Of course, don’t avoid the situation either.

Most importantly, if you are in a situation where you are unsure how to respond, **ask the person how you can be helpful**. This is the best way to create an open, transparent environment and build trust. It’s ok if you don’t know what to do – just don’t be afraid to ask!

BUILDING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL EMPLOYEES

An enabling environment is one where your employees can bring their “whole” selves to work. It helps them perform their best and feel included in the team. It’s also an environment where employees are free of discrimination and harassment. As a result, they should feel comfortable asking for workplace adjustments if needed.

As discussed in chapter one, workplace adjustments include modifications or changes to the way a job is undertaken in order to enable a candidate or employee to perform the essential requirements. Consider both the physical environment as well as the digital environment to set up a workplace where your team members have the best opportunity to succeed.

“As a person with lived experience of disability, I know what is best for me and what support I will need to do my job well. And please, just let us fit into the team, we don’t want our disability to be a focus at work or to be treated as special or different.”

**Donna Purcell, Senior Manager
Accessibility and Capability Advice,
Commonwealth Bank.**

CASE STUDY CHALLENGING STIGMA

Barclays' 'This is Me' campaign, challenges the stigma around mental health at work by supporting people to tell their own stories. Disability disclosure rates have increased and Barclays is retaining talent as more employees successfully return to work after mental health-related leave of absence. The campaign has now been replicated in more than 22 UK organisations and won the Business Disability Forum's Disability Smart Award for staff retention.⁹

Factors that may impact the **physical working environment** include:

- Wheelchair access to entrances, exits, lifts, parking and wheelchair-accessible bathrooms.
- An accessible route from public transport.
- Availability of a hearing loop or amplification.
- Uniform lighting throughout the workplace (no "dark" spots).
- Tactile ground surface indicators.
- Live remote captioning.
- Auslan interpreters for events.
- Activity Based Working (ABW), where individuals can choose their workspace each day, is good for collaboration and space saving. However, it can present challenges for people requiring workplace adjustments. Organisations should consider providing a fixed work space and additional storage to employees who may require it.

To learn more about creating accessible web content, see the global Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. Go to www.w3.org/WAI/intro/wcag. You can also seek advice from specialist agencies. Contact us for suggestions of where to go.

In terms of **digital accessibility and adjustments**, considerations include:

- Ensuring there is good colour contrast between text and background.
- Avoiding placing text over images so that the background is clean and text can be read more easily.
- Providing alternative text descriptions for images on your website. Alternative text is a text description of an image that is read aloud by screen readers.
- Using headings on websites and documents to allow people using screen-reading software to correctly navigate through the material.
- Using tables for data and ensuring each column and row has an appropriate heading.
- Avoid putting text in text boxes as these are not read aloud by screen readers.
- Avoiding using tab or enter to create spaces in documents. Instead use the paragraph tool bar to add larger spaces between text.
- Giving each page a meaningful title.
- Giving hyperlinks meaningful labels that make sense on their own and avoiding the use of URLs in text. For example Australian Network on Disability website, rather than click here.
- Ensuring emails are accessible for those using screen-reading software.

CASE STUDY HELPING YOUR EMPLOYEES THRIVE

Workplace adjustments come in all shapes and sizes. For instance, an employee may simply require a later start and finish for their workday as some medications may cause drowsiness in the mornings. Most accommodations have little or no cost to the employer, but they do have multiple direct and indirect benefits.

See page 7 of this guide and visit the JobAccess website (www.jobaccess.gov.au) for information about Employment Assistance Fund, a government funded scheme that can cover costs of workplace adjustments for eligible people.

WORK, HEALTH AND SAFETY (WH&S) CONSIDERATIONS

Creating a work environment that is safe for employees with disability will ensure that it is safe for everyone.

As a manager, it's important to check with everyone on your team to ensure they can follow your organisation's safety procedures, including evacuation procedures.

You may need to facilitate some workplace adjustments for emergency procedures or implement Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) for individuals. For example, flashing visual alarms can be installed for employees who are hard of hearing. Or a "buddy system" may be implemented to ensure everyone's safety during an evacuation. A walk through of the safety evacuation process can help to reduce anxiety and ensure people are familiar with the process, escape routes and assembly points.

In addition, there may be other WH&S adjustments required to ensure a safe workplace, for example a foot pedal for an employee to stop a conveyor on a manufacturing bench.

Your due diligence in creating a safe environment for all of your team members will pay off in more ways than one. Research shows that employees with disability do not increase occupational health and safety risk in the workplace (as many people assume). In fact, on average, employees with disability have a lower number of workplace incidents and lower workers' compensation costs than employees without disability.¹⁰

CHAPTER 2 KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Be a positive role model for your team by demonstrating inclusive behaviours that accommodate differences.
- Communicate openly, and only refer to a person's disability when necessary and appropriate.
- When in doubt about the best way to assist someone, ask them about the support or adjustments they may need.
- Consider the physical as well as the digital environment when assessing what workplace modifications may be required.
- Remember that workplace adjustments are designed to remove barriers in the environment and make it easier for people with disability to perform their best. Most workplace adjustments are relatively simple and cost-neutral.
- Creating a work environment that is safe for employees with disability will ensure that it is safe for everyone.

⁹ Barclays Bank website <https://www.home.barclays/about-barclays/diversity-and-inclusion/disability/this-is-me.html>

¹⁰ Are People with Disability at Risk at Work? A review of the evidence. Australian Safety and Compensation Council, 2007.

CHAPTER 3: ESTABLISHING FAIR RECRUITMENT AND ON-BOARDING PROCEDURES

Creating a positive, enabling environment begins before your employees are even hired. The recruitment process sets the stage when it comes to establishing a workplace where everyone can thrive. In fact, like workplace adjustments, it is one of the foundation pieces to creating an accessible and inclusive work environment. So, from the time you place a job ad, consider how you can remove barriers to facilitate a fair recruitment and on-boarding process.

Tip: To determine the essential requirements of a position, focus on the results of the job rather than the means for achieving a result.

THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

A barrier-free recruitment process means that candidates with disability have a fair opportunity to demonstrate that they are the best person for the job.

This begins with the position description. Consider which tasks and skills are truly essential requirements. The inherent requirements of a job are the fundamental tasks that define a job, not all of the requirements. For example, it is common for position descriptions to include a requirement for driving licence. However, it should be considered if this is really essential for the role, or if employees could take an alternative mode of transport.

Also evaluate the barriers the job may inherently entail and how these could be overcome. A candidate with disability may be able to demonstrate he or she can do the work if workplace adjustments are made. For example, a role requiring travel may require an adjustment of extra time to support a person with disability to board and disembark from a flight.

Essential considerations for creating a barrier-free recruitment process include:

- Understanding your organisation's policies and procedures related to recruitment practices. For example, is there an affirmative action strategy?
- Identifying the expected outcomes and results for the job.
- Ensuring application forms and related materials are available in accessible formats.
- Using the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 to check your website is accessible.
Go to www.w3.org/WAI/intro/wcag
- Providing access to further information acknowledging workplace adjustments and your equity and diversity policy.

THE INTERVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

It's best practice to ask all candidates if they have any specific requirements or need any adjustments before holding an interview. Keep in mind that an applicant may not have shared information about their disability at the time of application, which is why it's a good idea to check in with everyone who is progressing to an interview.

It's also good practice to let a candidate know the requirements of your selection process. For example, will you hold group interviews, conduct online tests, provide print materials to review or ask them to complete a novelty task such as building with plastic blocks? Give

all candidates a heads-up so they can voice any access requirements in advance.

Examples of adjustments at the interview stage may include detailed instructions for a safe drop-off point. Or, you may need to provide paperwork in an alternative, accessible format ahead of the interview.

At the interview, ask candidates with disability, the same questions that you would ask anyone else. Make sure that the questions address the essential requirements.

Behavioural interview questions are appropriate when they are framed around the essential requirements. This allows applicants to demonstrate where they gained their skills and abilities, regardless of the context. For example, instead of asking an applicant to describe their call centre experience, ask them about a time where they solved a problem for a difficult customer.

It is fair to allow a candidate with disability to give examples from volunteering, studying or other non-work settings. Remember that many people with disability have fewer opportunities to gain work experience than their age-related cohort, so it's important to keep an open mind.

If your organisation routinely uses external providers for psychometric or other testing, enquire whether their processes are accessible to people with disability, can they provide questions in audio format or large print? Some people may need additional time to complete tests as a result of their disability.

CASE STUDY

MAKING THE APPLICATION PROCESS ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL CANDIDATES

Matthew, a 40-year-old team leader with more than 20 years of experience in the IT industry, has developed low vision over the past few years. He uses screen-reading software to help him read small print and access information on some websites.

When applying for a new position in a large company, Matthew discovers he can't access all the information through the online job portal. He calls the recruitment contact to request the application information in text-only format via email so he can use his screen-reading software.

The recruiter asks Matthew how he plans to perform the job if he can't read a website. Surprised, Matthew explains that he uses screen-reading software. He also mentions the Government's Employment Assistance Fund, which can reimburse employers for the software cost.

A supervisor follows up via phone with Matthew. She provides the needed documents in text version via email, and she tells Matthew she looks forward to receiving his application. The supervisor also plans to organise disability awareness training for her team to broaden their understanding of disability in the workplace.

ASKING ABOUT DISABILITY DURING AN INTERVIEW

If you are wondering what you can ask about a disability or injury during an interview, the questions you can lawfully ask are:

- Whether any adjustments are required to ensure a fair and equitable interview/selection process.
- How the person will perform the essential requirements of the job.
- Any adjustments that may be required to complete the essential requirements of the job

QUESTIONS TO AVOID DURING AN INTERVIEW

It is inappropriate to ask questions about:

- How a person acquired their disability
- Details of their disability, including the name of the type of disability.
- How the disability will impact their ability to perform aspects of the role.
- Anything, where the information obtained is to be used for the purposes of discrimination.

ON-BOARDING

Hopefully you've asked all new recruits whether they require any workplace adjustments. This does more than show your positive attitude towards accommodating differences; it also means that you can help every employee put their best foot forward by having adjustments in place from the get-go. It's also a good opportunity to demonstrate the inclusive attitude and practices of your organisation.

Assess your on-boarding procedures. Are there facilitator-led inductions that new employees participate in? Or are they required to complete self-paced e-learning modules? Set up your new employees for success by ensuring that any noted adjustments and accommodations are

already in place before they begin the on-boarding phase.

To help your new employees successfully settle in, here are a few other considerations to keep top of mind during the induction period:

- Is the entire workplace accessible to the employee?
- Are accessible meeting rooms available if required?
- Is your IT department aware of any needed software and hardware?
- If you use training videos or DVDs, do they have captions or audio descriptions? Alternatively, can you provide a text transcript of training videos?
- Have you offered your new employee with disability the opportunity to visit your workplace before their first day?

FACILITATING CONVERSATIONS AMONG COLLEAGUES

Will your new employee's co-workers be required to do things differently? If so, discuss with your new employee with disability how they would like to inform colleagues of their specific requirements. This will help the team increase their own knowledge and understanding while learning how to sustain an inclusive environment. It also empowers the employee with disability by allowing them to determine whether or not (and how) information is shared with their colleagues.

Pay attention to interactions among your new employee and existing team members. If people lack confidence or are uncertain about what to do or say, they may end up avoiding their new colleague. Avoidance is a form of exclusion and may be perceived as discrimination, if performed on the basis of the disability. If you notice this happening, find out what your team members need to be able to include the new employee.

If your new employee has told you about disability, ask for their permission first if you think you need to inform someone else. Explain who you think needs to know and why. For instance, you may need to inform people who will help to make workplace adjustments. Reassure your new employee that you will not need to give specific information about the disability – only about the modifications needed.

If you do need to share information, ask your new team member to sign a consent form first. This ensures you are maintaining their confidentiality and privacy and it also helps build trust.

USING THE "BUDDY" SYSTEM

Sometimes it's helpful to provide new employees with a "buddy" within the team who is available to answer questions and help the new colleague settle in. This approach can apply equally well to a new employee with disability and can help them feel like they have another trusted person to turn to with any questions or concerns. Just keep in mind confidentiality requirements when briefing the "buddy."

CHECKING IN WITH YOUR NEW TEAM MEMBER

Regular feedback is crucial to maintaining a positive, inclusive workplace. Plan to check in with your new employee to ensure that the adjustments you've made are working or to discuss further modifications.

It's also a good idea to set regular dates to review workplace adjustments and potential improvements. Remember everyone is different, so don't assume that what's worked in the past or for someone else will be equally effective for another team member.

PROMOTING A WELCOMING WORK ENVIRONMENT

Again, leading by example is an effective way to model an inclusive environment for the rest of your team members. When your new employee with disability joins your workplace, there are many ways to make them feel comfortable and welcome. Start with the basics:

- Ask the person what works for them.
- Don't make assumptions.
- Remember disability and people are diverse.

Here are some more specific examples that can help create a welcoming work environment.

INCLUDING PEOPLE WHO ARE HARD OF HEARING

Sally is joining your team. She has chosen to share that she is hard of hearing. Some of the ways you can support Sally to feel welcome might be to:

- Move into Sally's line of sight when joining her in conversation and face her when you speak.
- Use Sally's first name so she knows you are directing conversation her way.
- Book meetings in quiet areas with minimal background disturbance.
- Speak directly to Sally if she uses an interpreter.
- Ask her if there is anything else you can do to be helpful.
- Follow good meeting etiquette. Eliminate side conversations and speak directly into microphones during teleconferences. Avoid shuffling paper.



INCLUDING PEOPLE WHO ARE BLIND OR HAVE LOW VISION

You have appointed Rohit to a new role at your company. He has advised you that he has low vision. Here's some of the ways you can help him feel included:

- Introduce yourself when you approach. Don't assume he will recognise you by your voice.
- Introduce the other people present when you are in a group situation, and make sure you let him know if you are leaving the conversation.
- Talk directly to Rohit, not his seeing eye dog, if he uses one. If he is accompanied by a seeing-eye dog, don't distract, feed or touch the dog without Rohit's permission.
- Use common words such as "see" or "look" and don't hesitate to talk about activities such as watching TV or videos. It's everyday language.
- Offer your elbow rather than taking his arm if Rohit wants you to guide him.
- Ask first to check if help is required.
- Follow good meeting etiquette. Introduce yourself as you speak, eliminate side conversations provide documentation in advance.

INCLUDING PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITY

Chris, who uses a wheelchair, is joining your team. Some of the ways you can establish an inclusive environment from her first day include:

- Offer to shake hands, even if she has limitations to her arm or hand.
- Look and speak directly to Chris.
- Ask before helping. For example, holding lift doors open can sometimes make things more difficult.
- Offer to reach things on high shelves or in hard-to-reach places.
- Make sure entrances and exits are not obstructed.
- Sit in a chair if you are speaking to Chris for more than a few minutes. This means that you're eye-to-eye

Again, more than anything else, remember **everyone's experience of disability is different and can vary from day to day.** Always check in with the person to find out if, and how, they would like you to assist.

Has someone in your organisation been trained in Mental Health First Aid? Mental health first aid is the help provided to a person who is developing a mental health problem, experiencing a worsening of a mental health problem or in a mental health crisis. The first aid is given until appropriate professional help is received or the crisis resolves.

The Mental Health First Aid Action plan is known as ALGEE® which stands for:

- **A**pproach, assess and assist with any crisis
- **L**isten and communicate non-judgmentally
- **G**ive support and information
- **E**ncourage appropriate professional help
- **E**ncourage any other supports

The Mental Health First Aid course was developed in Australia and is considered best practice. For more information visit <https://mhfa.com.au/>

CHAPTER 3 KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Creating an inclusive workplace begins before you've even hired your team members – it begins when writing a job description and placing a job ad.
- Focus on the essential requirements of the position in the job description as well as during the interview and selection process.
- Ask all candidates who progress to the interview stage whether they require any adjustments for the interview and selection process.
- Remember that potential employees with disability may respond to behavioural interview questions with examples that are non-work related, but are still equally relevant in demonstrating their experience and capabilities.
- If workplace adjustments have been requested, put them in place before your new team member's first day if possible.
- Consult with your new employee on how they would like to ask colleagues to do things differently so they can be fully included.
- Assess your on-boarding procedures to ensure all new employees are able to participate successfully.
- Check in with your new team member regularly to see how their workplace adjustments are working for them and discuss if further support is required.
- Be a good role model for your team by demonstrating welcoming and inclusive behaviours.

CHAPTER 4: PROVIDING CAREER DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORTING SUCCESS

As a manager, you play a key role in encouraging and nurturing your employees' career development. By providing challenging career development opportunities, you'll not only bolster your team's skills and experience – you're also more likely to retain valuable employees.

There are many aspects to career development. Including:

- Goal setting
- Team building
- Networking
- Mentoring
- Leadership opportunities
- Skills training

ENHANCING THE CAREERS OF EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITY

Like any other employee, team members with disability have a right to participate in learning opportunities and explore career development options. As with all aspects of building an inclusive workplace, it all starts with open conversation – discuss goals and future career paths with all your employees.

Keep in mind that employees with disability may have experienced roadblocks in the past, so be encouraging. Never assume that team members with disability have lower expectations or aspirations for themselves. Rather, discuss with the individual what their goals are and how you can help them achieve those goals.

More than one-third of women and more than one-quarter of men aged 15 years and over report that they've avoided situations because of their disability.¹¹
Keep this in mind as you create a welcoming, inclusive environment where everyone feels capable of meeting their full potential

You may also want to chat with employees with disability about any aspects of their role that they are finding difficult due to their disability. This provides another opportunity to review and reassess workplace adjustments to ensure that your team member feels they can excel and thrive in their role at work.

ASSESSING PERFORMANCE DURING THE PROBATIONARY PERIOD

The probationary period is an important period in which a new employee's performance is assessed to determine whether it meets the standard for continued employment. For employees with disability who need workplace adjustments, it's fair to **assess performance after those adjustments have been implemented**. If there is doubt as to whether you as manager have enough information on which to make the assessment, it is recommended that you extend the probationary period so that the decision is made based on performance following the satisfactory implementation of workplace adjustments plus the probationary period.¹²

ENSURING ACCESSIBILITY DURING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING AND TEAM EVENTS

Planning ahead for professional development opportunities will give you time to ensure that courses and events are accessible for all employees.

If you're partnering with another organisation or facilitator to provide a course for your team members, discuss accessibility ahead of time with the organiser. Consider how the course format can be updated to be accessible and inclusive of all attendees. Workplace adjustments can also be planned in advance.

It's also important to plan inclusive team building activities and team events. Activities should be inclusive for everyone so that all team members can participate fully.

REFLECTING ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As part of their professional review process, encourage employees with disability – like all your employees – to reflect on their unique strengths, preferred types of work, and short and long-term goals.

Discussions as part of professional development planning may include:

- Reflecting on any specific feedback the employee has received.
- Identifying situations and tasks that create barriers for them.
- Discussing solutions to overcome those barriers.
- Identifying additional professional development avenues, such as mentoring, certification courses, etc.

CREATING EQUITABLE PERFORMANCE GOALS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

Employees with disability have the same performance targets as people who don't have disability. Assessing performance is vital part of an inclusive work experience. With that in mind, here are some steps to help you create equitable performance goals for all of your team members:

1. Identify the expected outcomes and results for the job.
2. Ask if there are adjustments that can be made to help the employee perform at their best.
3. Seriously consider and implement adjustments where appropriate, and set goals in line with the key deliverables.
4. Match expectations of performance against required outcomes rather than against standard process.
5. Evaluate the employee on job outcomes and agreed goals.

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016, 4430.0 - Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2015, viewed 24 February 2017.

¹² Employers who extend the probationary period beyond 12 months, for small business employers, or beyond 6 months, for all other employers, are still subject to the unfair dismissal provisions under Part 3-2 of the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth).

CHAPTER 4 KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Professional development is vital to staff retention and opportunities should be provided to all employees, including those with disability.
- Keep in mind that some employees with disability may have experienced barriers before, so provide extra encouragement to facilitate their career development planning.
- For employees with disability who need workplace adjustments, it's fair to extend the probationary period so you can assess performance after adjustments have been implemented.¹³
- Ensure that training opportunities are barrier-free so all employees can participate. If necessary, plan workplace adjustments for courses and learning modules in advance.
- Encourage all your employees to reflect on their workplace goals and identify the necessary steps to achieve them.



"Working with people with disability has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career. It reinforces that all people, regardless of their personal circumstances, will contribute productively and positively when they're provided with a supportive and inclusive environment."

Justin Lokhorst, Director at Australian Bureau of Statistics

¹³ Employers who extend the probationary period beyond 12 months, for small business employers, or beyond 6 months, for all other employers, are still subject to the unfair dismissal provisions under Part 3-2 of the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth).

CHAPTER 5: RETAINING EMPLOYEES WHO ACQUIRE DISABILITY

Many people acquire disability at some stage during their working lives. It could be brought about through an accident, illness, mental health issue or simply the ageing process.

The likelihood of living with disability increases with age and nearly 40% of the Australian workforce is aged 45 or over.¹⁴ Among 55 to 64-year-olds, 31% are living with disability.¹⁵

As a manager, you're likely to face the situation where an employee's health situation has changed. Knowing what to say makes all the difference. The conversation might be challenging, but it's important to have.

If an employee approaches you to talk about changes to their situation it is important to:

- Thank them for raising the issue and acknowledge their honesty and courage for coming forward. It's not easy to do.
- Ask questions about how long it has been impacting them and if they have spoken to anyone else and if they think it is affecting their work performance. Beware of invading someone's privacy.
- Ask if there is anything they would like you to do or not do. Find out what will make it easier for them to do their job.
- Give information about resources that are available, such as your organisation's Employee Assistance Program (EAP), rather than giving advice.
- Be open – don't worry about saying the wrong thing. It's important to address the situation, even if you aren't confident about the right words to use.

If an employee is performing well and hasn't asked for any changes to be made to their working environment, there is no need for them to share information about their disability. However, like any personal issue, if it starts to impact the employee's ability to do their job, you do need to act.

Signs of change as a result of illness, injury or disability may include behaviour that is out of character, such as the employee:

- Arriving late when they are usually punctual.
- Staying late when they generally leave on time.
- Withdrawing from relationships with colleagues when they are usually friendly and chatty.
- Becoming irritable or tearful.
- Missing deadlines or forgetting to do work, especially on tasks they usually take in their stride.
- Finding it unusually difficult to make decisions.
- Feeling tired and complaining of having no energy.
- Missing work due to sickness.
- Complaining of being tired or in pain.

¹⁴ Department of Employment, Australian Jobs 2015.

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016, 4430.0 – Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2015.

TIPS FOR POSITIVE CONVERSATIONS

Speak to your employee early when you notice things have changed. It's important to let them know about your observations and concerns. Show genuine care and enquire about what is happening for them. If you've already laid the groundwork for a welcoming, inclusive environment then hopefully your team member will feel more comfortable discussing changes to their situation.

Focus on having a productive conversation to better understand their current situation. Here are some tips:

- Find a private space where you can talk uninterrupted. Make sure you have set aside enough time.
- Do your homework before the meeting. Ensure you know how your organisation expects good managers to respond. What resources and policies are in place to support you and your employee? Familiarise yourself with any relevant policy and follow it.
- Stay constructive. If there is an issue with job performance or behaviour, turn your criticism into a question: "You seem to be having difficulty – what can we do about it?"
- Be specific and factual to avoid misunderstanding. Focus on what is observed. Explain what you need them to address.
- Ask what they think may be impacting their work. Press gently, and reassure them that you want to help.
- Focus on what your team member needs to be able to manage the situation if the issue is related to disability. What could you do differently to enable them to do better?
- Refrain from asking for details of their illness, injury or disability. Instead, ask if any adjustments would be helpful.
- Follow up – if you need to take the time to find information and get back to the employee, let them know that's what you plan to do. Don't share personal information without permission, unless authorised, or required by, or under law.
- Show empathy. Be sensitive and willing to pause if the person becomes upset.
- Show your concern and focus on how you can solve the problem together.
- Formulate a plan and fix a time for a further meeting to review progress.

Under performance can be an issue with any employee, whether or not they are dealing with disability. Check in with all of your team members when you are concerned. And, above all else, treat your employees as you would like to be treated – listen, think and respond thoughtfully.

DEALING WITH UNDER PERFORMANCE

When you check in with an employee who you're concerned about, the goal is to generate potential solutions that will help them meet their performance requirements. It is important that you address changes to your employee's situation promptly and make timely adjustments.

Some questions you can ask your employee that may help you identify next steps include:

- How can we take this forward?
- What can we do differently to better support you?
- How do you see the situation being resolved?
- What help do you need from your colleagues?
- How can we make your life at work more manageable?

Finally, be sure to schedule a time to meet again to assess any changes that have been implemented and continue evaluating the situation.

In some cases, it may be necessary to implement performance management procedures. These should be done in alignment with your organisation's policy.

DETERMINING THE REASONABLENESS OF WORKPLACE ADJUSTMENTS

It is best practice not to pursue any disciplinary processes until all reasonable workplace adjustments have been considered and appropriate adjustments implemented and reviewed. If needed, consult with your Human Resources team with any questions.

As a guide, considerations to the 'reasonableness' of workplace adjustments include:

- Potential effectiveness of the adjustment in preventing disadvantage and in assisting in the performance of the essential requirements of the job.
- Practicality.
- Financial and other costs of the adjustment.
- Extent of the disruption caused.
- Availability of financial resources.

For more information on workplace adjustments, visit www.jobaccess.gov.au.

CASE STUDY

MENTAL HEALTH CAN BE IMPACTED BY PHYSICAL HEALTH

Sarah had been successfully working for a small consulting firm for three years. When she started, she told her manager, Peter, that she had chronic back pain and, with adjustments, she could manage her condition. She had no problems becoming a top performer and one of the most productive members of the team. Sarah also needed to travel very regularly to meet with her clients.

At a one on one meeting with Peter, Sarah wasn't her usual self. She seemed tired and flat. Peter chose not to mention anything, (we all get tired and flat from time to time) and decided to take note of how Sarah seemed. After noticing her low mood continue for a week, he made a

time to meet with Sarah to ask how things were going for her.

Sarah explained that her doctor had recently prescribed medication for depression and this was impacting on her energy and mood. She also said that the travelling to and from another city in a day was taking its toll on her back. After discussing what adjustments could be made, Peter and Sarah agreed that fortnightly trips that included an overnight stay would be more manageable than weekly interstate day trips. Additionally, it was agreed that Sarah would work from home one day a week. Client's needs were still met and Sarah could manage her energy and her back pain more effectively.

CHAPTER 5 KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Employees may acquire a disability during their working life through accident, illness or ageing.
- If you're worried that a team member's situation may have changed, invite them to have a constructive conversation to discuss how things are going at work for them and if there are any adjustments you can facilitate to help them.
- If workplace adjustments are needed, make them in a timely manner and then plan to review their effectiveness periodically.

CLOSING SUMMARY

With around one in five Australians experiencing disability, building an inclusive, diverse workforce benefits everyone.

We hope that this guide will support you, as people leaders, to be able to effectively, recruit, support, retain and develop employees with disability in your workforce.

In addition to removing barriers in your recruitment process, one of the most important take outs, is to ask employees about what adjustments they may need to perform their job well. They are in the best position to advise you.

Remember creating a positive, inclusive work environment for employees with disability will benefit all employees and the organisation as a whole.



APPENDIX: UNDERSTANDING LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

THE DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT 1992

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) provides legal protection for everyone in Australia against discrimination based on disability.

Disability discrimination occurs when people with disability are treated less favourably than people without disability. It also occurs when people are treated less fairly because they are relatives, friends, carers, co-workers or associates of a person with disability. Disability discrimination can be direct or indirect.

Under the DDA, the definition of the term "disability" is very broad. This means that people you might not regard as having disability, and people who may not even think of themselves as having a disability, are included.

The Disability Discrimination Act's definition of disability includes:

- Physical disability
- Intellectual disability
- Psychiatric disability
- Sensory disability
- Neurological disability
- Learning disability
- Physical disfigurement
- The presence in the body of disease-causing organisms.

While some people are born with disability, many people acquire disability throughout their lives. Disability can be visible or non-visible.

The DDA protects against discrimination of disability that a person:

- Has now
- Has had in the past (for example: a past episode of mental illness)
- May have in the future (e.g., a family history of disability which a person may also develop)
- Is believed to have.

The DDA also protects people who may be discriminated against because they:

- Are accompanied by an assistant, interpreter or reader
- Are accompanied by a trained assistance animal, such as a guide or hearing dog or
- Use equipment or an aid, such as a wheelchair or a hearing aid

In regards to employment, the DDA prohibits discrimination against people with disability throughout all stages of the employment process, including:

- Recruitment processes such as advertising, interviewing, and other selection processes
- Decisions on who will get the job
- Terms and conditions of employment such as pay rates, work hours, job design and leave entitlements
- Promotion, transfer, training or other benefits associated with employment or
- Termination of employment, demotion or retrenchment.

The DDA is administered by the Australian Human Rights Commission. Individuals can lodge complaints of breaches of the DDA with the Commission in writing, by phone or online.

For more information, visit the Australian Human Rights Commission (www.humanrights.gov.au/).

DISABILITY INFORMATION SHARING

There is no legal obligation for an employee to disclose a disability unless it is likely to affect their performance in a role. However, you should explain your workplace's diversity policies to applicants. This will assure them that your organisation actively encourages applicants from diverse backgrounds, and that it has an inclusive culture.

PRIVACY ACT 1988 (PRIVACY ACT)

The Privacy Act recognises that our privacy is a vital part of who we are. It is something that is valuable and worth protecting. The Act provides rights and protections for our personal information. For more information visit Office of the Australian Information Commissioner www.oaic.gov.au.

KEY TERMS TO REMEMBER

- **Disability:** Disability may result from accidents, illness or genetic disorders. A disability may affect mobility, ability to learn things or ability to communicate easily. Some people may have more than one. A disability may be visible or hidden, may be permanent or temporary, and may have minimal or substantial impact on a person's abilities.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines people with disability as those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Many people with disability provide that social and attitudinal barriers are equally as challenging as environmental barriers.

- **Person-first language:** Person-first language is the most widely accepted terminology in Australia. It puts the person first and the impairment second (when it's relevant). Examples include: "person with disability", "people with disability", "person who is deaf" or "people who have low vision".
- **Workplace adjustment:** A workplace adjustment is a change to a work process, practice, procedure or environment that enables an employee with disability to perform their job in a way that minimises the impact of their disability.

ABOUT US: AUSTRALIAN NETWORK ON DISABILITY

Since our inception in 2000, the Australian Network on Disability (AND) has been supporting large, complex organisation's to welcome people with disability as employees, customers and stakeholders.

Today, we work in partnership with more than 180 organisation's from across the public, private and not for profit sectors. Our significant experience and unique networks support us to build our members' knowledge, understanding and ability to welcome employees, potential employees and customers with disability.

We are also Australia's leading content creator in relation to inclusion of people with disability in a business environment. Our publications are developed in collaboration with people with disability, our business networks, regulators and thought leaders.

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TERMS OF USE

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