

An Able Work Environment



Preparing an able work environment

If you're thinking about employing someone with disability, you may need to make changes to your workplace to ensure it's accessible.

Most people with disability won't need changes to the workplace, so it's a good idea to chat with your employees first.

Changes to your workplace could include:

- **modifying the physical environment, such as special equipment**
- **accessible car parking**
- **accessible sanitary facilities, such as bathrooms and toilets**
- **accessible room requirements in accommodation buildings**
- **making work arrangements more flexible**
- **training your staff to ensure they feel comfortable with communicating and working with people with disability**

A disability can lead to participation barriers or activity limitations, that are then impacted by participation barriers in the workplace, including:

- **Social barriers – group attitudes, workplace culture, exclusion**
- **Physical barriers – accessibility, inadequate workplace personalisation**
- **Attitudinal barriers – includes limitations that others perceive about the person with disability, stereotyping, stigma, prejudice and discrimination**
- **Practice and policy barriers – includes failure to provide reasonable workplace personalisation, policies that do not provide equitable access and participation for employees with disability**
- **Communication barriers – inaccessible information including technology deficiency, interpretation, technical jargon that is inaccessible to individuals with cognitive impairment.**



Creating a disability-friendly workplace

- **Adapting the workplace or the working environment**
- **Removing physical barriers**
- **Making some changes to how work is organised**
- **Ensuring that information is provided in accessible formats**
- **Modifying or acquiring equipment**
– including assistive digital technology
- **Offering specialist training and support**
- **Providing more flexible employment**
– including part-time hours and a phased return to work.

Able workplace values

People with disability are individuals who have the inherent right to respect for their human worth, and the right to be treated fairly and with dignity.

People with disability have the same rights as other members of Australian society to realise their individual capacities for physical, social, emotional and intellectual development.

People with disability have the same right as all Australians to pursue meaningful employment and a chosen career where their skills and talents can be developed, and their aspirations realised.

Able workplace leadership

It is highly likely that, as a manager, you will supervise a worker with mental illness at some point in your career – whether you know it or not. Mental illness is more prevalent than many people realise.

Around 45% of Australians aged between 16 and 85 will experience a mental illness at some point in their life, while one in five Australian adults will experience a mental illness in any given year.

A worker may develop mental illness prior to, or during employment. Most workers successfully manage their illness without it impacting on their work. Some may require workplace support for a short period of time, while a minority will require ongoing workplace strategies.

It is often presumed that a worker's mental illness develops outside of the workplace. However, an 'unhealthy' work environment or a workplace incident, can cause considerable stress and exacerbate, or contribute to, the development of mental illness.

Research from many number, of sources indicates that 'job stress and other work-related psychosocial hazards are emerging as the leading contributors to the burden of occupational disease and injury'.

It is clear that the cost of ignoring the problem is far greater than the cost of developing and implementing strategies to create a safe and healthy workplace.

Managers within an Able Work Environment should ensure they:

- **Develop placement & employment opportunities for disability**
- **Provide targeted training opportunities**
- **Develop inclusion & diversity toolkits, policies and procedures for all staff**
- **Adopt and promote best practice models on supporting disability within the work environment**
- **Utilise established feedback mechanisms for gauging employee satisfaction**
- **Monitor sector progress towards outcomes of the strategy through annual review of implementation plan**
- **Develop and implement initiatives to improve agency culture**
- **Participate in Disability Awareness events and engage in continuous improvement in relation to inclusion and diversity**
- **Provide flexibility for mental health days and support.**
- **Include information on disability and services at workplace inductions**



Workplace culture

- **Communicate definition of disability and work with staff, clients and stakeholders**
- **Invest in memberships with Disability Peak Bodies, Australian Network on Disability, Diversity Council of Australia**
- **Utilise specialist disability services for information and advice (e.g. job design, workplace personalisation etc.)**
- **Develop resources (inclusion and diversity toolkit) to support best practice approaches**
- **Provide networking opportunities through inclusion and diversity forums**
- **Building resources to support compliance in recruitment process**
- **Promote the use and processes for workplace personalisation, flexible work arrangements and other workplace design initiatives**

Inclusive consultation and engagement

People with disability should have as much say about the planning and development of services and activities as other people in the community. When talking with stakeholders, it is important to include people with disability so that the views of the whole community are included.

Why is consultation and engagement important?

Organisations should aim to engage with, and get the views of stakeholders and the broader community to:

- **generate ideas or get feedback on available options**
- **help with the planning and development of activities, policies and programs**
- **understand what is working well, what needs to be improved, and how to make improvements**
- **find out how they feel about:**
 - programs
 - services
 - facilities

Premises standards

Premises Standards set out the minimum requirements for building work to make sure that people with a disability can use the building in a dignified way.

The standards apply to new buildings and parts of existing buildings that are undergoing modifications, require building approval, and were lodged on or after 1 May 2011.

If this applies to the building your business operates out of, you should read more about how the Disability (Access to premises - Buildings) Standards 2010 applies to your business. Generally, private residences are not covered by the premises Standards.

What is inclusive consultation and engagement?

Inclusive consultation and engagement includes:

- **adopting flexible approaches for consultation to suit individuals and groups**
- **taking into account a variety of access and communication requirements**
- **respecting people's differences**
- **giving people an equal opportunity to contribute**





Support for workers with disability

As an employer, it's good to know that there's also support for workers with disability to help them adjust to their workplace. Here are a couple of examples:

Employment Assistance Fund provides financial help to buy work related modifications and services. This help is available for people with a disability who are about to start a job, who are currently working, or who need help finding and preparing for work.

Job Access has information for people with disability about finding work and being supported in the workplace.

International day of people with disability (IDPWD)

December 3rd is International Day of People with Disability (IDPWD). The day celebrates the achievements of people with a disability and aims to raise awareness and acceptance of all people.

IDPWD aims to:

- **bring together businesses, governments and communities to recognise the contributions and celebrate the accomplishments of people with a disability**
- **promote the understanding of people with a disability**
- **encourage support for their dignity, rights and well-being**

Learn how you can celebrate the day in your workplace on the International Day of People with Disability website.

Further information Legislation

Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Act 2015

The Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Act plays a crucial role in the human rights of people with disability. The Act promotes equality of opportunity for all people in the Territory, and provides remedies for people who have suffered unlawful discrimination on the grounds outlined in the Act. The Act also prohibits direct discrimination, in the area of work, on the basis of disability.

Disability Discrimination Act 1992

The Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act makes disability discrimination unlawful and aims to promote equal opportunity and access for people with disability, including in relation to employment.

Disability Services Act 1986

The Commonwealth Disability Services Act aims to provide a co-ordinated approach to assisting people with disability to gain and maintain employment. The Act also provides a set of guiding standards for the delivery of quality services, known as Disability Service Standards.

National Disability Agreement 2012

The National Disability Agreement is an initiative of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). It provides a strong commitment from the Australian Government, states and territories, to provide more opportunities for people with disability to participate and enjoy Australia's economic and social life.