



CCIWA Report 2024

# Tapping the talent pool of people with disabilities



Chamber of Commerce  
and Industry WA





# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Our approach</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Disability employment landscape: Western Australia</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Breaking down barriers: Challenges to disability employment</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The business case for disability inclusion</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Unlocking potential: Strategies for businesses to enhance disability employment</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Government’s vital role: Advancing disability employment through policy</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Our commitment and ongoing journey</b>	<b>21</b>

© Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia 2023. All rights reserved.  
ABN: 96 929 977 985 ACN: 099 891 611  
This document is subject to copyright. Its reproduction and use outside its intended use are not permitted without prior written permission.  
All content is for general information purposes only and should not be used as a substitute for consultation with professional adviser.



## Executive Summary

The value of diversity and inclusion within workplaces has risen to the forefront of organisational priorities. Companies around the world are recognising the undeniable benefits of cultivating a workforce that mirrors the rich tapestry of society.

This isn't merely an exercise in social responsibility; it's a strategic imperative that generates innovation, resilience and a competitive edge. As we navigate the complexities of an interconnected global marketplace, the need to ensure that every individual has an equal opportunity to contribute becomes all the more apparent.

Western Australia stands at the crossroads of progress, positioned to champion the cause of enhancing employment outcomes for people living with a disability. According to the most recent ABS data, around 1 in 5 Western Australians live with a disability, highlighting the magnitude of this demographic within our community. Yet, their representation within the workforce remains disproportionately low. This disparity not only undermines the principles of equality, but also hampers the growth potential of our businesses and economy.

The case for employing people with disabilities is compelling and multifaceted. Firstly, it is grounded in fundamental human rights. Every individual, irrespective of their physical or cognitive differences, possesses inherent talents and potential that can enrich our workplaces. Secondly, an inclusive workforce drives innovation. Diverse teams bring together a range of perspectives and experiences, fostering creativity and problem-solving that non-diverse groups simply cannot replicate. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that companies that

prioritise diversity and inclusion outperform their competitors in terms of innovation and financial performance. Additionally, the economic benefits of embracing disability-inclusive employment extend beyond individual companies. Research indicates that optimising the economic participation of people with disabilities not only enhances workplace dynamics but also serves as a catalyst for broader economic growth.

Furthermore, in an era where corporate values are under intense scrutiny, consumers and investors are more likely to support businesses that demonstrate a commitment to social responsibility and inclusivity. By reflecting the diversity of our society, organisations can foster deeper connections with their communities.

In this report, we outline the state of disability employment in Western Australia and the barriers that continue to impede progress in this area. We delve into the strategies and initiatives to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities and explore the tangible benefits, from fostering a culture of belonging to unlocking untapped talent pools.

As we embark on this journey towards a more inclusive future, we hope this report serves as a guiding light for organisations, both public and private, large and small, across Western Australia. By harnessing the power of diversity and embracing the abilities of all, we can reshape our workplaces, communities and economy for the better. The path to progress starts with a single step, and it is our collective responsibility to ensure that no one is left behind.



# Our approach

This report is driven by the findings of a CCIWA survey conducted in late 2022. This survey, which assessed the state of diversity and inclusion in Western Australian workplaces, focused on four underrepresented groups, including women, people from the LGBTQIA+ community, Indigenous Australians or people from other cultural backgrounds, and people with a disability. The survey garnered 378 responses across small, medium and large enterprises from various industries. While the results showed notable progress in some underrepresented cohorts, it also shed light on a stark and persistent disparity: people with disabilities continue to face significant obstacles in accessing employment opportunities compared to other groups. This disparity served as the catalyst for our mission, emphasising the urgency of fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and diverse workforce in Western Australia.

We uncovered the barriers faced by people with disabilities in accessing mainstream employment. Discrimination, rooted in misconceptions and unconscious biases, pose a formidable obstacle, underlining the need for a paradigm shift. However, our report offers not just a diagnosis but a roadmap to brighter possibilities. We highlight the advantages of disability inclusion, including diversity, innovation, access to a broader talent pool, and increased workforce engagement. This presents the business case for diversity.

Further, we present an array of strategies for businesses to enhance disability employment, with inclusive organisational culture at the core. We

then turn our attention to government, proposing policies and initiatives to catalyse change in the public and private sectors, underlining the pivotal role of government leadership in improving disability employment outcomes.

Lastly, we share our organisation's own journey. While we are in the early stages, we have adopted several of the strategies presented in this report to accelerate our progress, guided by the belief in the transformative power of embracing disability employment.

Our commitment to providing a holistic perspective has been enriched by invaluable insights gathered through in-depth engagement with key stakeholders. We hosted two roundtable discussions with around 40 businesses (members and non-members), representing a diverse array of WA employers. These roundtables were an opportunity to hear directly from those who have experienced the challenges of recruiting, hiring and retaining individuals with a disability. The candid discussions shed light on the barriers they face and their commitment to finding solutions.

We also conducted two focus group sessions, directly engaging with individuals with disabilities who are actively employed in various capacities. While they were in closed employment settings, they generously shared their personal stories and experiences of their pursuit of open employment opportunities. Their narratives unveiled the multifaceted challenges they have encountered on their journey, giving us a deeper understanding of the obstacles that must be overcome.





## Disability employment landscape: Western Australia

Western Australia is home to approximately 411,500 individuals with reported disabilities. Yet, as of now, only around 103,500 of them are employed, revealing a stark gap in employment opportunities. The most recent ABS data on disability employment (2018) highlights that the labour force participation rate among people with disabilities stood at 59.1 per cent, significantly lower than the 85.3 per cent participation rate for those without disabilities (Graph 1). Furthermore, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities was at 11.1 per cent (this rises to 20 per cent for people with intellectual disabilities), almost double the rate for their counterparts without disabilities, which stood at 5.3 per cent at that time (Graph 2).<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, our survey revealed that only 60 per cent of businesses currently employ someone with a disability. This figure stands out as the lowest percentage among the four underrepresented groups captured in the survey, which also included women, Indigenous Australians or people from another cultural background, and people from the LGBTQIA+ community (Graph 3).

Moreover, 60.9 per cent of respondents admitted to making limited-to-no progress in attracting and retaining people with disabilities. This figure was the highest among the four underrepresented groups, signalling a substantial area for improvement (Graph 4).

Our survey revealed that small and medium

enterprises (SMEs) in particular faced unique challenges, with lower confidence levels in hiring individuals with disabilities. The reasons behind these disparities in hiring and retention are multi-faceted, reflecting both external and internal factors within organisations.

When asked about the challenges faced in recruiting or retaining people with disabilities, respondents primarily cited a trifecta of barriers, specifically:

- lack of applicants;
- the inability to offer workplace adjustments either due to financial or physical constraints; and
- lack of career opportunities.

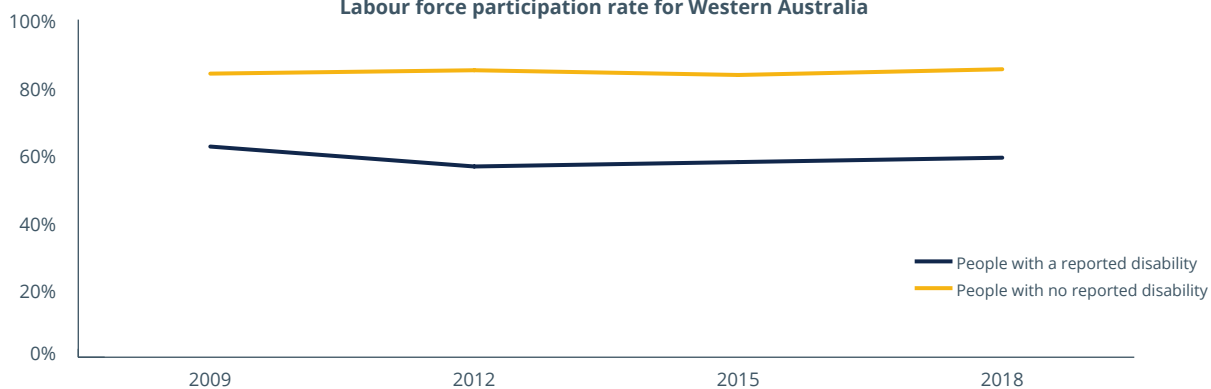
Two further factors were identified to impact an organisation's confidence in hiring people with disabilities:

- costs associated with workplace adjustments and additional support/training requirements; and
- concerns about productivity and absenteeism.

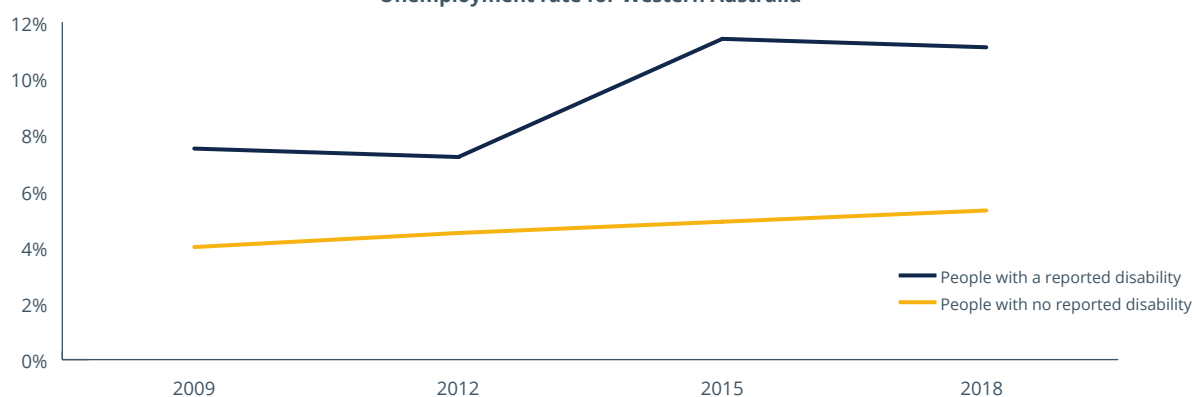
The survey results underscored the existence of common biases and misconceptions surrounding the employment of people with disabilities in Western Australia. These biases often stem from preconceived notions that individuals are unable to perform the same tasks as their peers, require more days off or are more costly to employ. To bridge the gap and foster a more inclusive workforce, it is crucial to address these misconceptions.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019. Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings.

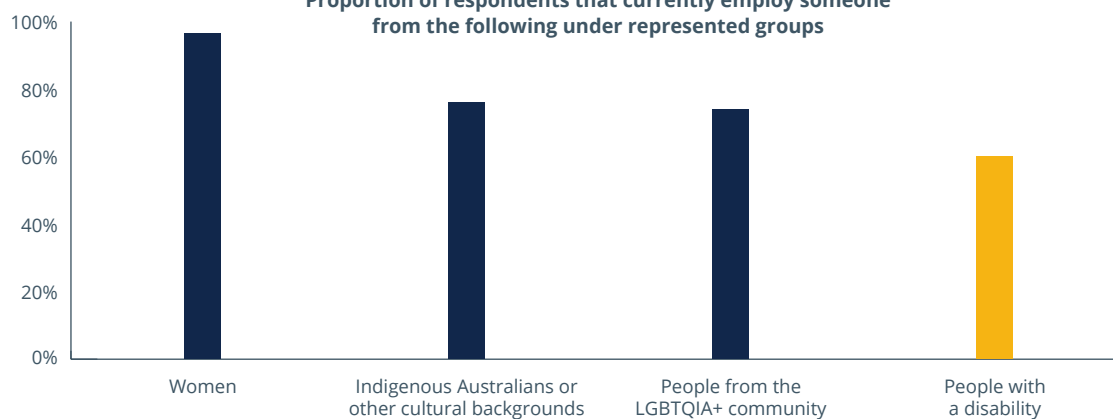
Graph 1  
Labour force participation rate for Western Australia



Graph 2  
Unemployment rate for Western Australia



Graph 3  
Proportion of respondents that currently employ someone from the following under represented groups



Graph 4  
Proportion of respondents that have said they have made limited-to-no progress in attracting and retaining people from the following groups



# Breaking down barriers: Challenges to disability employment

Employment is a fundamental aspect of individual independence, financial stability and social inclusion. However, for people living with disabilities in Western Australia, there are significant barriers that hinder their access to open or mainstream employment opportunities.

In this section, we list the barriers faced by individuals with disabilities, as highlighted through conversations with employees with disabilities and workshops with employers. The experiences and insights shared by employees and employers, as well as the broader context, illuminate the complex challenges encountered by individuals with disabilities seeking meaningful work, particularly in mainstream workplaces. These barriers include:

## 1. Discrimination and misconceptions

One of the most pervasive and detrimental barriers to employment for people with disabilities in Western Australia is discrimination, both during the recruitment process and within the workplace itself. Discrimination often manifests in the form of unconscious bias and misconceptions held by employers and co-workers. These misconceptions may lead to negative stereotypes about the capabilities and productivity of individuals with disabilities. The impact of such discrimination is not only demoralising, but also significantly limits

employment opportunities and can notably affect the confidence of people with disability in seeking employment, particularly in mainstream workplaces.

The latest ABS data also identified discrimination as a key issue, finding that:

**In 2018, 15.6% of people with any disability aged 15-64 experienced discrimination.<sup>2</sup>**

**For those who experienced discrimination, 1 in 4 experienced it from their employer.<sup>3</sup>**

Similarly, our engagement with people working with a disability revealed they too had experienced discrimination:

**We had a couple of highly skilled employees [with disability] who went to open employment but came back [to an Australian Disability Enterprise] and swore they would never go back to open employment because of the way they were treated.<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019. Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019. Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings.

<sup>4</sup> Quote from a disability employment services employee





For individuals with intellectual disabilities, the challenges of securing mainstream employment can be even more daunting. The stigma or discrimination faced by those with intellectual disabilities remains a significant obstacle, as societal attitudes toward intellectual disabilities continue to lag. Despite advancements in understanding and awareness, there remains a lack of support and a prevailing misconception that individuals with intellectual disabilities are unable to contribute meaningfully to the workplace.

The latest ABS data found that:

**In 2018, 32.1% of people with severe or profound core activity limitation experienced discrimination.<sup>5</sup>**

## 2. Poor understanding of rights

We identified a contributing factor to the discrimination faced by individuals with disabilities was a lack of understanding of their rights as defined by relevant Commonwealth and State legislation. Many employers, and even employees themselves, lack awareness of the legal protections and accommodations that should be afforded to people with disabilities. This knowledge gap creates an environment where discriminatory practices can go unchecked.

## 3. Limited job availability and marketing

Despite the overall low unemployment rate in Western Australia, there is a notable lack of job availability for people with disabilities, especially in open or mainstream employment. This lack of opportunity to participate perpetuates the feeling of exclusion among individuals with disabilities, making them less likely to seek employment.

## 4. Insufficient support

The journey to secure mainstream employment is often more challenging for individuals with disabilities due to inadequate support. Job seekers with disabilities, at times, require specialised assistance to find suitable positions, navigate the application process, and sustain employment while feeling included and valued in the workplace. The absence of tailored support services exacerbates their difficulties in accessing work in open employment settings.

## 5. Limited access to skills training and education

Access to skills training and education is essential for individuals with disabilities to compete effectively in the job market. However, many face barriers in accessing these opportunities. Inadequate educational facilities, lack of workplace/job-specific accommodations and a shortage of specialised training programs limit the development of essential skills required for certain jobs, as one participant explains:

**We need more upskilling and opportunities for professional development.<sup>6</sup>**

## 6. Inadequate workplace flexibility

Workplace flexibility can be a crucial consideration for people with disabilities, as they may have unique physical and wellbeing needs. While many workplaces are adopting flexible work arrangements, these may not fully accommodate the diverse needs of employees with disabilities. For example, modifications to physical workspaces or schedules may be required to ensure equal access and opportunities.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019. Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings.

<sup>6</sup> Quote from a focus group participant with lived experience.





## 7. Disincentives for employment

A significant disincentive for people with disabilities to seek employment or more hours of work is the potential reduction of their Disability Support Pension (DSP) as their income or hours of work increases. This issue has been identified on numerous occasions including, for example, the Senate inquiry into the “Purpose, Intent and Adequacy of the Disability Support Pension”. The DSP is an essential financial support system for many individuals with disabilities. However, the way the DSP is currently structured means that single recipients are losing 50 cents for every dollar earned above \$204 per fortnight.<sup>7</sup> This creates a disincentive for people with disabilities to seek more work or advance in their careers, as they may face financial uncertainty, a net loss, and could even risk losing other allowances or benefits that assist them in their day-to-day living.

**The way the Disability Support Pension is currently structured means that single recipients are losing 50 cents for every dollar earned above \$204 per fortnight.**

<sup>7</sup> Services Australia, 2023. [Income test for disability support payment](#)

## 8. Lack of knowledge and confidence

One of the prominent impediments that seem to be hindering employers from expanding their hiring practices to include more individuals with disabilities is a fundamental lack of knowledge and confidence in how to approach the process. This uncertainty often stems from misconceptions and unfamiliarity with the specific accommodations and support mechanisms that may be required.

Employers may worry about the perceived complexities and potential challenges associated with integrating individuals with disabilities into their workforce. Concerns about accommodating physical or cognitive differences, fostering an inclusive workplace culture and complying with relevant legal requirements can loom large, particularly for small and family businesses.

There is often a genuine desire among employers to provide meaningful opportunities for people with disabilities, as evidenced by the number of our members that were eager to take part in our workshops, but many of them felt ill-equipped to do so effectively and some just simply didn't know where to start.

Addressing this knowledge gap and building employer confidence is pivotal in dismantling this barrier and fostering an inclusive labour market that benefits both businesses and individuals with disabilities.



# The business case for disability inclusion

Businesses in Western Australia have a transformative opportunity – one that not only enriches their workforce, but also propels them into a more competitive and innovative future. The heart of this opportunity lies in the active inclusion of individuals with disabilities. While promoting diversity and inclusivity is undeniably a moral imperative, it is equally essential to acknowledge the tangible and economic benefits that businesses stand to gain by embracing disability inclusion.

This section explores the compelling reasons why businesses should prioritise the employment of people with disabilities, emphasising that by not doing so, the business community is missing out on a wealth of advantages that can substantially impact their success and growth. These include:

## 1. A diverse and innovative workforce

One of the most prominent advantages of employing people with disabilities is the enhancement of workforce diversity. A diverse workforce brings together individuals with unique backgrounds, perspectives and skills. Research consistently demonstrates that diverse teams are more innovative and creative, generating a wider range of ideas and solutions to compete and adapt in an ever-changing business environment.<sup>8,9</sup> Moreover, a diverse workforce can also better represent the diversity of customers and clients, leading to improved products and services tailored to a broader range of needs. It can also help companies avoid groupthink, where everyone shares similar backgrounds and perspectives, which can stifle innovation.<sup>8,9</sup>

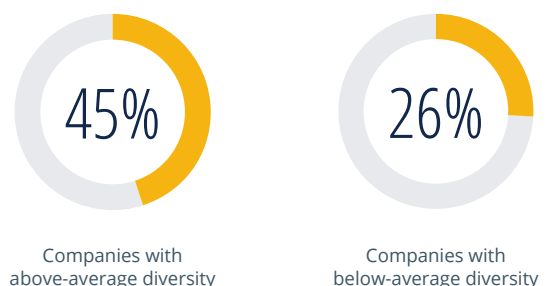
A 2018 survey conducted by Boston Consulting Group found that companies with above-average diversity reported that 45 per cent of their company's total revenue stemmed from innovation revenue compared to just 26 per cent for companies with below-average diversity scores.<sup>10</sup> Furthering that diversity by having more individuals with disabilities in the workforce introduces different problem-solving approaches, leading to more effective solutions and fostering innovative ideas.

## 2. Access to a broader talent pool

By actively recruiting individuals with disabilities, businesses tap into a vast and often untapped talent pool. With 1 in 5 Western Australians identifying as having a disability, this represents a substantial segment of the labour market. Failing to consider this talent pool means missing out on the diverse skills, experiences and expertise that individuals with disabilities can bring to the table. This broader talent pool can lead to a more dynamic and adaptable workforce, as well as a greater ability to attract top talent from diverse backgrounds.

In addition, individuals with disabilities often possess a wide range of transferable skills that can benefit various roles and industries. For example, someone with a visual impairment may have honed exceptional attention to detail and auditory skills, making them well-suited for roles in data analysis or customer service. Moreover, many individuals with disabilities have developed strong resilience and problem-solving abilities in their daily lives, which can be valuable assets in the workplace. By actively seeking out and harnessing the skills and experiences of individuals with disabilities, businesses can access a wealth of untapped potential that can drive growth, innovation and competitiveness – which is especially important in the current jobs environment where WA's unemployment rate remains consistently low.

Percentage of total revenue from innovation



Source: Boston Consulting Group, 2018

<sup>8</sup> Harvard Business Review, 2017. [Does diversity actually increase creativity?](#)

<sup>9</sup> Graham Jones, Bernardita Chirino Chace and Justin Wright, 2020. [Cultural diversity drives innovation: empowering teams for success.](#)

<sup>10</sup> Boston Consulting Group, 2018. [How Diverse Leadership Teams Boost Innovation](#)

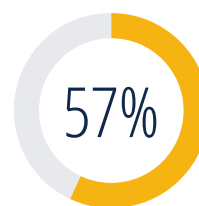
### 3. Double dividend

Employing more people with a disability has a cascading effect that extends beyond the individuals themselves to their carers and the broader society. One of the most significant benefits is that it can free up valuable time for their carers. Many individuals with disabilities rely on family members or friends to provide essential care and support. When these individuals secure meaningful employment, they often become more self-reliant and require less intensive care and assistance from their carers. This not only eases the emotional and physical burden on carers, but also allows them to allocate more time and energy to other pursuits, including their own participation in the workforce.

Furthermore, the increased workforce participation of carers has the potential to boost the overall economy. When carers are able to join or re-enter the workforce, they too contribute to the labour market, increasing productivity and providing an even wider pool of talent for businesses to tap into. Additionally, greater workforce participation by carers can lead to enhanced financial stability for families, improving their overall quality of life, and mental well-being.

### 4. Improved employee engagement and morale

Research indicates that companies committed to diversity and inclusion, including the hiring of people with disabilities, tend to enjoy higher levels of employee engagement and morale.<sup>11</sup> When employees perceive their workplace values diversity and provides equal opportunities, they are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs and feel a sense of belonging within the organisation. This heightened engagement can translate into increased productivity, creativity and loyalty among staff members. Moreover, employees who feel valued and respected are more likely to stay with their employers, reducing turnover rates and the associated costs of recruitment and training.<sup>12</sup> For example, CCIWA participates in the Diversity Council of Australia's annual Inclusive Employer survey. Our organisation outperforms the benchmark across most key criteria. As a result, based on the 2023 benchmark, our employees are 24.9 per cent less likely to look



**Percentage of consumers that are more loyal to brands that commit to addressing social inequities in their actions, including through hiring and retention.**

*Source: Deloitte, 2021<sup>14</sup>*

for alternative employment in the next 12 months compared to the average. This continuity and commitment from employees contribute to a stable and thriving organisational culture that benefits the business as a whole.

### 5. Enhanced customer relations

Inclusive hiring practices can also lead to improved customer relations.<sup>13</sup> A workforce that reflects the diversity of the customer base is better equipped to understand and meet the unique needs of a wide range of clients and customers. This, in turn, can boost customer satisfaction and loyalty. When customers see that a business values diversity and inclusivity in its workforce, they are more likely to feel a connection with the brand and choose it over competitors. Moreover, employees with disabilities can serve as valuable liaisons between the business and any customers that have a disability, providing insights and empathy that can enhance customer interactions. Operators in the hospitality sector, for example, cite fewer customer complaints where they employ people with disabilities in their service teams. In this way, an inclusive workforce can lead to stronger customer relationships and increased customer loyalty.

### 6. Positive impact on the bottom line

Contrary to misconceptions, employing people with disabilities can positively impact a company's bottom line. Several studies have shown that disability-inclusive workplaces experience reduced turnover rates and lower recruitment costs.<sup>15,16</sup> In addition, the costs to business of absenteeism and sick leave for employees with disabilities was found to be as low as

<sup>11</sup> Deloitte, 2015. [The role of diversity practices and inclusion in promoting trust and employee engagement](#)

<sup>12</sup> Harvard Business Review, 2018. [Do your employees feel respected?](#)

<sup>13</sup> McKinsey & Company, 2018. [Delivering through diversity](#)

<sup>14</sup> Deloitte, 2021. [2022 Global Marketing Trends: Thriving through customer centricity](#)

<sup>15</sup> Safe Work Australia, 2007. [Are people with a disability at risk at work? A review of the evidence.](#)

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Graham, Kaye Smith, Alison Shinkfield and Udo Polzin, 2002. [Employer benefits and costs of employing a person with a disability](#)



## Companies that excel in disability inclusion



28% higher revenue



Double the net income



30% higher economic profit margin

34 per cent of the costs incurred by their counterparts without disabilities.<sup>17</sup> These translate into financial advantages that can result in significant cost savings and contribute to the overall profitability of the organisation. A study by Accenture found companies that excel in disability inclusion outperform their peers, achieving 28 per cent higher revenue, double net income and a 30 per cent higher economic profit margin.<sup>18</sup> These findings demonstrate that disability inclusion can be a strategic asset that directly enhances an organisation's financial performance.

### 7. Fostering inclusivity and environmental, social and governance (ESG)

Demonstrating a commitment to inclusivity and ESG is increasingly important in today's socially conscious marketplace. Businesses that actively promote disability inclusion sends a powerful message to employees, customers and stakeholders about their commitment to social equity and fairness. By incorporating disability inclusion into their corporate values, organisations can align themselves with societal expectations and showcase their dedication to ethical business practices. This commitment can lead to increased goodwill and support from customers, investors and partners who value and appreciate businesses that prioritise social responsibility. Additionally, it can help attract and retain employees who seek purposeful work and want to be part of a company that positively impacts society.<sup>19</sup>

### 8. Demonstrating leadership as a competitive advantage

Becoming a leader in disability inclusion can set a company apart from its competitors. By championing the employment of people with disabilities, an organisation can inspire others in the business community to follow suit, contributing to a broader

societal shift toward greater disability inclusion. This leadership role not only enhances the organisation's visibility, but also positions it as a forward-thinking, socially conscious entity that values diversity and inclusion as core principles. By setting a positive example and actively promoting disability inclusion, companies can drive positive change in their industry and across the community. This leadership can extend to partnerships, advocacy and collaborative efforts that further promote disability inclusion and social progress.

### 9. A catalyst for macroeconomic uplift

The positive impact of enhanced economic participation by people with disabilities goes beyond just businesses and individuals with disabilities, but it also holds considerable economic promise for Australia. Recent research underscores the potential for substantial gross domestic product (GDP) uplift resulting from improved employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, with indications that if Australia were to ascend to the top eight of OECD countries for disability employment by 2050, the estimated economic benefits could exceed \$50 billion.<sup>20</sup> This figure reinforces the untapped potential within this demographic. Increased employment rates among people with disabilities, as has been demonstrated above, produces a more dynamic and diversified labour market, fostering innovation and driving economic growth. Furthermore, the economic benefits extend to the broader community, as improved financial independence for individuals with disabilities positively influences consumer spending and reduced dependence on welfare programs. As we strive for a more equitable and prosperous future, the economic case for disability employment stands out as a compelling rationale for businesses and policymakers alike to champion inclusivity in the workplace.

<sup>17</sup> Safe Work Australia, 2007. [Are people with a disability at risk at work? A review of the evidence.](#)

<sup>18</sup> Accenture, 2018. [Getting to Equal: The disability inclusion advantage](#)

<sup>19</sup> Glenn Llopis, 2018. [Inclusion as a growth strategy part 3: Inclusive hiring and inclusive working](#)

<sup>20</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016. [Willing to Work](#)

# Unlocking potential: Strategies for businesses to enhance disability employment

Following our exploration of the myriad benefits that arise from employing people with disabilities, the focus now shifts to the actionable steps that businesses can take to attract, hire and empower individuals with disabilities.

This section, informed by insightful conversations with both employers and employees, as well as extensive research on successful practices both in Australia and globally, lays out a roadmap for businesses to maximise the potential of disability inclusion within their workforce.

These strategies include:

## 1. Nurturing an inclusive organisational culture

Creating an inclusive culture within organisations is foundational to improving disability employment outcomes. When workplaces prioritise inclusivity and foster an environment where every employee feels valued, respected and empowered, they are more likely to attract and retain individuals with disabilities, as one participant explains:

**I've stayed at my current workplace [for over a decade] because of the support I get and the community-like culture.<sup>21</sup>**

Key actions to help foster a more inclusive culture can include:

- **Leadership Representation**

Increasing the representation of people with disabilities in leadership roles, including within boards, is a powerful signal of commitment to inclusivity. It not only provides role models, but also ensures that decisions and policies consider the perspectives of individuals with disabilities.

- **Inclusive Programs**

Implementing programs that actively support the inclusion and advancement of individuals

with disabilities is essential. These programs should address career development, mentorship and workplace accommodations, creating an ecosystem where everyone can thrive.

- **Lived Experience Involvement**

Involving individuals with lived experience in the design of strategies and plans for employing people with disabilities is invaluable. Their insights are crucial in shaping policies that resonate with the needs and aspirations of individuals with disabilities.

- **Disability Awareness Training**

Conducting regular disability awareness training sessions for employees can foster understanding and empathy. Such sessions can break down misconceptions, eliminate biases and encourage open dialogue about disability-related topics.

## 2. Overhauling the recruitment process

The recruitment process plays a significant role in determining whether people with disabilities have equal access to job opportunities. It is the gateway through which individuals enter the workforce, and if not designed with inclusivity in mind, it can inadvertently create barriers that make it harder for people with a disability to access job opportunities. Businesses should consider the following adjustments to make the process more inclusive:

- **Inclusive Language**

Scrutinising position descriptions to use inclusive language is crucial. Language should be chosen carefully to avoid inadvertently discouraging individuals with disabilities from applying. For example, including driver's licence requirements.

- **Avoiding Screening Out**

Employers should be vigilant about screening out individuals with disabilities during the initial selection process. Ensuring that all applicants have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their skills and qualifications is essential.

<sup>21</sup> Quote from a focus group participant with lived experience.

- **Encouraging Disclosure**

Encouraging applicants to disclose their disabilities can be beneficial. This disclosure allows employers to provide necessary assistance and accommodations throughout the recruitment process.

- **Accessible Contacts**

Employers should ensure that appropriate contact persons are available to assist applicants with disabilities. Providing clear information about the best person to contact for assistance can facilitate a smoother application process.

- **Alternative Assessment Methods**

Rethinking traditional interview processes and considering alternatives, such as short work trials<sup>22</sup> or skills assessments, can help employers better assess candidates' abilities and fit for the role, and vice versa.

- **Application Forms**

Businesses should ensure application forms are available in diverse formats and styles (such as large print, electronic text, or audio) to meet the needs of applicants with disabilities. Accepting applications through various channels further accommodates diverse preferences, demonstrating a commitment to an inclusive and accessible recruitment process.

### 3. Changing mindsets and reducing stigma

People with disabilities have long faced discrimination and misconceptions that hinder their access to employment. To break down these barriers, organisations must actively challenge and reshape internal attitudes and beliefs. Addressing deeply ingrained societal stigmas and changing mindsets within the organisation are pivotal steps toward improving disability employment outcomes, as this participant explains:

**Just because we have a disability, doesn't mean we can't do it.**<sup>23</sup>

Not only does this positively affect workplaces, but it can have a cascading effect whereby employees are able to create or raise better awareness within their own homes and communities, and ultimately have a generational impact on how people with disabilities are viewed in society.

Key actions to help change mindsets include:

- **Building the Business Case:**

Promoting the benefits of employing people with disabilities is essential. Building a strong business case that highlights the value, skills, and innovation that individuals with disabilities bring to the workplace can convince sceptics and gain buy-in from stakeholders.

- **Showcasing Success Stories**

Sharing success stories of employees with disabilities within the organisation can be a powerful tool for creating awareness and reducing stigma. These stories humanise the experience of disability in the workplace and highlight achievements.

- **Visible Representation**

Normalising disability within the organisation by providing visible representation through employee resource groups, affinity networks, company marketing and publication materials can help change perceptions and foster an environment of acceptance. This representation not only demonstrates the commitment to inclusivity but also serves as a powerful way to show employees and customers what is possible.

### 4. Metrics and targets for accountability

Establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) related to the employment of people with disabilities can hold organisations accountable for their commitments to inclusivity.

Key strategies can include:

- **KPIs for Disability Employment**

Organisations should develop and track KPIs specific to the employment of people with disabilities across all levels and areas of the organisation. Metrics may include the percentage of employees with disabilities, retention rates and advancement opportunities.

- **Transparency**

There should be an obligation to report statistics related to the employment of people with disabilities. Transparency ensures accountability and helps organisations measure progress toward their inclusivity goals.

- **Executive Support**

Garnering the attention and support of executives is vital for driving change. Demonstrating the business case for disability inclusion and tying it to organisational objectives can secure top-level commitment.

<sup>22</sup> While work trials may be a more appropriate alternative to assess someone's fit for the role, they must be utilised correctly (i.e. a one-day or one-week trial should suffice) and not used to exploit a person with disability's willingness to work.

<sup>23</sup> Quote from a focus group participant with lived experience.



## 5. Customised support strategies for individuals with intellectual disabilities

While it is essential to develop strategies that improve employment outcomes for all individuals with disabilities, it is equally important to acknowledge and address the unique challenges faced by those with intellectual disabilities. These individuals often face additional barriers when seeking meaningful employment opportunities. Intellectual disabilities can impact various aspects of daily life, including communication, problem-solving and adaptive skills, which can pose specific challenges in the workplace. Therefore, when implementing disability employment initiatives, it is imperative that our efforts are comprehensive and inclusive, encompassing all segments of the community. By recognising the diverse needs of this demographic and tailoring our strategies accordingly, we can foster a truly inclusive work environment that embraces the full spectrum of abilities, allowing every individual to contribute their unique talents and perspectives to the workforce.

To this end, in addition to the strategies recommended above, these are further initiatives that can be implemented to improve employment outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities:

- **Tailored onboarding and training programs**

Design and implement onboarding and training programs that are customised to the unique needs and abilities of individuals with intellectual disabilities. These programs should be flexible and provide extra support as required, including simplified training materials, additional coaching or mentorship, and extended training periods. Offering individualised support can help these employees become more confident and productive in their roles.

- **Mentorship and peer support networks**

Establish mentorship programs and peer support networks within the organisation to provide ongoing assistance and guidance to employees with intellectual disabilities. Mentors can offer one-on-one support, helping individuals navigate their job responsibilities and providing a source of encouragement. Peer support networks can facilitate the sharing of experiences and strategies for success, fostering a sense of belonging and community within the workplace.

- **Reasonable accommodations and flexibility**

Ensure that the workplace is equipped to provide reasonable accommodations for individuals with intellectual disabilities. These accommodations may include modified work schedules, simplified task instructions or assistive technology. In addition, it is important to maintain an open and flexible approach to job roles and allow employees to adjust their tasks or work environments to better suit their strengths and abilities. Flexibility and accommodation can significantly enhance job satisfaction and performance for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

## 6. Strategic partnerships

Forging meaningful partnerships with organisations possessing specialised expertise in disability inclusion, such as Australian Disability Enterprises, Disability Employment Service Providers and Disability Advocacy Groups can also be critical in fulfilling an organisation's aspiration to increase disability inclusion. Collaborating with these entities can provide invaluable insights, resources and support to navigate the complexities of the disability employment journey. Australian Disability Enterprises, for instance, can offer unique perspectives and opportunities for integrated employment solutions. Disability Employment Service Providers bring tailored assistance, connecting businesses with qualified candidates and offering ongoing support for both employees and employers. Additionally, engagement with Disability Advocacy Groups ensures a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, enabling businesses to tailor their practices and policies for maximum inclusivity. Collaborative efforts with these organisations signify a commitment to diversity and can significantly enhance the effectiveness of disability employment initiatives.

## 7. Successful initiatives and strategies

To further inform these recommendations, it is valuable to draw inspiration from successful initiatives, programs or strategies that have been implemented by other organisations. To this end, two case studies are provided.

**SPOTLIGHT:**

## Neuroinclusion internships at Rio Tinto Iron Ore

Rio Tinto has started the journey of welcoming people with neurodiverse conditions into the business with a pilot internship program that lays the groundwork for neuroinclusion. In its first year, the program has created pathways for people with autism.

It is hoped that this will be extended to consider people with other neurodistinct conditions, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Dyslexia/Dyscalculia.

Working closely with Curtin University and the Australian Computer Society, the project team identified four initial roles aligned to some of the common strengths of people with autism.

Four interns joined the business in the Rail Logistics and Optimisation, Core Processes and Knowledge Management, Integrated Systems Modelling and Value Chain Planning, and Modelling teams.

The project team received further funding in May 2023 to progress this work, developing a range of materials, including a video, a 'day in the life' cartoon series, and a leader guide to help educate and share the pilot's success across the business.

The team's next focus is on sustainability, and they are working closely with the Future Skills team to create a transition plan.

The transition will focus on integrating neurodiversity internships into Rio Tinto's existing internship and graduate streams, as well as exploring further rotational or permanent opportunities with support from senior leaders.

### Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

In mid-2023, Rio Tinto also began the process of establishing four ERGs – LGBTQ+ (Thrive), Neuroinclusion, Gender Equality and Indigenous peoples – to elevate the voices of underrepresented groups within the business and make systemic change.

The ERGs aim to ensure that everyone feels safe to be themselves at Rio Tinto and to feel supported in making change. They support a key recommendation in the Everyday Respect report to address structural barriers to diversity.

They are employee-led and sponsored by Rio Tinto's Executive Council and bring the following benefits:

- creating visible communities where people feel they belong and can build advocacy and trust.
- enhancing Rio Tinto's culture by supporting the review of systems, procedures and programs to remove and prevent structural barriers.
- contributing to business decisions and projects that would benefit from a diverse lens.
- providing career development opportunities for diverse talent and leadership, including training and mentoring.

The Neuroinclusion ERG aims to enrich the experience of people with distinct cognitive profiles who think, feel, and learn differently.



## SPOTLIGHT:

### ANZ's Abilities Network and A Chance For All

ANZ has been on its disability employment journey for some time, with a strong commitment to embed accessibility and inclusion across all areas of its business, not least of which being employment. The commitment shown by ANZ, exemplified through the programs they have established to improve employment outcomes for people with disability, has seen them recognised as a Top Performer in the Australian Network on Disability's Access and Inclusion Index in 2021.

#### Abilities Network

In 2005, a group of ANZ employees established the Abilities Network with the aim of fostering a more inclusive workplace for individuals with disabilities. The network is open to all ANZ employees and has active sub-groups across the various locations the organisation operates in. While the way disability is perceived and supported varies by location, the common goal is to enhance ANZ's support for people with disabilities and create a sense of belonging.

The Abilities Network plays a vital role in promoting awareness and inclusivity, serving as a point of contact and advocacy for employees with disabilities. It also provides guidance to various ANZ departments and stakeholders to enhance accessibility practices and policies, and was a finalist in the 2023 'Disability Employee Network of the Year' category of the annual Disability Confidence Awards run by the Australian Network on Disability, recognising the significant work being done to create a more accessible bank.

#### A Chance For All

Given the Chance, an initiative by the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL), helps refugees and asylum seekers overcome language and cultural barriers to find employment in Australia. ANZ has partnered with BSL since 2009, providing work placements lasting 6-12 months, with 40 per cent of participants securing permanent positions. In 2022, ANZ joined BSL's "Chance for All" pilot, expanding the program to include people with disabilities, aiming to address employment barriers faced by this group.

ANZ, in collaboration with BSL and WISE Employment Australia, sourced candidates for the program. BSL managed the recruitment process, working with participants and their supervisors to create tailored support plans. Eight roles were established, accommodating individuals with various disabilities, and "supportive people leaders" across a range of business units were identified and trained to help participants adapt to a corporate work environment. ANZ and BSL collaborated to match participants with suitable roles and determine the level of support needed, including considerations like part-time hours, breaks, and the need for a support person.



# Government's vital role: Advancing disability employment through policy

In addition to the significant role that businesses play in advancing disability employment, governments equally play a pivotal role in shaping policies and initiatives that promote equal employment opportunities for all citizens, including those with disabilities.

As the State's largest employer, the WA Government put forward an ambitious plan aimed at increasing the representation of people with disabilities within the WA public sector to 5 per cent by 2025. However, despite the detailed actions put in place for both the Public Sector Commission and public sector agencies, the current representation remains at just 1.5 per cent, a figure that has plateaued since 2018 and has even shown a decline since 2014.<sup>24</sup> The need for a concerted effort to bridge this gap is evident. It is noteworthy that, in contrast, the Federal Government has established a 7 per cent target for disability employment within its public sector agencies.

To ensure a cohesive and aligned national approach, the WA Government should harmonise its target with the national benchmark. This alignment not only reinforces a unified commitment to disability inclusion at the federal and state levels but also signifies a collaborative effort to achieve meaningful

progress in advancing disability employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

But, if these aspirational targets are going to be achieved, it is clear more needs to be done. To this end, our recommendations include:

## 1. Strengthen disability employment support services

To empower job seekers with disabilities, the State Government should establish a comprehensive support system. This could include expanding vocational training programs that equip individuals with the skills necessary for various industries. Additionally, offering career counselling and access to assistive technology resources can help disabled job seekers navigate the job market more effectively.<sup>25</sup>

We note the Federal Government's commitment to improving systems and services for job seekers and employers through the establishment of a new specialist disability employment services model. This will replace the current Disability Employment Services Program and we encourage the State Government to work closely with them to ensure the new model will deliver quality assistance and support to enable greater workplace participation.

<sup>24</sup> Western Australian Government, 2022. [People with Disability: Action Plan to Improve WA Public Sector Employment Outcomes 2020-2025](#)

<sup>25</sup> While these types of services can be accessed by participants in the National Disability Insurance Scheme, it is imperative that they are available to all Australians with disabilities.





## SPOTLIGHT:

### Opportunities Fund for Person with Disabilities

Canada's Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities is a Federal Government program aimed at helping Canadians with disabilities to prepare for, obtain, and maintain employment. The program is administered by Employment and Social Development Canada.

The program provides funding to various organisations and initiatives that support individuals with disabilities in their pursuit of employment including:

- Job search supports
- Pre-employability services
- Wage subsidies
- Work placements
- Employer awareness initiatives

Examples of projects/initiatives funded by this program, include:

- Neil Squire Society – This project provides people with disabilities with skills training and job supports to help them find and keep jobs. This project also helps employers by providing one-on-one education and help to develop hiring plans.
- Trucking Human Resources Canada – This project provides people with disabilities, including those with invisible or episodic abilities, with job placements in the trucking sector.
- Sinneave Family Foundation – This project supports people with autism spectrum disorder to prepare for and find work.



## SPOTLIGHT:

### New Zealand's Think Differently campaign

New Zealand's Think Differently campaign was a government-funded initiative that ran from 2010 to 2015. The campaign was designed to challenge negative stereotypes about people with disabilities and to promote a more inclusive and accessible society.

The campaign featured a series of TV commercials, print ads, and social media posts that highlighted the achievements of people with disabilities from all walks of life. The campaign also included community events and initiatives aimed at raising awareness of disability issues and to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities.

Separately, the State Government should fund initiatives that provide tailored training and support, ensuring that individuals with disabilities have the tools and knowledge needed to secure and maintain employment. The \$2.5 million allocated by the State Government through the Innovation Fund earlier this year to support nine innovative projects designed to enhance independence and quality of life for people with disability is an important step. Funding initiatives that have an employment focus is also key. Canada's "Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities" program could serve as a template.

#### 2. Promote disability awareness and inclusion training

Launching a public awareness campaign and promoting disability awareness and inclusion training is essential for fostering a more inclusive workplace culture.

Governments can collaborate with employers and disability service providers to create campaigns that educate the public on the benefits of a diverse workforce. Encouraging businesses to provide disability awareness and inclusion training for their employees will help break down stereotypes and reduce unconscious bias, making workplaces more

welcoming for individuals with disabilities. With cultural awareness training currently mandated within the public sector, the Government should consider extending this to disability awareness training as well.

#### 3. Foster inclusive leadership development for individuals with disabilities

To promote diversity and inclusion within the disability community, the State Government should invest in and support leadership development programs designed for individuals with disabilities.

These programs should aim to cultivate leadership skills, provide mentorship opportunities and build networks for people with disabilities. By enabling and celebrating leadership skills within this cohort, the Government can create a more inclusive leadership pipeline that reflects the diversity of the disability community. Drawing inspiration from successful disability leadership initiatives in other regions, such as the "Emerging Leaders" programs in the United States as well as those already on offer in the State, which empower individuals with disabilities to take on leadership roles, can inform the development of similar programs.



## 4. Address employment disincentives within the Disability Support Pension

The State Government should advocate for the Federal Government to review and reform the Disability Support Pension (DSP) to ensure that individuals with disabilities are not disincentivised to seek and maintain employment due to concerns about losing their pension benefits.

This can involve adjusting the DSP eligibility criteria, income thresholds and asset limits to create a more flexible and accommodating system. By raising the income-free threshold and offering a gradual reduction of pension benefits as individuals' earnings increase, the Government can encourage greater workforce participation among people with disabilities. It is important that the right balance is struck between financial support and employment incentives for people with disabilities.

## 5. Implement educational programs on legal context for disability inclusion in employment

To ensure fair and inclusive employment practices for individuals with disabilities, the State Government should support the introduction of educational programs that educate employers, HR professionals and employees about the legal context surrounding disability inclusion in recruitment, promotion and evaluation.

These programs can include workshops, seminars and online resources that provide practical guidance on complying with disability discrimination laws and promoting disability diversity in the workplace. Creating "how-to" guides that align policies and processes with legal requirements specific to disability inclusion can serve as valuable resources. Examples from jurisdictions such as the United States' Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) provide comprehensive guidance on compliance with disability employment laws, which can serve as a model for Western Australia.

## 6. Provide affordable access to disability inclusion experts for SMEs

Recognising that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) may need support in hiring and

accommodating individuals with disabilities, the State Government should establish programs that offer affordable access to organisations specialising in disability inclusion.

These organisations can advise SMEs on developing and implementing disability inclusion policies and strategies tailored to their specific needs. The Government can facilitate partnerships between disability inclusion experts and SMEs to enhance workplace disability inclusion.

Promoting and facilitating access to programs such as the Australian Network on Disability's Disability Confident Recruiter program could also prove useful in advancing the disability employment journey of small and medium-sized organisations.

## 7. Expand the remit of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency to include disability employment

The State Government should advocate to the Federal Government to expand the remit of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) to encompass disability employment, thereby fostering a more comprehensive approach to workplace equity and inclusion.

WGEA has a successful track record in promoting gender equality within Australian workplaces, providing guidelines, resources and reporting mechanisms that have helped advance gender diversity initiatives. By extending the agency's responsibilities to include disability employment, we can leverage its expertise and established infrastructure to tackle the multifaceted issues related to disability inclusion.

This expansion aligns with the broader global trend towards recognising the intersectionality of diversity and inclusion. It acknowledges that gender equality and disability employment are interrelated concerns, as they both aim to eliminate discrimination and enhance opportunities for marginalised groups.

Moreover, integrating disability employment into WGEA's purview can streamline reporting, benchmarking and best practice sharing for organisations committed to both gender and disability diversity.

## SPOTLIGHT:

### Emerging Leaders programs

“Emerging Leaders” programs are initiatives designed to identify, nurture, and develop the leadership potential of young individuals who show promise in various fields, such as business, government, non-profit organisations, and academia.

Programs have been designed to specifically help individuals with disabilities develop the skills and knowledge they need to take on leadership roles in their communities and workplaces.

Some examples include:

- **The Disability Voices United Emerging Leaders Program (US)**

A five-part training program that gives self-advocates with disabilities and family-advocates in California the skills needed to take leadership positions in their communities and state and to advocate for systemic change.

- **National Business & Disability Council Emerging Leaders Internship (US)**

A highly competitive program that places top undergraduate and graduate college students with disabilities in fulfilling internships nationwide that also provide them with meaningful leadership development and networking opportunities.

- **Disability Foundation Youth Leadership Initiative (Canada)**

Empowers youth with disabilities to identify, discuss, and find solutions to attitudinal barriers to employment.



# Our commitment and ongoing journey

While CCIWA has a mission to improve disability employment outcomes in Western Australia, we too have a responsibility to demonstrate leadership through being a more inclusive and accessible workplace. Though we find ourselves in the early stages of this endeavour, we are committed to fostering a workplace that champions diversity, inclusivity and equity.

One of the cornerstones of our approach has been the establishment of a dedicated Diversity and Inclusion Council (D&I Council), which includes a disability stream. The disability stream of our council focuses on developing and spearheading initiatives aimed at enhancing disability-related aspects within our organisation. It acts as a driving force, ensuring that our commitment to disability employment remains a top priority.

Moreover, we have recognised the significance of making our workplace more accessible, both in terms of physical infrastructure and communication. We have proactively made adjustments and introduced accessibility features to our premises, eliminating physical barriers that could potentially hinder individuals with disabilities. In tandem, aspects of our recruitment practices, such as our job advertisements, have evolved to be more inclusive, emphasising our dedication to an equitable workforce.

However, our efforts extend beyond mere structural changes. We have diligently cultivated a work environment and culture that embodies acceptance, support and inclusivity. We understand that creating a sense of belonging is the most crucial element, and we strive to be a place where every individual feels valued, regardless of their abilities.

One of our key initiatives in this journey involves a collaborative partnership with disability service providers such as Rise Network and Good Sammy, who bring vital expertise to the table. Together, we offer individuals with disabilities the opportunity to gain exposure to corporate settings and mainstream workplaces. Through short-term placements, we allow them to explore roles that align with their capabilities and aspirations, thus providing a chance to determine the right fit. Our goal is that, when permanent roles become available, we can extend these opportunities, providing long-term employment prospects.

As we move forward, we are actively exploring training initiatives that we plan to gradually roll out to our D&I Council, management and, ultimately, to all staff. As highlighted earlier in this report, disability awareness training serves as a pivotal tool in challenging negative stereotypes and biases that may exist, while also fostering a greater understanding of the unique value that individuals with disabilities bring to our workforce.

In closing, our ongoing disability employment journey is rooted in a deep-seated commitment to inclusivity. We are dedicated to fostering a culture that celebrates diversity and champions equal opportunities for all. As we continue to pave the way forward, we hope that our dedication and initiatives serve as an inspiration for the wider Western Australian business community.

We strongly encourage others to join us in this journey towards a more inclusive, diverse, and equitable employment landscape, ensuring that individuals with disabilities are empowered and supported to achieve their full potential.

Together, we can create lasting positive change and improve disability employment outcomes in Western Australia.







Chamber of Commerce  
and Industry WA

[cciwa.com](http://cciwa.com)