



Working differently

Empowering disability confidence – summary report

January 2018



Working differently – empowering disability confidence

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Contents

Purpose	3
Vision	3
What is and isn't disability	3
Our role	4
Business impact	4
Current state of disability	5
Queensland public sector	5
Lived experience	6
Future principles and enablers	7
Talking the walk and walking the talk	8
Functional accessibility	10
Recommendations	11
Conclusion	12
References	13

“You shouldn't have to tick a box. I think it should just be inclusive anyway” participating employee.

“I don't want to not be me” participating employee.

“I can't walk, but, everything else is fine. So, I will try to do anything without asking for help” participating employee.

Purpose

This is a summary of the full report - Working differently – empowering disability confidence, produced in January 2018. The Working differently report explored the current state of disability from the lived perspective of employees who identify ‘with disability’ in the Queensland Public Sector (the sector). It provides a high-level overview of the findings, catalytic areas for future focus and recommendations for disabling disability in workspaces and workplaces.

Representation of employees identifying as a ‘person with disability’ in the sector workforce has steadily declined more than 50 per cent over the past decade. The Disability Confidence project aimed to better understand the current state of disability across the sector to drive enhanced employment and workforce participation outcomes for this representative group. The employees participating in this initiative come from a range of disciplines, roles, workplaces, agencies and identify with a diversity of injury, illness and condition identities, predominately sensory impairments followed by psychological conditions.

The project team adopted the social model view where ‘disability’ is socially constructedⁱ. Research says the social model is the internationally recognised way to view and address ‘disability’ and this model also has the greatest influence in empowering employees to recognise our shared responsibility over our work environments. The social model view aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities principles (moral model¹), the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland and differs to the medical model².

For this project, the application of the social model considers work environments with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriersⁱⁱ.

Vision

Queensland public sector workspaces and workplaces are disabling disability to include people who hear, see, move, process information and perform differently.

What is and isn’t disability

Disability is not a person. Our everyday norms and environments create disability.

Disability is the result of the way today’s norms, society and environments are organised that do not enable people with at least one impairment to participate and interact on a functional and equitable basis in every aspect of their lives, including employment. Our environments are filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers that can create disability.

Impairment is a person’s (likely) permanent illness, injury or condition that leads to disability. An impairment may be congenital, developed in life and at work, acquired because of injury (including workplace injuries), be of a chronic or episodic nature, or may even no longer exist. The spectrum of impairments is diverse – sensory,

¹ Moral model: ‘disability’ once led to concealment and exclusion of individuals, and now leads human rights and social justice.

² Medical model: ‘disability’ is a health condition of the individual and to be dealt with by medical professionals – i.e. what a person cannot do and cannot be.

intellectual, psychological, physical and/or psychosocial. Impairment is a part of the human condition, a group we are all likely to join at some point.

Our role

People with impairment experience unique differences and challenges in how they interact and engage. Providing environments that do not anticipate, accommodate or understand individual impairments can mean that we do not get the best results from our employees, or we exclude their participation altogether.

Disability often exists across social, physical and digital workspaces, without affecting the four in five people without impairment with the most ease (a privileged status). To disable disability we need to challenge the status quo including the behaviours, actions and spaces we choose to tolerate because they are familiar and comfortable.

Understanding that it is our workplace norms and environments that disables individuals is key to changing how we understand and work with people with impairments and realise significant benefits for the whole workforce.

“My disability doesn't define me, I have the same goals as everybody else” participating employee.

Business impact

Impairment-based discrimination accounts for a quarter (25.4 per cent) of complaints of which 60 per cent occur at work or in seeking work. This is significantly greater than sexual harassment which equates to 14.2 per cent of complaintsⁱⁱⁱ. Employment barriers include lack of access to education and training, inaccessible work environments, significant lack of knowledge and misconceptions about how adjustments can be made, stigma and discrimination^{iv}.

Genuine inclusion of employees with impairment provides opportunities for better service delivery outcomes from a deeper appreciation of understanding and serving a diverse community^v. Research shows that employees with impairment demonstrate equal or greater productivity than other workers, better attendance, longer retention and lower occupational health and safety incidents^{vi}.

Retaining employees with impairment, and realising these benefits, requires our workplace norms and environments to adequately support and meet the needs of people who hear, see, move and process information differently. This recognition will improve the experience of those with impairments, enable employees to participate where they may not have done so, spend more time making a positive contribution and less time trying to 'level the playing field'.

This will translate into broader benefits including:

- creating a more inclusive workplace experience
- improving the opportunities and contribution of all employees
- providing better services to Queenslanders.

If a third more people with impairment worked instead of depending on welfare in the next decade, Australia's gross domestic product could increase by \$43 billion^{vii}. In an

accelerating, diverse and mobile world, our value lies in making the invisible visible and in how quickly we can respond to difference. This will be more evident in the workforce with an increasing prevalence of people working with impairments^{viii}, longer workforce participation and advancing technologies.

Current state of disability

Disability can occur anytime, and is experienced differently, depending on the design and accessibility of our environments and the individual's circumstances. The disability community which includes people providing services and people with impairment is both the largest and the fastest growing minority in the world^{ix}.

People with impairment continue to be among the most disadvantaged in Australia with 45 per cent living near or below poverty, which is more than double the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average of 22 per cent^x. Issues faced by people with impairment include low labour participation rates (53 per cent compared to 83 per cent^{xi}), lower than average income, higher costs of living and limited options. This often leads to working at reduced capacity^{xii} and/or needing supplementary support – now or in the future). They can also experience compounded layers of disadvantage on the basis of their gender, age, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic, cultural or religious background.

The sector has a commitment to building a diverse and inclusive workforce through the *Inclusion and Diversity Strategy 2015-2020*³. The strategy refers to the *Disability Service Plans 2017-2020* created by each department for addressing disability within the service delivery as well as within their department. A review of the plans indicate the actions generally focus on:

- lifting awareness through the promotion of events and production of support material and resources such as training, stories and information
- reviewing key documentation for accessibility and reference of people with disability
- providing some support for people with disability and/or managers
- creating employee resource group or disability network, inclusive workplace cultures, diversity champions and allies
- engaging specialists and peak bodies.

Queensland public sector

Identification and employment participation

- Representation of employees disclosing as 'person with disability' has steadily declined. Actual numbers have fallen by more than 50 per cent (6,422) while the total workforce has grown 33.8 per cent (71,400) between 2004 to 2017⁴.
- A comparison of the data of employees leaving the sector showed those who identify as having an impairment were leaving at a similar rate to that of other diversity groups (NESB and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people). This may suggest that the decline in the data may likely be a result of employees not disclosing and/or people changing their response in the system.

³ The strategy provides opportunities for better decision-making, problem solving, innovation and market growth, attracting and retaining high performers in workplaces.

⁴ MOHRI 2004 and 2017

- Employees with impairment work across Queensland in all agencies; cities, regions and rural areas; industries and disciplines; and positions⁵.

Employment experience

Working for Queensland survey results indicate the following:

- Employees with impairment do not have as positive a work experience as those without impairment, with positive scores between 7 per cent and 12 per cent points lower for all key metrics than those without impairment.
- The employment experience of people with impairment is often further impacted by other demographics:
 - The workload and health score for managers with impairment is one of the lowest for any demographic group. Only 27 per cent indicated that workload and health is not a problem, compared to 35 per cent of managers without impairment.
 - With the exception of workload and health, the employment experience is poorer for non-managers with impairment on all key metrics.
- Since 2015, the proportion of people who indicate that disability is a barrier to success has increased by four points.
- People with impairment report higher levels of perceived bullying (27 per cent) and sexual harassment (2 per cent) than people without impairment (16 per cent and 1 per cent respectively). The experience of bullying is further exacerbated for people with impairment if they have caring responsibilities and if they don't have managerial status.
- The lowest performing of the inclusiveness and diversity questions is whether employees felt people are treated fairly and consistently with 41 per cent of employees with impairment compared to 51 per cent without impairment.

“I have a double disadvantage, I’m Aboriginal, I’m a person with a disability, that is hard in the employment industry to get into because the stereotypes, the discrimination” participating employee.

Lived experience

Observations underpinning the lived experiences shared by employees with impairment are divided into three main themes:

Exertion of extra effort

Employees with impairment appear to exert extra effort not only in managing their impairment but also in dealing with the barriers in everyday environments. This appears to be more evident for employees:

- reconciling their 'before and after' lives after acquiring an impairment or as the severity of the impairment changes/deteriorates
- whose needs are not adequately met to enable their effective participation.

Pull for accountability and support

Employees with impairments are often required to take an extra step in situations to address the disability existing in workspaces and workplaces. This includes instigating

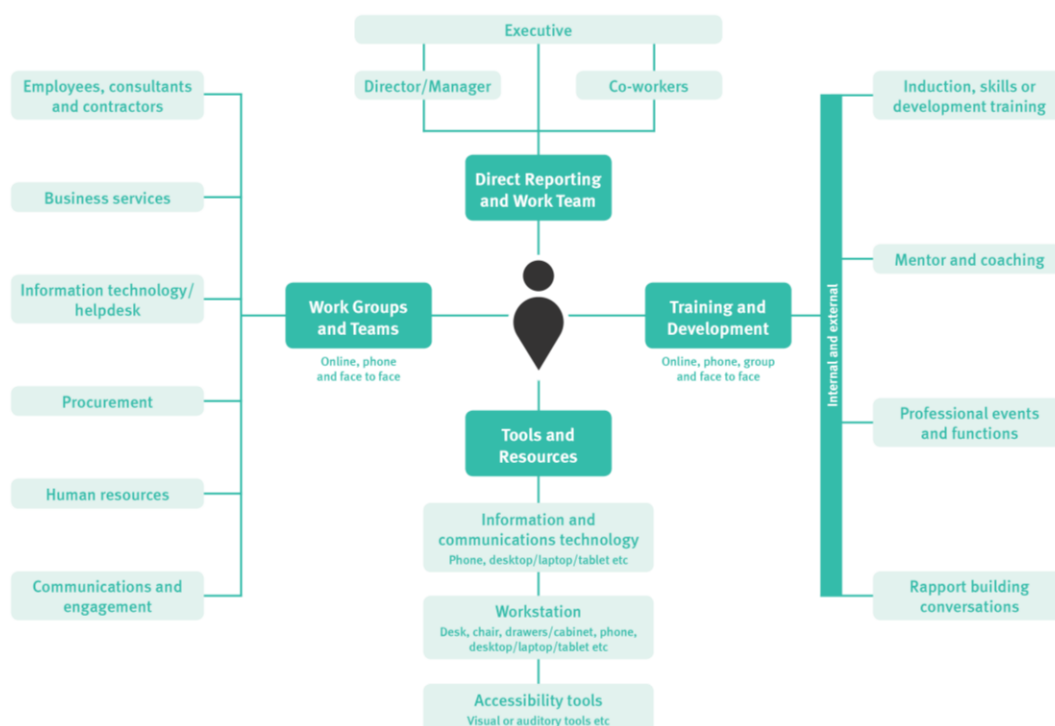
⁵ MOHRI

and driving the implementation of adjustments, disclosing their impairment often multiple times to help others understand the disability barriers faced, identifying strategies and devices to address disability; continuously reminding and following up for accountability for adjustments.

Frequency of barriers

These experiences are not one off, or present only at time of recruitment. Rather, they exist in the numerous, everyday business and social activities, physical and digital workspaces in which employees interact and engage as part of doing their job and being a team member as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: The interactions experienced during an employee’s journey at work



Addressing the disabling barriers for all pathways is required to enable an inclusive workplace environment.

“Communication has to be much more deliberate” participating employee.

Future principles and enablers

The public sector ‘customers first’ value includes our employees. We each have a personal and a collective responsibility to participate in the continuous pursuit of equity and liberation within the sector from which our aspiration to provide better services to the people of Queensland can benefit. The following focus areas are informed by project findings, particularly the learnings from our employees’ lived journeys in conjunction with sector-specific and broader quantitative data.

Below are key principles and enablers for successful outcomes to be inclusive of people with impairment and to disable disability in the workplace.

Talking the walk and walking the talk

There are overarching legislation, frameworks and resources across the sector promoting the inclusion, accessibility and safety of our workforce and workplaces, including recognition of disability. The disability community has resources to assist with understanding disability and the diversity and spectrum of impairment identities.

The absence of a single, consistent definition and context for disability terms across the sector has likely contributed to low data representation. Research indicates employees identify with the medical name of their condition e.g. autistic, blind, depression, paraplegic and the terms 'impairment', 'injury' or 'illness'. Additional research indicates an employee's identity with disability is influenced by intra-individual factors, interpersonal factors and legal factors.

Research from the project working group and participating employees indicate varying degrees of capability maturity and consistency in identifying and disabling disability. For example, the following tools were validated by some participating employees lived experiences, with varying degrees of success:

- use of assistive devices by employees, often funded by JobAccess
- employee works reduced hours to decompress from overstimulating environments
- engagement of specialists to manage an employee's return to work
- the use of mobile devices and flexible hours to work around medical appointments
- having a conversation to understand an employee's needs
- effective meeting practices including distribution of agenda and papers early, speaking one-at-a-time, displaying minutes in real time
- mental health awareness campaign
- re-establishing an employee support network
- peers advocating on another's behalf in prompting and reminding others of good etiquette
- gaining self-awareness and confidence in understanding the impairment identity.

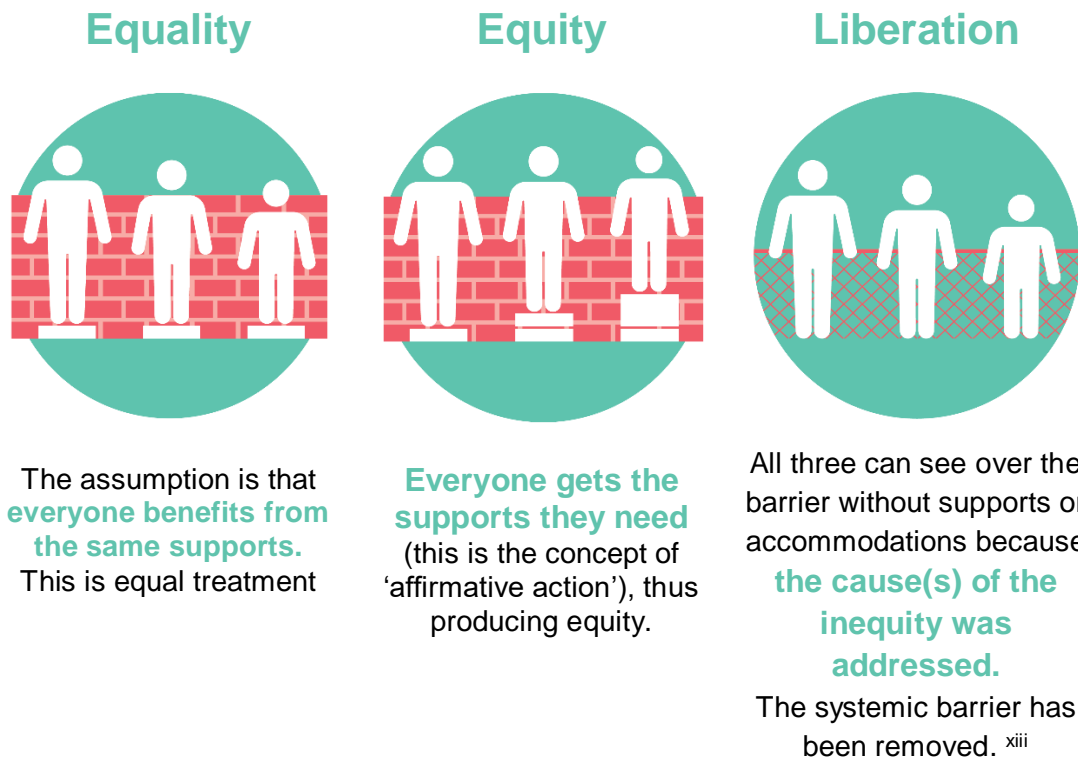
Participating employees recently recruited into the sector report a positive experience with being engaged in a conversation about their needs with adjustments more often implemented after commencement. However, some participating long-term employees expressed not having such conversations and/or a lack of continuing conversations over the years to address any new or changing barriers.

Other participants raised concerns with inherent requirements of a job conveyed in role description. For example, whether it is mandatory for a role to have an open car licence (which can exclude people with low vision) or is the ability to travel.

People with impairment are a small percentage of the population, especially the working population. Repeated exposure to people with impairment will gradually result in turning difference into something we can tolerate. It takes a great deal more to turn toleration into inclusion and the benefits. Therefore, a conscious effort to apply learnings and feedback from one employee to transferable situations and pathways across the sector is essential for the sector to be inclusive and accessible as employer of choice.

A journey for observing an event is illustrated as follows where some environmental disability barriers are removed.

Figure 2: Equality, equity and liberation



Important: This illustration depicts the removal of some systemic barriers present in observing an event. Accessible tools and environments for the equitable participation of some people with vision and hearing impairment, autism and anxiety, for example, is not captured in the illustration and other systemic barriers may remain.

The evolution of progress towards liberation in the workplace could look like:

Equality	Equity	Liberation
Environmental norms apply the same tools to everyone.	Environmental norms apply different tools to everyone based on an individual's circumstances.	Environmental norms are the tools enabling all people to participate.
People need to hear with the same tools.	People need to hear with different tools.	Environmental norms do not require people to hear.
People need to work in the same workspace environment.	People need to work in different designated workspace environments.	Workspace environments change to suit the person.
People need to adjust to external stimulation the same way.	People need to adjust to external stimulation in different ways.	External stimulation changes to suit the person.

Person-centric and disability-centric

The impetus for change is often driven from first-hand experience working with an employee who departs from the norm. Action to disable everyday workplace barriers is more likely a workaround, prompted after disclosure by people with impairment in a specific workplace situation. As such, workplace adjustments are focused at providing localised support to an individual with impairment to manage the disabling environment. For example:

- The use of colleagues to complete a task for, or on behalf of, an employee when a document/program is not accessible even with the use of personal assistive technology, such as a screen reader. The ability for an employee using assistive technology to do their job is now disrupted, dependent upon the cooperation of a colleague and exertion of more effort.
- Replacing the accessible toilet swing door to an automated sliding door closest to the employee's workstation. The ability for an employee to access mobilised workplaces is potentially limited to proximity to the accessible toilet or dependant on exertion of more effort.
- The use of assistive devices such as screen readers, volume adjustable phone, captioning, white cane, wheelchair.
- The ad hoc use of meeting rooms as quiet and less stimulating environments for 'workstations'. The ability for an employee to manage overstimulation and stress is potentially limited by the availability of rooms, ergonomic issues and separation from colleagues.

While these interim practices need to be maintained, there is a need to simultaneously design and arrange workplace processes so that they fit the people who use them to minimise reoccurrence of the barriers across the sector. This practice is consistent with the application of human rights as part of policy decisions and development from the outset, rather than waiting until a right is violated, or an act of discrimination occurs^{xiii}. Potential outcomes for the earlier examples:

- Ensuring documents/programs are accessible to screen readers, or acknowledged otherwise, consistently across the sector. This enables employees to work uninterruptedly and independently, whether or not they use a screen reader.
- Ensuring sliding doors are installed at all other workplaces the employee visits as part of conducting the job. This enables employees to access a suitable toilet from any workspace.
- Ensuring assistive devices are readily available and functioning for use when needed.
- Providing workstation environments that are low in stimulation and ergonomically designed quiet rooms. This enables employees to feel less stressed in environmental surroundings.

Implementing a proactive disability-centric and a reactive person-centric practice across the public sector contributes to the vision as employer of choice.

While there is no data on the disability barriers or representation of impairment identities within the sector, barriers and enablers can be identified by using the prevalence of impairment identities in the Australian population. For example, only 1 in 137 people use a wheelchair^{xiv}.

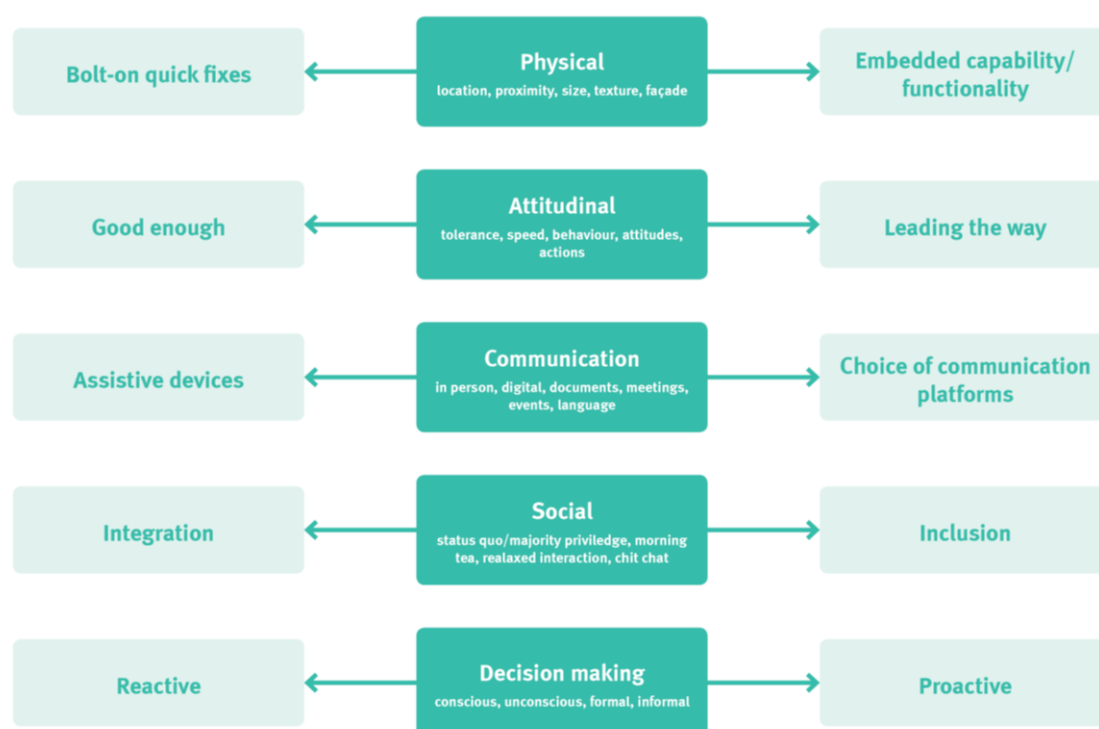
Functional accessibility

Functional accessibility is more than being able to enter a physical or digital workspace. Functional accessibility is:

- Ensuring that all physical or digital workspaces can be accessed, navigated and understood by all people, with various degrees of movement, hearing, sight and processing capabilities
- The capability of the physical and digital workspaces should be compatible with assistive devices used to bridge accessibility gaps present in the workspace
- Ensuring that all pathways connected to the physical or digital workspace required to be taken by a person to get to and leave can similarly be accessed, navigated and understood.

An example of functional accessibility and the experience with physical, attitudinal, communication and social disability barriers is illustrated below. The decision making framework underpins the other themed barriers, as it is present in the everyday conscious and unconscious, formal and informal, decisions we make as individuals and as a collective that supports the continuation of today's workplace norms.

Figure 3: Functional accessibility response capability



Recommendations

The following recommendations are shaped from project findings as focus areas for future actions. Each recommendation includes key elements which should be achieved in addition to initiatives addressing the broader themes in this report.

An overarching principle for all recommendations is to develop and encourage employees with impairment to lead and participate in the development and implementation of actions that impact them - 'do nothing about us, without us'.

Strategic shift

1. Establish the social model view of 'disability':
 - Consistent definition for 'disability' for application, reporting and data.
 - Capability growth in perspective, application and language.

Leadership and accountability

2. Establish visible and accountable leadership:

- Leadership Board to champion employees with impairment.
- Chief Disability Officer(s) with accountability for disability outcomes.
- Reverse mentoring (employees with impairment mentor executive leaders).

Ecosystems and practices to disable disability

3. Establish a visible and accountable disability profile and pathways:

- Formal response process to employee disclosure and feedback.
- Functional accessibility standards.
- Inherent needs in jobs (target unique skill sets, exclusionary attributes).
- Dedicated funding for workplace adjustments.
- Coordination of workplace adjustments and strategies.
- Transfer of corporate knowledge and enablers.

Education and awareness

4. Deliver a sector-wide marketing campaign to support behaviour change. ICC to provide marketing expertise and recommendations about engaging an external party to develop this campaign.

Sector-wide action and implementation plans and measures will be developed as part of phase 2 of the Disability Confidence project for delivery of endorsed recommendations.

Conclusion

Understanding that disability results from the way our current workplace norms and environments are organised is critical to disabling disability and ensuring impaired employees can participate on a functional and equitable basis.

Providing social, physical and digital workplace environments that do not anticipate, accommodate or understand differences in how people hear, see, move, process information and perform means that we do not get the best participation, productivity and satisfaction in employment from people with impairment.

The sector is in a unique position as the largest employer in Queensland to increase social and public value through improving the employment of people with impairment. To attract and retain employees with impairment, we need to continue to disable disability in our workplace environments.

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