

Workforce participation for People with Disability

The issues

People with disability in Australia are less likely to be working than other Australians

- The labour force participation rate of people without disability is 83% compared to 54% of people with disabilityⁱ
- Australia ranks 21 out of 29 OECD countries in terms of employment participation for people with disability.
- Stigma and misconceptions about hiring people with disability persist, despite the introduction of legislative instruments such as the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, Discrimination and Other Human Rights Legislation Amendment Act 2009 and the Fair Work Act 2009.
- There is a lack of awareness of available Government supports to hiring people with disability.
- Australia has a theoretical labour market for people with disability – one where jobs exist in principle rather than reality.

About Mission Australia

Mission Australia is a non-denominational Christian community service organisation that has been transforming the lives of Australians in need for more than 150 years

We have provided employment services for over 33 years and last year placed 55,000 people into work through our Employment Solutions division; the largest not for profit provider of Australian Government funded employment services. Consistent with our vision to see a fairer Australia, we focus strongly on the needs of job seekers who face the highest barriers to employment, through the following programs:

- A large provider of the Indigenous Youth Career Pathways (IYCP) Program which provides school-based apprenticeships and traineeships to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students.
- DEEWR-funded Job Services Australia (JSA) program, which we operate from 96 sites in 32 Employment Services Areas, in every state of Australia.
- The largest national provider of the Access Programme, which provides job seekers with pre-vocational training and assistance prior to taking on an apprenticeship.
- The New Enterprise Incentive Scheme, which assists eligible social security recipients into self-employment.

- Disability Management Services, which support job seekers who have suffered injury, have health issues or a disability that restricts their work capacity to rehabilitate and reengage with the workforce.
- We also foster innovation in work experience and employment programs and operate a range of social enterprises and transitional labour market programs, including the largest range of Indigenous Employment Programs (IEP) of any provider in Australia.

Mission Australia's Position on Workforce Participation for People with Disability:

The persistently low rates of employment for people with disability indicates the need for a targeted intervention to address the barriers to employment that people with disability face. It is important to ensure that people with disability are able to access the financial and social benefits that come with employment but also as a way to address the underutilisation that presents a core challenge for the economy over the next twenty years. The following actions would lift participation rates and improve outcomes for the most disadvantaged job seekers.

More demand side interventions to increase the workforce participation of people with disability

- Increasing the number of subsidies available to Australian employers for hiring people with disabilityⁱⁱ;
- Developing complementary programs to build upon the Government's stated commitment to provide supported employment services and specialist transition to work programs that prepare National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) clients for employment;
- Government considering the introduction of a long-term wage subsidy that is assessed on a case by case basis and weighted according to employee productivity;
- Government taking a leadership role by increasing the number of people with disability employed in the Australian Public Service, reversing the decline in numbers that has occurred over the past 20 years; and
- Business recognising their obligation to hire people with disability to meet their skills and workforce needs.

Mission Australia's Position on Workforce Participation:

Improving employment services for people with disability

- Better supporting employers to design new jobs and tailor existing jobs to both suit business needs as well as a job seeker's capabilities;
- Providing full information to employers about employing a person with disability, including improving employer awareness of available Government supports; and
- Meeting the job preferences of job seekers with disability, focussing on competitive employment, providing integrated vocational and non-vocational supports, and doing so over a sustained period of time.

Increasing participation opportunities for job seekers with disability

- Ensuring income support recipients who have the capacity to work are equipped to participate in job search and education and training as a means to ensure they have the best opportunity to experience the social and economic benefits of employment;
- Government providing greater support for social enterprise and transitional labour markets to assist people with disability improve their work experience and job readiness skills, and transition into the mainstream labour market;
- Increasing the accuracy of work capacity assessments of people with disability to avoid persecuting those who are legitimately unable to work; and
- Addressing the stigma and discrimination that people with disability face as a means to increase participation opportunities.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) Australian Social Trends, March Quarter 2012. ABS: Canberra.

² For example, Wage Connect subsidies, the Supported Wage System, funding for workplace modifications through the Employment Assistance Fund and similar. Government could also consider providing an incentive for employers to report or retain workers who experience illness or disability as a means to stem the number of people who fall into unemployment at the onset of their disability