



SAFE, DIVERSE AND PRODUCTIVE

A WORKPLACE WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

The nature of the workforce in Australia is changing, and the key challenges we face are an ageing population and a skills shortage. Employing people with disability can be a positive experience for both employers and employees, yet there is unfounded concern about occupational health and safety (OHS) risks for business when employing people with disability. Research undertaken by the Australian Safety and Compensation Council¹ reveals the following facts about employing people with disability, highlighting the overall benefits for business.

There is no conclusive evidence to support the suggestion that workers with disability are more likely to be injured at work than other employees.

An Australian national study in 2002 found that employees with disability have lower number of OHS incidents and lower workers compensation costs.

Many people with disability have the qualifications and skills to match the skill demands of the workforce

- > People with disability are employed in a wide variety of jobs, including in trades and manufacturing.
- > 43% of unemployed people with disability have higher educational qualifications and the most common fields of qualifications are:
 - Management and commerce : 27%
 - Engineering and related technologies: 24%
 - Food and hospitality: 11%
- > These fields of study mainly lead to occupations experiencing slight or moderate growth.

Minimal cost → maximum benefit

- > If the workplace needs to be modified for people with disability, the cost required to make workplace accommodations is minimal, with employers reporting that the benefits of employing workers with disability outweigh any costs.
- > These workplace accommodations may range from adjustments to work methods or work-stations and offering flexible working hours, with less than 10% of people with disability requiring special equipment or extra support at work.
- > Research indicates that the productivity of people with disability is similar to that of employees with no disability.
- > Workers with disability have lower absenteeism and higher retention rates than employees without disability, which leads to reduced costs in terms of recruitment and training of new staff.
- > The inclusion of people with disability in the labour force leads to economic and social benefits for people with disability, employers and the community as a whole.

People with disability are a diverse group and a large percentage have a hidden disability

Over 2 million working age Australians (almost 1 in 6) have a disability.

Occupational health and safety laws and the Disability Discrimination Act can work together to increase the employability and retention of people with disability

- > Successful businesses and employers recognise the contributions made by a diverse workforce including their workers who have a disability. They provide a safe workplace for all their workers.
- > It is important that employers do not indirectly discriminate against a person with a disability on the grounds of health and safety. It will be the exception rather than the rule to exclude people with disability from particular jobs or tasks.
- > Employees with disability have the same rights and responsibilities as other employees under OHS laws.
- > Risk assessment should not focus unduly on a person's disability – it should look more broadly at the overall demands of the work and how best to manage associated risk for all employees.

What does this mean for employers?

- > Employers can address the skills shortage by employing capable, enthusiastic workers with relevant skills and qualifications.
- > By providing a safe working environment for all employees, employers can improve productivity, morale and save money.

The biggest change that needs to be made when considering the employment of people with a disability is a change in attitude!

Further information and assistance

A full copy of the Australian Safety and Compensation Council research report *Are people with disability at risk at work?* can be found at ascc.gov.au

There is free help available to businesses who employ people with disability. JobAccess supports employers through the employment process and will even pay for the cost of workplace adjustments and solutions.

Strengthen your business by employing people with disability, call the JobAccess Advisers on **1800 464 800** or visit jobaccess.gov.au for information.