

# Evaluating Disability Diversity & Inclusivity in Australian Workplaces

Australia's Disability Diversity and Inclusivity Index 2023





# Introduction

As part of APM's commitment to corporate social responsibility and data philanthropy, we share evidence-based research with our customers and communities to inform and develop programs and enhance service delivery.

Now in its fourth year, APM has published its Disability Diversity and Inclusivity Index of Australian Workplaces annually since 2019. The Index evaluates – and aims to inform and increase – disability diversity and inclusion within businesses of all sizes. Our business research shines a light on the immensely positive impact economic participation has on individuals and, by extension, their families and communities.





# 2023 Disability Diversity and Inclusivity Index of Australian Workplaces

In 2023, the Disability Diversity and Inclusivity Index returned a score of 58.2. This is only marginally higher than last year's score of 57.2 and remains in neutral territory.

However, the improvement is attributable to business perceptions rather than the perceptions of people with injury, illness or disability. In fact, scores on Index measures for people with disability trended down across all pillars.

The result comes despite the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) focus on an inclusive pandemic recovery aimed at addressing structural inequalities. Additionally, with unemployment rates dipping to 3.5% in September 2022, Australia is currently experiencing its tightest labour market since 1974.<sup>1</sup>

This year's Disability Diversity and Inclusivity Index score continues the slow upward trend from the inaugural score of 57.6 in 2020, which was interrupted by a slight dip during the height of the pandemic to 56.2 in 2021.

After widespread upheaval, the Australian labour market has rebounded dramatically. With unemployment now sitting at an historically low 3.5%,<sup>2</sup> many industries are struggling to fill vacancies.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, employers increasingly report that their organisations have formal policies in place to support diversity and inclusion. Despite this, and the intentions among most employers to recruit in the coming year, just 39% are very or extremely likely to fill vacancies through active recruitment of people with disability.

With misperceptions about this underutilised segment of the labour market still prevalent, people with disability remain disadvantaged compared to their peers when it comes to equity of employment.

This is compounded by the affordability of education, which makes it difficult for many people with disability to upskill and increase their attractiveness as candidates.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force, Australia, [April 2022](#), and [September 2022](#)

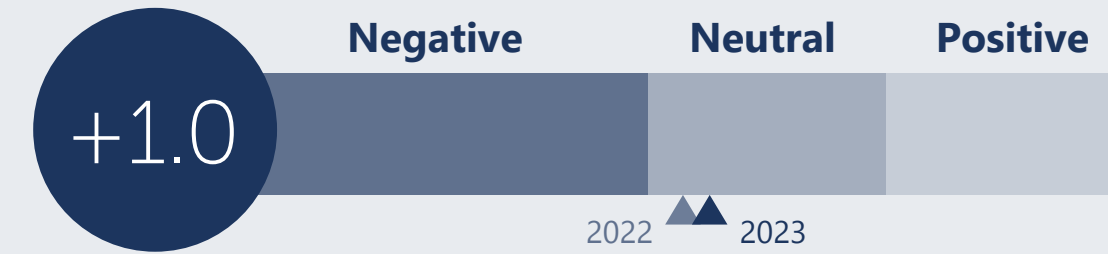
<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force, Australia, [September 2022](#), Australian

<sup>3</sup> For example: ABC Four Corners, [Breaking Point: The real cost of Australia's worker shortage](#).

**“With misperceptions about this underutilised segment of the labour market still prevalent, people with disability remain disadvantaged compared to their peers when it comes to equity of employment.”**

# 2023 Index Scorecard

## 58.2/100 (+1)



This score remains in the neutral range and indicates room for improvement.

**2.1 million**

Working age Australians are living with a disability

**90%**

Of Australians with disability have a non-visible disability<sup>4</sup>

**1.3 million**

Australians are underemployed as at October 2021<sup>5</sup>

### Culture 50 / 100

Awareness of disability is improving among Australian employers, along with the value of meaningful employment in the lives of people with disability.

Despite most employers actively striving to make their workplaces disability-friendly, many appear to still hold negative perceptions of people with disability.

- Recognition** 37.0 +2 percentage points
- Inclusion** 63.0 +0.8 percentage points

### Accessibility 60.2 / 100

Since last year, there has been little change in terms of people with disability's perceptions of workplace accessibility.

In contrast, education accessibility has continued the downward trend that began during the COVID 19 pandemic.

- Workplace** 59.3 +1.7 percentage points
- Inclusion** 61.1 -0.2 percentage points

### Career Equity 64.3 / 100

The number of Australian businesses with formal diversity and inclusion policies and targets continues to grow.

Although hourly wages earned by people with disability have improved since last year, the prevalence of fragile employment has not.

- Advancement** 67.1 -3.4 percentage points
- Formal Policies** 67.7 +6 percentage points
- Employment Quality** 58.0 +2.4 percentage points

<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force, Australia, September 2022.  
<sup>5</sup> ABS Labour Force Data, Table 22 (Seasonally adjusted, series ID A85255719L)



# Disability Diversity and Inclusivity Index

The Disability Diversity & Inclusivity Index has been designed to measure and track three broad areas, or pillars:

Culture	Accessibility	Career Equity
The level of recognition and understanding of diversity and inclusion among Australian businesses and how inclusive workplaces are currently.	How accessible, inclusive and equitable employment and education is for people with disability.	The equity and parity of employment and career progression opportunities for people with disability.

The Index's measures are based on self-reported attitudes/perceptions and actions/activities of businesses, along with the experiences and perceptions of Australians living with disability.

Each pillar is comprised of two or three components. Each component is based on measures captured either from businesses, people with disability or both, which contribute equally to the overall pillar score.

The pillars combine to form the overall Disability Diversity & Inclusivity Index. Each pillar is scored from 0-100 and is separated across business and individual responses. The higher the component score, the closer we are to full inclusion and equity for Australians with disability, and to genuinely diverse and inclusive workplaces as a norm.

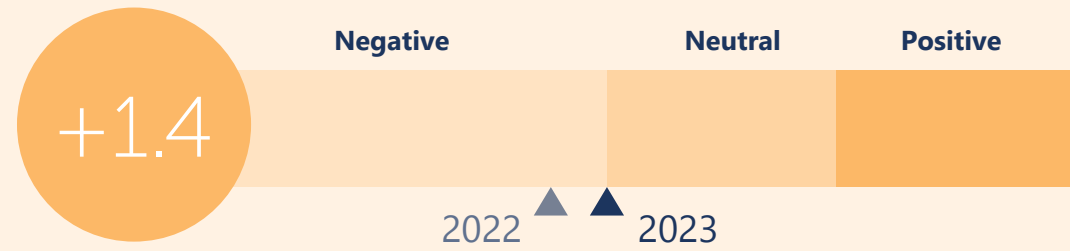
Today and in the future, the Index provides a view of how Australian workplaces are evolving in terms of attitudes and behaviours and becoming more inclusive of individuals with disability.





# Culture

50 / 100



37.0

## Recognition

+2 percentage points

63.0

## Inclusion

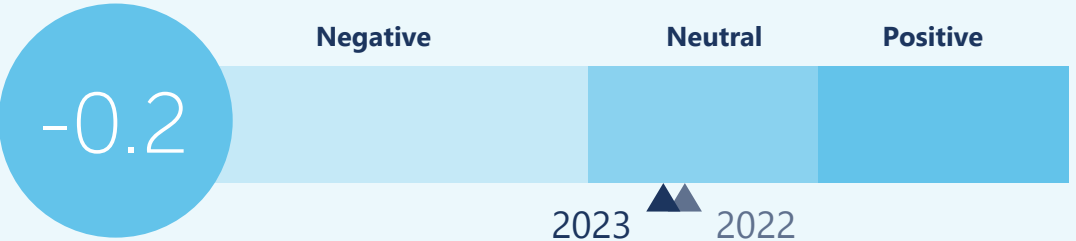
+0.8 percentage points

### Awareness of disability is improving among Australian employers, although many appear still to hold negative perceptions of people with disability.

1. Almost a quarter of employers (22%) are now aware that one in six Australians live with a disability, a notable increase over the 2020 benchmark of 14% and continuing the gradual upward trend.
2. The majority of employers who have recruited people with disability say they are actively working on their organisational culture to create disability-inclusive workplaces (74%). A similar proportion of people with disability agree their current workplace is inclusive (72%).
3. The experience of businesses who have employed people with disability remains positive, with two in three (66%) reporting organisational benefits. When asked to select the top three benefits, the key benefits cited included:
  - Greater diversity of thinking (47%, a marked increase on last year's 34%)
  - Positive impact on workplace culture (43%)
  - Greater diversity of skills (36%)
4. Employer openness to hiring people with disability remains high at 79%, consistent with last year (78%).
5. Two thirds of employers (66%) say they are actively working to build and retain disability-diverse workforces, and half (54%) actively encourage hiring people with disability. However:
  - Negative employer perceptions remain prevalent, experienced by 65% of people with disability and observed by 66% of employers, including perceptions it is easier to just employ someone without disability (39%).

# Accessibility

60.2 / 100



- 59.3
**Workplace**  
 +1.7 percentage points
- 61.1
**Inclusion**  
 -0.2 percentage points

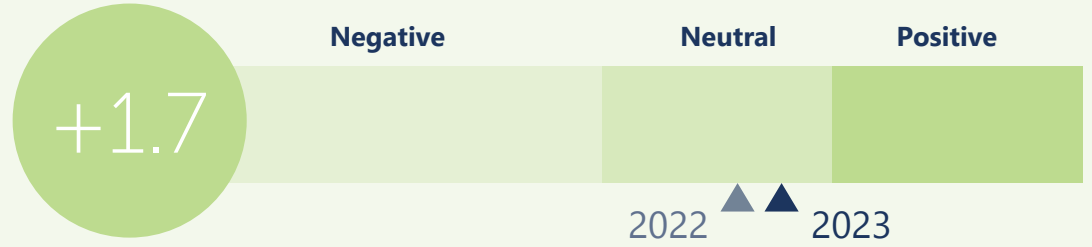
**There has been little change year on year, although education accessibility has continued a downward trend that began during the pandemic.**

1. Four in five (80%) Australian businesses now report having hired a person with disability, and/or having an employee return to work after injury, compared to 71% last year. SMEs remain less likely to have recruited a person with disability than large businesses (56% vs. 68%). Although this represents a 15 percentage point increase over last year for SMEs, compared to a 6-percentage point decrease for large businesses.
2. Most employers (70%) say their workplace is fully accessible to people with disability, injury or illness, up from 66% last year. While people with disability agree (68%), this is down from 80% last year.
3. Almost one in five (19%) inexperienced employers still feel that employing people with disability is a burden to business, consistent with last year; organisational capability (38%) and willingness (22%) remain barriers to recruitment.
4. Their health condition stopped 68% of people with disability from working or seeking employment, employer unwillingness to consider 'someone like them' has prevented almost a quarter (23%).
5. Despite COVID-19 seeing many education courses taken online, fewer people with disability who have participated in formal education and training agree it is inclusive and accommodating (44%, down from 52% last year). Similar numbers agree educators are willing to support people with disability (47%) or that educational opportunities are fairly and equitably accessible for them (45%). Both are also down on last year (52% and 50% respectively).
6. Those with living with a non-visible disability seem to hold more negative views of education, in particular, they are less likely to agree that people with injury, illness or disability can fairly and equitably access education (41%, compared to 69% of those with visible disability). Further to this, educators are happy to support students with disability, injury or illness (45% compared to 67% of those with visible disability).
7. Affordability (33%) is the most common barrier to undertaking further education among those who have not done so, jumping to 40% among those with non-visible disability.



# Career Equity

64.3 / 100



- 67.1
**Advancement**  
 -3.4 percentage points
- 67.7
**Formal Policies**  
 +6 percentage points
- 58.0
**Employment Quality**  
 +2.4 percentage points

**The number of Australian businesses that now have formal diversity and inclusion policies and targets continues to grow year on year.**

1. Formal policies for return to work after injury (72%) remain more common than formal diversity and inclusion policies (66%), although the latter has increased marginally since last year (63%).
2. More than two in five (45%) employers say they have workforce diversity targets, similar to last year, although organisations appear to be taking a more focused approach:
  - 56% have a generic overall target, down from 68%
  - 37% have disability diversity targets, up from 23%
  - 32% have cultural diversity targets, up from 23%
  - 29% have LGBTQIA+ targets, up from 20%
3. The employment fragility gap persists, with half of employed people with disability reporting they held a casual or seasonal position (53%). By contrast, just 12% of the general population held these roles.
4. One in five (20%) people with disability in employment say they are not earning enough and need more hours, increasing to 43% among those who are employed but job seeking.
5. In the last year, almost one in five (19%) employed people with disability actively searched for a new job. This is commonly prompted by a lack of job security (39%) whereas lack of security is less of a factor behind job seeking among employees in the general population (23%).
6. While there has been little improvement in the annual salary profile for people with disability in employment this year, hourly wages have increased overall with three in 10 (30%) now earning more than \$30 per hour (compared to 17% last year).



# Key findings

## 1. Most disability is non-visible

Three in five people with disability say their disability is not visible (60%), while a further quarter have both visible and non-visible disability (25%). In fact, 62% are living with multiple conditions. Those with non-visible disability are:

- 1.1 More likely to struggle finding flexible jobs (40% vs 27% of those with visible disability).
- 1.2 Less likely to agree that education is fully accessible (45% vs 64%).
- 1.3 More likely to struggle at work because they are hiding their disability (39% vs 22%) or not to be believed, or thought to be exaggerating the impact of their disability (32% vs 17%).
- 1.4 More likely to have encountered the perception that people with disability are unreliable from employers or prospective employers (23% vs 10%).
- 1.5 More likely to feel hopeless (28% vs 16%) or anxious (43% vs 20%) about work and having a job.

While more than four in five employers (82%) say they treat people with disability the same, regardless of whether their disability is visible:

- 1.6 51% think some people pretend they have a non-visible disability to get extra benefits.
- 1.7 5% would want proof of diagnosis before providing support to these individuals.
- 1.8 31% do not think non-visible disabilities are 'real' disabilities, rather illnesses or health conditions.





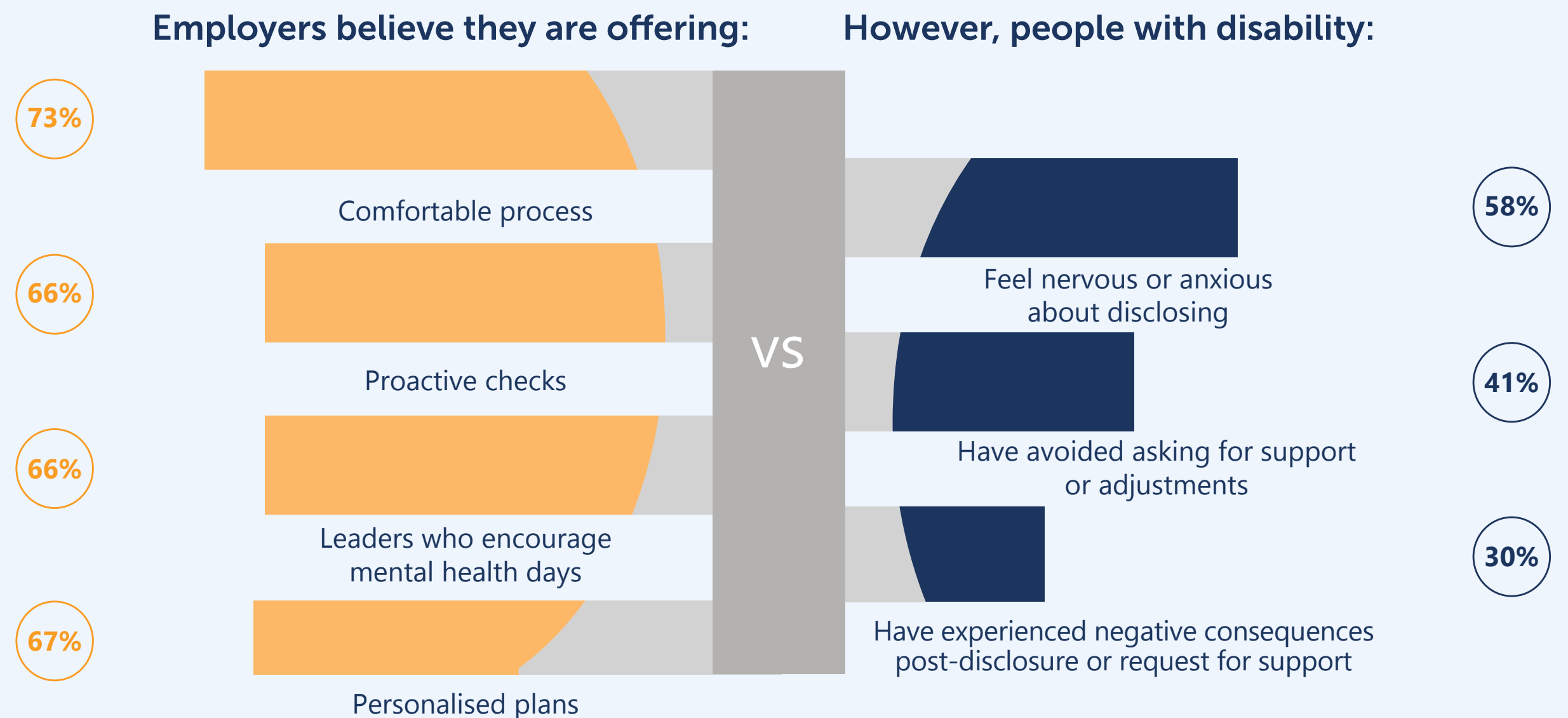
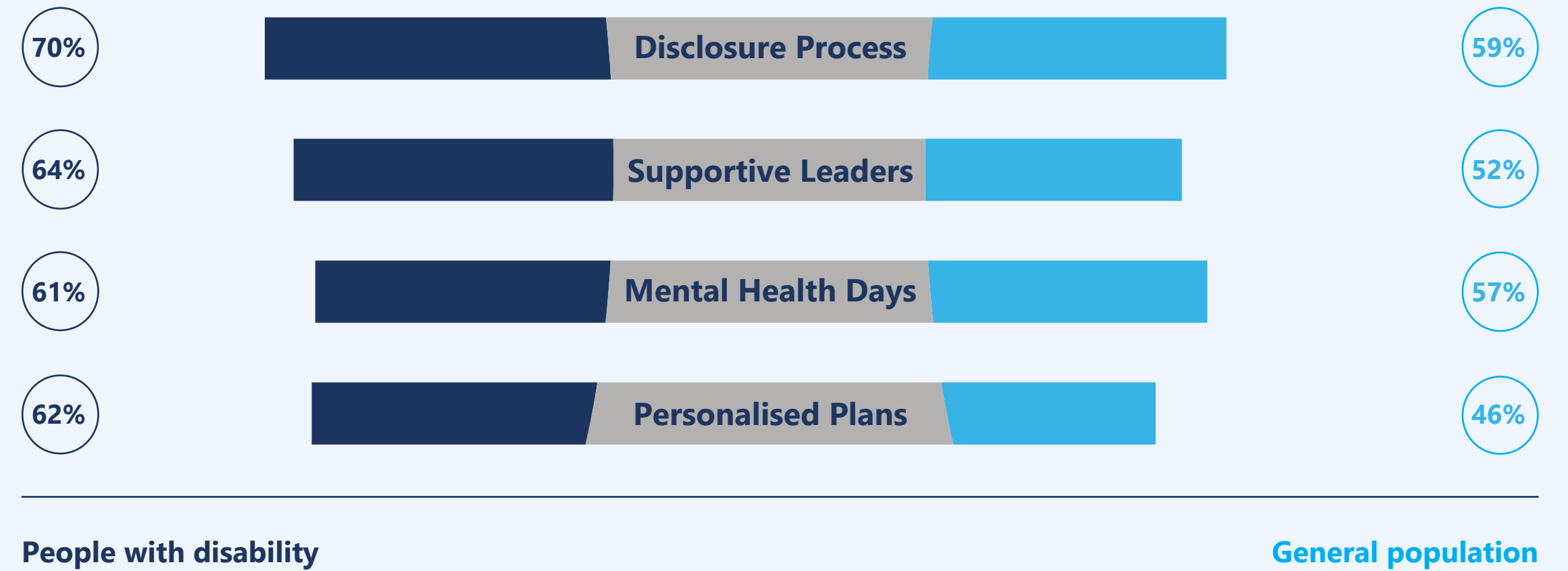
# Key findings

## 2. Inclusive workplace practices have widespread appeal

Inclusive workplace practices are important to all staff, not just people with disability. As such, investment in them is likely to deliver businesses a greater return than they may anticipate.

- 2.1 Seven in 10 (70%) people with disability say a process that makes them comfortable to disclose any disability, injury or illness is extremely important (of 59% general population).
- 2.2 Nearly two in three (64%) people with disability say leaders who proactively check if they need support to manage their disability is extremely important (vs 52% general population).
- 2.3 Approximately three in five (61%) people with disability say having a leader who encourages mental health days is extremely important (vs 57% general population).
- 2.4 A similar proportion (62%) say the option to develop a personalised plan so their manager better understands their needs at work is extremely important (vs 46% general population).
- 2.5 Despite most employers saying they offer the above (73% comfortable process, 66% proactive checks, 66% leaders who encourage mental health days and 67% 'personalised plans'), employees with disability often feel nervous or anxious about disclosing (58%).
- 2.6 Two in five have avoided asking for support or adjustments (41%) and almost a third have experienced negative consequences post-disclosure or request for support (30%).
- 2.7 Unhappiness with their boss/manager was one of the more common triggers of job-seeking among employed people with disability (31%). Even more were driven by unhappiness with workplace culture (37%). These were less common drivers among job seekers in the general population (24% and 31% respectively).

### What is important to employees in the workplace?





# Key findings

## 3. Awareness of disability among employers is increasing

Awareness of disability prevalence has almost doubled since the Index's inception, with 22% of employers now aware that 1 in 6 people live with disability (compared to just 14% in 2020).

Almost four in five businesses remain open to hiring people with disability (79% vs 78% last year).

- 3.1 Nearly three quarters of businesses say diversity is on their organisation's radar (72%), up from 67% last year.
- 3.2 More than half (54%) say their organisation actively encourages hiring people with injury, illness or disability, unchanged year on year (55%).
- 3.3 Two thirds of employers who have hired people with disability (66%) have experienced benefits from doing so, and 57% of those who have not would expect benefits, in particular.
  - 3.3.1 Greater diversity of thinking (56%), up from 36% last year.





# Key findings

## 4. Employers need support, but lack awareness of the options available

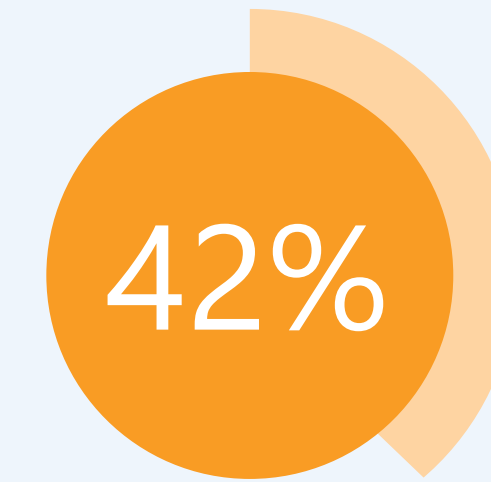
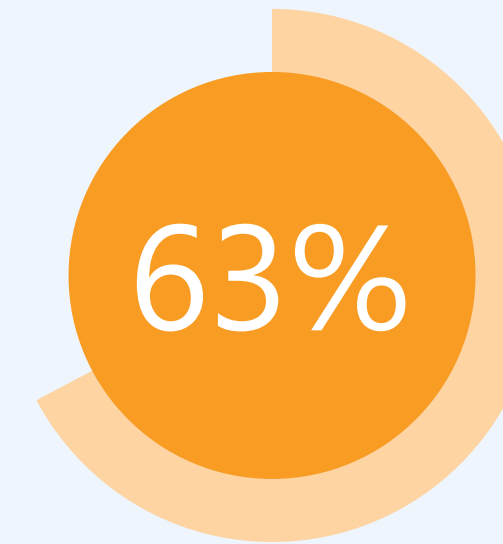
Cost of training and support (27%) and lack of easily accessible information (25%) are among the top barriers to employing people with disability among employers with no experience.

However, there is a lack of awareness of many of the supports available to them.

- 4.1 More than three in five (63%) are aware of at least one government-funded support available, compared to 81% of experienced employers.
- 4.2 Two in five (42%) are aware of Disability Employment Services (DES) providers and half (50%) say this would help them to recruit an employee with injury, illness or disability.
- 4.3 Three in ten (30%) are aware of wage subsidies.
- 4.4 Less than one in five (18%) are aware of ongoing placement support for six months.

### Employer awareness of support

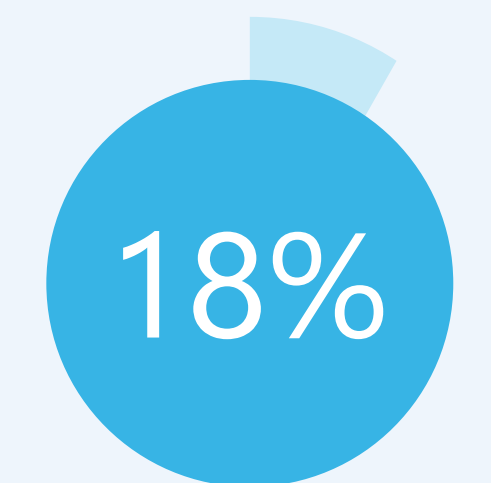
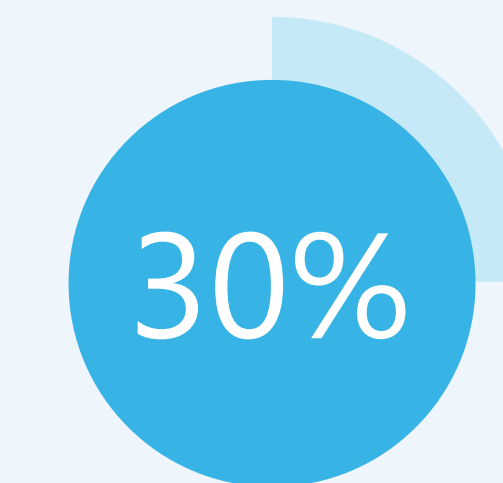
More than three in five are aware of at least one government-funded support available



Two in five are aware of Disability Employment Services providers and half say this would help them

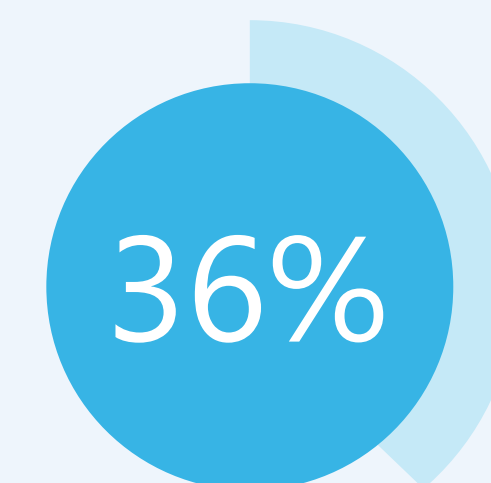
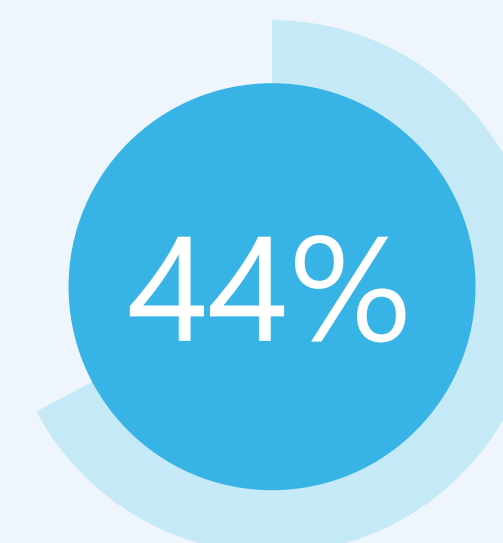
### Employers say additional support would help

Three in ten are aware of wage subsidies



Less than one in five are aware of ongoing placement support for six months

More than two in five say this would help



More than one-third say this would help



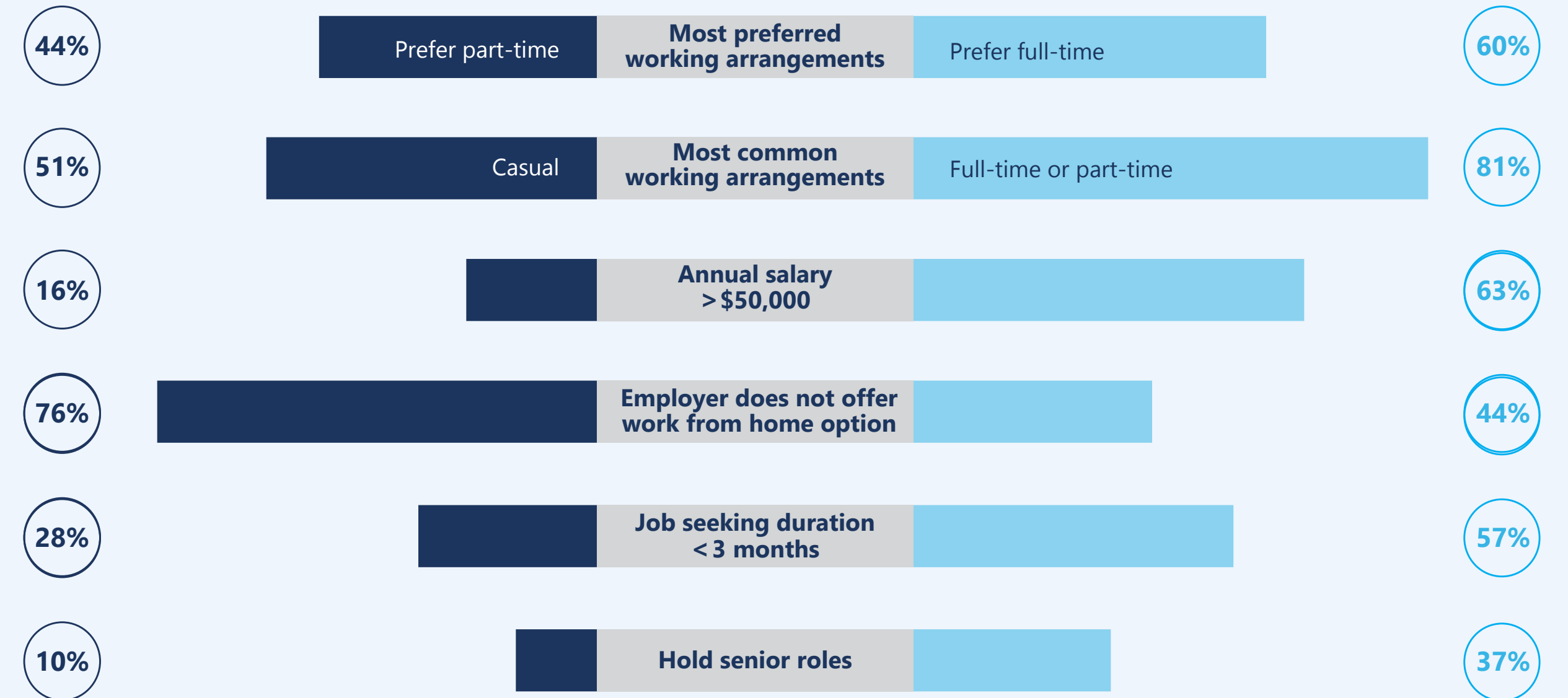
# Key findings

## 5. More accessible education could improve employment outcomes for people with disability

There is a clear employment fragility and pay gap between people with disability and their peers in the general population. One third of people with disability (33%) who have not accessed formal education say it is not affordable, compared to 23% of the general population. This raises questions about awareness of fee discounts for people with disability and whether Government funding is being directed towards the right courses or qualifications.

- 5.1 People with disability typically desire part-time employment (44%), in contrast to the general population who preference full-time (60%); yet more remain in casual (51%) roles than part-time (25%), whereas just 19%<sup>5</sup> of employed Australians are in casual employment.
- 5.2 Other workers are almost twice as likely to earn over \$30 per hour compared to people with disability (55% vs 30%) and nearly four times as likely to have an annual salary of more than \$50,000 (63% vs 16%).
- 5.3 People with disability are far more likely to be employed in organisations where the option to work from home is not offered (76% vs 44%).
- 5.4 Alongside the need for better security (41%), unhappiness with their hours/shifts or schedule are among the more common drivers of job seeking among employed people with disability (39%).
- 5.5 Success is hard to come by for job seekers with disability. Those who are successful are far less likely to find a role within three months (28%) than other job seekers (57%).
- 5.6 Workers with disability are less likely to be employed in senior roles, with just one in 10 in team leadership, management or executive positions (10%), compared to 37% of working age Australians.

### Employment fragility and pay gap for people with disability



People with disability

General population

<sup>5</sup>Australian Bureau of Statistics, Characteristics of Employment, Australia



# Inclusive language matters

Mental health conditions are prevalent among the general working population surveyed, self-reported by nearly one in five (21%).

Present stigma and the non-visible nature of mental health issues likely contributes to non-disclosure, something 52% of employers believe has occurred within their workforces.

As a result, Australian workers are struggling as they actively hide their mental health condition, unable to perform at their best without the support they need.

Employer-led approaches that encourage people to disclose mental health conditions and share their needs at work have the potential to deliver both culture and productivity gains.

However, these efforts may fall short if the language used focuses on broad disclosure of disability.

More inclusive language could reassure those who do not identify as having a disability to speak up about any workplace support or accommodations they may need.





# Simple changes for maximum impact

A growing number of Australian businesses have diversity and inclusion policies in place (+6 percentage points since 2020) and are open to recruiting people with disability (+11 percentage points).

However, our findings this year indicate that the positivity of employers and their efforts to create more disability-friendly workplaces is yet to reflect the experiences of people with disability.

For organisations with people with disability in their workforce, this gap between intent and outcome may be addressed through the inclusion of employees with disability in the design and implementation of strategy, policies and processes.

This approach leverages the diversity of thinking and lived experiences of those businesses are seeking to include and support.

For businesses seeking to take their first steps towards hiring people with disability, our research highlights some alternative approaches that could have a big impact:

## Part-time employment

Casual employment remains far more common among people with disability than other workers. Casual work meets the need for flexible hours many people have and accommodates those whose disability makes full-time work difficult.

However, it does not offer the job security or predictable working hours and, by extension, income that part-time work does. More people with disability prefer part-time (44%) to casual (27%) roles, and those in employment are most likely to seek other opportunities for reasons relating to job security (39%).

This suggests that identifying roles that can be offered as part-time instead of casual will help capture more applications from people with disability and retain them long term.

## Psychological safety

Despite growing implementation of formal policies, those with non-visible disability have often had negative experiences when disclosing or requesting accommodation or support. The outcome is many of those with non-visible disability hiding this at work (39%).

This suggests that formal policies alone are not enough to make people feel genuinely safe to disclose and work with employers to establish suitable working arrangements. Rather, they need to be matched with proactive employer led engagement, communication and championing of flexible, diverse ways of working as a positive for businesses, rather than a necessary accommodation.

## Inclusive recruitment practices

Some of the common barriers stopping job seekers seeking work from being successful in their job hunt could potentially be addressed through recruitment practices that make people with disability feel comfortable to apply.

For example, three in 10 job seekers who actively searched for a job in the last 12 months and are yet to find one, say they lack the qualifications (29%) or work experience required (30%).

Rigid job ads that specify mandatory qualifications or experience may be off putting for people with disability, even if they have the skills or attitude to perform the role. To avoid creating unintentional barriers to applications from these candidates, it's worth considering where flexibility can be provided with regards to desirable versus essential elements of the role.



# Employers that meet the needs of people with disability in the workforce will address the needs of most workers

People with disability typically need and seek the same accommodations and flexibility as other workers.

When they find the right employer, their attitude is positive and there is a keen desire to stay; they are also loyal employees.

Excluding income, the three most important things in a job for people with disability are: doing something they enjoy (57%), flexibility (hours, location, etc) (49%) and feeling safe and welcome (47%).

These are no different from what other workers in the general population consider most important to them (52%, 51% and 43% respectively).

The employment needs of people with disability are also similar. They say they need flexibility in their hours, start and finish times (54%), compared to 41% of other workers and a quarter (23%) say they need an option to work from home, on par with others (25%).

However, just 10% of working people with disability say their organisation offers the option to work from home to all staff, and three quarters (76%) say their organisation does not offer it at all.

This likely reflects the fact that many people with disability are employed in roles or industries where work from home is not possible.





# Methodology

The APM Disability Diversity and Inclusivity Index of Australian Workplaces (DDI Index) is the largest holistic research project of its kind in Australia.

APM commissioned independent market research consultancy, CoreData to create an annual benchmark of equity and inclusion in Australian workplaces. A key focus of this project, now in its fourth year, was the creation of an index and benchmark of inclusion and equity for jobseekers and employees with disability.

The term “people with disability” refers to individuals who have an injury, illness or disability, whether this is a temporary or permanent state. For this research, we also include job seekers, employees, and those returning to work after injury. A range of factors have been considered and measured in this research, including barriers, enablers and outcomes.

We have also captured perspectives and impact from both Australian businesses and people with disability. The findings presented in this report are the result of both secondary research (exploration and analysis of existing, publicly available data), and primary research (quantitative).

Quantitative insights were captured via online surveys with 509 Australian businesses, including small, medium, large and national employers, 1,502 job seekers with disability and 1,023 working age Australians.

Quantitative fieldwork was conducted from September to October 2022.





# Where to from here?

## APM is here to help

### **Build a diverse and inclusive team**

Through our network of 500 locations, we provide work-ready candidates to local and national businesses. For more information contact APM Employment Services 1300 366 047 or email [employers@apm.net.au](mailto:employers@apm.net.au)

### **Find the staff you need quickly**

Grow inclusion with Employable Me, a free and easy to use platform giving you access to a wide pool of candidates who can be matched to your business.

Learn more at [employableme.com](http://employableme.com)

### **Look after your workforce**

The APM vocational rehabilitation businesses understand how an injury, illness or disability can result in a dramatic change for an employee and their co-workers.

For more information, contact APM WorkCare 1300 967 522 or email [workcare.customers@apm.net.au](mailto:workcare.customers@apm.net.au)

### **Promote inclusion in your community**

APM Communities helps people with disability, their carers and family access the support they need to enjoy a more independent life, including access to National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) services.

Learn more about APM Communities at [apm.net.au/ndis](http://apm.net.au/ndis) or call 1300 276 522



# We are APM

We are more than 13,000 people in 11 countries with a global purpose-to enable better lives. Our purpose drives us. It's why we come to work. It's why we continue to grow.

It's how we inspire excellence and exceptional service with everyone we meet.

We started in 1994 as a small team in Perth, Western Australia, looking to provide better vocational rehabilitation for injured workers so they could recover their health and stay in their jobs. Today we're an international human services provider with more than 1,000 locations across Australia, United Kingdom, Canada, United States of America, New Zealand, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Sweden, Singapore, and South Korea.

For people with injury, illness, or disability, as well as children and the elderly, the unemployed, and those facing hardship or harm, our teams make a positive and lasting social impact every day. We take immense pride in empowering people to realise their ambitions and aspirations through sustainable employment, independence, better health, and wellbeing, and increased social participation.

Each year globally, APM now supports more than 2 million people of all ages to live a better quality of life.



APM acknowledges Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people as the original custodians of this country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

APM is building an inclusive workplace to help realise the potential of our employees, embrace difference and apply our diverse thinking to innovation and service delivery.

APM is dedicated to the consideration, support and inclusion of people with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTQIA people and people from culturally diverse backgrounds in all aspects of our organisation.

[apm.net.au](https://www.apm.net.au)