

# Building Employer Demand

## Literature Review

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Kantar Public job reference: 263104492

February 2017



Market &  
Social  
Research  
ISO 20252

SAI GLOBAL

A/S 20252:2012  
Certificate No.:  
MSR20016



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# 1. Executive summary, conclusions and implications

The Department of Social Services (DSS) commissioned Kantar Public to conduct a comprehensive review of the literature on the topic of employment participation amongst people with disability, focusing on identifying the key drivers and barriers to employment and the role of employers to this end. This work will help to inform the development of an evidence-based communications campaign targeting employers across Australia.

The review sought to address the following research questions:

- What is the existing knowledge and awareness of employing people with disability amongst employers?
- What beliefs, barriers and attitudes influence the decision of employers to employ a person with disability and what are the key drivers and barriers to doing so?
- What are the barriers employers face regarding employing people with disability?
- Are there different barriers and attitudes held by different employer cohorts (size, sector etc.)?
- What is the specific information and support needed by employers to help them employ a person with disability?
- How do people with disability experience seeking for and gaining employment, and what do they see as the key drivers and barriers to doing so?
- What is the range of communications approaches shown to be effective in encouraging employers to engage people with disability?
- What are the areas of commonality shared by successful approaches?
- Where are the gaps in the literature relating to these issues?

The review focusses on relevant and available national, international and local academic and grey literature pertaining to barriers and drivers of disability employment. It draws on literature provided by DSS, as well as sources obtained from online searches and interviews with key informants.

This section provides a summary of key findings, together with conclusions and implications for strategy development.

## 1.1 Summary of findings

### 1.1.1 The role of prejudice

Prejudice and negative stereotypes around people with disability are identified as significant barriers to the employment of people with disability. The literature suggests that prejudice reflects unconscious biases resulting from a lack of familiarity with people with disability. Limited knowledge and understanding around disability has been found to perpetuate negative assumptions about, and attitudes towards, people with disability, reinforcing a perception that they are not as capable in the workforce.

Many examples of employer prejudices that impede the opportunity of people with disability to find work are cited in the literature. Manifesting in a variety of misconceptions, these prejudices underpin many of the perceived costs associated with the employment of people with disability.

### 1.1.2 The cost-benefit equation

The literature indicates that the inclination of employers to hire people with disability is often correlated with their perceptions of the relative costs and benefits of doing so. While some employers recognise the benefits of employing people with disability, many adhere to negative stereotypes that drive uncertainty around their suitability as employees.

Overwhelmingly, the literature indicates that employing people with disability is more likely to be viewed by employers as morally and socially desirable rather than business savvy. Perceived benefits reported in the literature focus on workplace diversity, inclusivity and social responsibility. Recognition of the economic benefits of employing people with disability is more limited amongst those who have not employed a person with disability previously, though some employers identify advantages in filling skills shortages and having access to a larger and more diverse talent pool.

For the majority of employers, however, the research suggests that, from a business perspective, the costs of employing people with disability outweigh any potential benefits. A summary of the beliefs that drive this assessment appears below:

- **“People with disability are less productive”**: Prejudice around the productivity and capability of people with disability is often centred on the belief that they are less competent professionally than people without disability. This belief drives concern about the potential cost of employing a person with disability, in terms of time and productivity. There is a perception that a person with disability will need more training, require more supervision, and perform tasks at a slower rate, ultimately weakening the business’ profitability.
- **“People with disability are more likely to be absent from work”**: Employers have also been found to adhere to the misconception that people with disability are more likely to be absent from the workplace. People with disability also identify perceptions around absenteeism as a barrier to employment, believing that employers often conflate disability and ill-health and therefore presume that people with disability will take a considerable amount of time off.
- **“There are many risks associated with employing people with disability”**: A primary aspect of prejudice associated with employing people with disability is the notion that they represent a greater risk for employers. In particular, there is a high degree of concern about risks associated with workplace health and safety, reflecting a perception that an employee with disability could be ‘unpredictable’, or that they could compromise the safety of co-workers, customers or themselves. There is also fear of litigation brought on by employees with disability, particularly in relation to alleged discrimination or workplace safety matters.
- **“People with disability require special treatment in the workplace”**: Employers further assume that people with disability have greater needs and require greater support in the workplace in the form of special treatment and accommodations in order to perform the role. This is seen to correlate with a negative impact on costs and resources.
- **“Employees with disability will create tension amongst staff”**: Employer concern is also reported around the perceived impact that an employee with disability may have on their co-workers. This is in part attributed to the belief that co-workers need to work harder to compensate for the perceived lower productivity of employees with disability. It also extends,

however, to a belief that people with disability may have trouble relating to others, creating workplace tension.

- **“Employees with disability will not represent the business well”**: Employers have also shown concern that people with disability will not represent their business well to clients, particularly in relation to communication and relationship skills, looks and presentation, with negative impacts on businesses performance and image. Conversely, positive reactions from clients can act as a motivator for employment.

Importantly, the literature indicates that the majority of these beliefs are unfounded, with evidence to suggest that:

- Employees with disability may be just as, or more productive as people with disability, and contribute to the profitability of the business.
- Employees with a disability have reduced rates of absenteeism.
- Employees with disability are less likely to be represented in workplace health and safety incidents.
- Employees with disability may have lower turnover rates and show greater loyalty to the business.
- Employees with disability may require similar levels of supervision as other staff.
- Employees with disability have often been reported to have a positive impact on other staff.
- Employees with disability represent the business well, and promote a positive public image.
- Workplace adjustment may actually be considerably less expensive than employers may anticipate.
- Employing people with disability may contribute to positive economic impacts for businesses, including through costs savings and increased earnings potential.
- People with disability represent a broad pool of talent and can help to meet skills shortages across a wide-range of industries and occupations.

### 1.1.3 Confusion, concern and complexity as a barrier to hiring

Even when employers do not hold (or do not believe they hold) prejudicial beliefs or unconscious bias about employing people with disability, they may lack the knowledge and the confidence to do so. The literature identifies low self-efficacy as a primary barrier to employing people with disability, reflecting employer uncertainty about both process and outcome. This appears to arise from a lack of familiarity of disability in the workplace and reluctance to ask questions for fear of seeming discriminatory or intrusive.

Several specific issues appear to be a source of confusion and concern for many employers. These include:

- **Facilitating workplace adjustment** – The perception that making workplace adjustments is difficult and costly.
- **Negotiating workplace law** – Legislation and policies surrounding the employment of people with disability are considered complex, and subject to frequent changes and reforms. This perception often compounds fear of litigation.

- **Employee management** – There are low levels of self-efficacy around the management of employees with disability and a pervasive concern about doing the wrong thing.
- **Questions about employee suitability** – Concern around not finding a candidate with suitable skills and experience may also act as a deterrent.

#### 1.1.4 Workplace barriers

The literature also highlights the role of corporate culture and organisational structure in facilitating or impeding the employment of people with disability. Contributing factors include:

- **Leadership and organisational support** – Limited organisational interest or support across the business can hinder opportunities to recruit and retain employees with disability. Business leaders, human resources managers and line managers may input into the decision to hire a person with disability, with any discord in their interest in or commitment to the issue presenting a major obstacle. While the support of all parties is important, commitment from organisational leaders is widely thought to be essential for businesses to proceed.
- **Organisational support** is not only important in encouraging the employment of people with disability, but is also key in **minimising misconceptions about employees with disability amongst staff**, and implementing positive employment practices within the workplace. Human resource managers can act as successful influencers in developing and supporting an inclusive workplace culture, though gaps in the literature around the role of HR in this capacity are noted.
- **Policy** – While corporate social responsibility and workplace diversity policies and plans may help to facilitate an inclusive business culture, they may also create competing priorities.
- **Accessibility** – The design of jobs and workplaces is commonly identified as a key barrier across all facets of employment – negatively impacting recruitment and retention. Issues pertaining to accessible and assistive technology and workplace adjustments are consistently ranked as one of the most important and/or prevalent barriers to employment. Reflecting employers' difficulty in interpreting relevant laws, confusion around what constitutes 'reasonable adjustment' under the Disability Discrimination Act is also evident.

#### 1.1.5 The role of government support

The research highlights a lack of awareness of government incentives and wage subsidies amongst employers, including JobAccess, the Employment Assistance Fund and Disability Employment Services (DES). For those employers aware of the existence of wage subsidies, perceptions of these are largely positive, though the extent to which they drive the decision to employ a person with disability is uncertain. While some of the literature indicates that financial incentives can underpin an employer's decision to hire a person with disability, this is generally not the sole factor for employment, with job fit still key.

### 1.1.6 Employer differences

The literature draws attention to differences in the concerns and priorities of employers in different sized businesses. For instance:

- The costs and risks associated with employing people with disability appear to be heightened for **smaller businesses**. They focus on the perceived productivity, supervision needs and workplace requirements of people with disability, increased workplace health and safety risks, and the potential for litigation. The financial costs involved in workplace adjustment are also identified as a key challenge for small businesses.
- These issues do not appear to be as concerning for **larger sized businesses**, who appear more likely to appreciate a wide range of benefits offered by employing people with disability, in both social and economic terms. Instead, concerns for this employer cohort appear to relate more strongly to staff reactions to working with people with disability, and the workplace tensions this may create.
- The literature suggests that awareness of information and assistance available to businesses in engaging employees with disability is high among larger organisations, and low in most small-to-medium-sized enterprises.

Fewer studies have examined industrial differences in employer attitudes to this issue. Those that have suggest that service industries (particularly hospitality and tourism) may be most attune to the advantages of employing people with disability, and most supportive in their outlook. Employers in goods-producing sectors (such as manufacturing, logistics and warehousing), particularly those that are physically demanding, are more likely to question the suitability of the work for people with disability.

**Figure 1: Summary of barriers to employing people with disability for smaller and larger employers**

	Smaller Business	Larger business
Prejudice	Greater concern over productivity and suitability	Less likely to hold prejudicial beliefs, however heightened concern of prejudice among other staff
Efficacy	Greater degree of confusion around process and outcome	More informed, but questions around efficacy still evident
Workplace barriers	Largely not relevant given they are sole/primary decision makers	Primary concern reflects need for senior leaders, middle management and HR to endorse and drive, and staff to support

Figure 1 compares the concerns of small businesses versus large businesses in employing people with disability. In terms of prejudice, smaller businesses have greater concern over productivity and suitability, while larger businesses have a heightened concern of prejudice among other staff. In terms of efficacy, smaller businesses have more confusion around process and outcomes, while larger businesses are more informed but still have questions. The last comparison, workplace barriers, notes that these are largely not relevant in smaller businesses but larger businesses show a need for senior leaders, middle management and HR to drive employment of people with disability.

### 1.1.7 Communications preferences

The literature indicates that communications have an important role to play in increasing employer demand for people with disability. Empirically, much of the research examining the impact of communications in this area focuses on people with mental illness. Nonetheless, there is sufficient commonality across the drivers and barriers to employment for all people with disability to suggest that communications may be effective in:

- Educating employers and increasing awareness and knowledge of people with disability and their capabilities within the workplace;
- Promoting the benefits of employing people with disability – providing evidence regarding work ethic, commitment and productivity and the positive impact of diversity on workplace and organisational culture;
- Demonstrating effective job-matching and positive outcomes for both employers and employees;
- Challenging employer prejudice; and,
- Instructing employers about how to create an inclusive workplace, management approaches and where to access support services.

While mass media campaigns are endorsed for challenging prejudice and stigma on a broad community scale, the research demonstrates the benefits of more targeted delivery approaches, such as workplace specific campaigns, which allow for more context specific messaging. As part of workplace targeted intervention, the literature also points to the benefits of providing opportunities for either direct or indirect contact between employers and people with disability.

The framing of messages in communications has been found to play an essential role both in driving audience involvement and engagement, and contributing to the credibility, relevance and impact of messages. For instance:

- The research highlights the importance of using a positive approach that focuses on ability rather than disability and avoids pity, normalises images of disability, depicts positive interactions and features ‘true to life’ personal stories. In order to ensure that communications are delivered in accordance with the principles advocated for by the disability sector, people first language should always be used and people with disability should be consulted and preferably featured in communication.
- In targeting employers, information should be factual and ‘down to earth’, and framed in response to their concerns, while offering practical information and drawing attention to support services. Employers are particularly receptive to testimonials from other (like) employers, recognising fears and challenges, but demonstrating that they are ‘fixable’, and that outcomes are positive. Demonstrating a ‘match’ between employers and employees may help to illustrate mutually positive working arrangements. The literature also points to the importance of using plain English and avoiding ‘politically correct’ language wherever possible when targeting small and medium sized businesses.
- Due to the paucity of evaluative research on communications approaches and strategies aiming to mobilise employers on this issue, more detailed insights on ‘proven’ approaches to this end are unavailable.

### 1.1.8 Employer support

The literature draws attention to the effectiveness of a range of other initiatives in engaging employers, both in allaying concerns around employing people with disability and building confidence to do so. They include:

- Access to trusted knowledge brokers or intermediaries (particularly field staff from group training organisations and disability employment network providers (now referred to as DES providers));
- Training, particularly informal 'learning' through supportive peer relationships and knowledgeable third parties;
- Employer networks and contacts to enable knowledge- sharing and mentoring;
- Initiatives (government or community) that facilitate 'contact' with people with disability (such as positive exposure).

### 1.1.9 Gaps in the literature

The review highlights a range of 'gaps' in the literature: topics about which little recent research appears to have been undertaken or is publicly available. These include:

- Empirical data to determine the impact of employer targeted strategies (including communications) on employment rates for people with disability;
- The relative weight of, and interplay between, individual prejudicial beliefs for different cohorts of employers, and the way this impacts employment decisions;
- Differences in employer perspectives reflecting industry and location;
- Specific barriers for 'middle' sized businesses;
- Differences in employer perspectives relating to employees with disability from culturally and linguistically diverse and Indigenous backgrounds;
- The decision making process in larger organisations, and the respective roles of HR/ leadership and line managers in driving and facilitating this;
- Drivers and barriers relating to retention, dispute resolution and advancement in the workplace for people with disability;
- 'Proven' or preferred delivery and format options for employer targeted communications, training or educational resources;
- Employer perspectives on the role of government in delivering initiatives in this area.

## 1.2 Conclusions

The review offers a useful perspective on the drivers and barriers to employing people with disability. While gaps in the available literature are noted, the review provides considerable insight into the knowledge, perceptions and attitudes of employers around disability, and how these shape and influence their openness to consider employing a person with disability. Some of the key themes to emerge through the review are as follows:

- In line with the social model of disability, many of the obstacles that people with disability face in relation to employment stem from the barrier of prejudice, which underpins negative attitudes

and misconceptions. The literature suggests that prejudice around disability exists on a broad community scale. Employment related discrimination is just one manifestation of this.

- Increasing understanding, awareness and familiarity has been shown to counter prejudicial attitudes. Providing opportunities for employers to work with people with disability (via avenues such as internships, work experience or volunteering opportunities) may help to counter negative perceptions of their productivity and competency and exaggerated fears over litigation risks and the costs of workplace modifications.
- Recognition of the social and economic benefits of hiring people with disability for their business appears to motivate employers to hire people with disability. Nonetheless, Australian employers appear to be largely unconvinced of the economic benefits of employing people with disability. This is particularly evident amongst small business.
- Considerable confusion exists around the process of implementing workplace modifications, and legislation relevant to hiring and retaining an employee with disability. Associated with this, employers show low self-efficacy around managing people with disability. The literature suggests that increasing awareness of and access to knowledge brokers (e.g. field staff from group training organisations, disability employment network providers (now referred to as DES providers) and VET liaison staff), training, business networks (e.g. the National Disability Recruitment Coordinator and Australian Network on Disability), and easily accessible informational resources may help to increase self-efficacy amongst employers, boosting their 'disability confidence'.
- Accessibility in the workplace remains a key barrier to hiring people with disability due to its perceived difficulty and cost. Instead of 'singling out' people with disability for special treatment, people with disability recommend embedding practices that make a workplace more universally inclusive.
- Government-funded financial assistance schemes are seen as broadly positive drivers for businesses, and may be pertinent to small businesses, who express greater concern over the perceived costs of workplace modifications. The literature highlights a lack of awareness of disability employment support services (e.g. DES and JobAccess) and financial incentives (e.g. the DSP, the WSS).
- Business culture and internal leadership have a strong influence on the hiring and retention of people with disability. Commitment from business leaders appears to be essential for supporting employees with disability and their managers and co-workers; and creating inclusive workplace environments and working arrangements.
- The barriers and drivers to employing people with disability appear to vary considerably for smaller and larger employers. Overall, larger employers appear more likely to recognise benefits associated with employing people with disability, and seem less concerned about risks and costs than smaller employers.
- Communications may play a role in motivating employers to consider hiring people with disability. An outline of potential communications approaches is provided overleaf.

### **1.3 Implications for communications**

This section details the implications of the literature review for the communications strategy. The strategy directions put forward in this report have been formulated on the basis of review findings. They are intended as a starting point for communications on this issue, noting that there are gaps in the existing research that preclude the development of a full campaign strategy at this stage.

### 1.3.1 Setting objectives

The barriers to employing people with disability are complex, and reflect deep seated prejudice, low self-efficacy and business culture. This highlights the challenges involved in communicating on this issue. It is therefore important to be realistic about what communications can achieve, and identify communications objectives accordingly.

- For instance, the deeply engrained **prejudices** observed amongst employers are a significant barrier. Addressing these would ultimately require an extensive and prolonged social marketing approach, which may be outside the scale of intervention that can be undertaken at this stage.
- Conversely, misconceptions and limited self-efficacy around employing people with disability is also a significant barrier, and one that may be more effectively targeted through a smaller scale campaign aiming to build employers' awareness of their own **biases**, boost their **confidence to act**, and equip them with the **skills** to do so.
- Communications aiming to support businesses in **facilitating** the employment of people with disability may also be achievable through workplace based activities.

### 1.3.2 Targeting

- The business community is not homogenous and the strength and balance of drivers and barriers vary according to individual attitudes, as well as business size and industry. Given the likely scope of communications, it would seem to be more useful to target employers who show at least some openness to considering hiring a person with disability. We know from social marketing theory that those with a more positive attitudinal predisposition are more receptive to communications – potentially motivating them to act. Those who reject the idea outright are unlikely to be swayed by any communication on this issue, calling into question the benefit in targeting this group.
- Targeting must also accommodate the differences in the outlooks and concerns of businesses of different size and industry. Although gaps in the literature on this issue preclude a detailed assessment of these, it is clear that any campaign would need to accommodate these differences, tailoring messaging, tone and delivery accordingly. This points to a need to 'match up' attitude with business size and industry to allow attitudinally defined target segments to be profiled by business characteristics (as well as by media preferences). While the literature suggests that employers with more open attitudes may be more likely to be larger in size, the review did not identify an existing statistical segmentation of employers on this issue: another significant gap.
- An additional consideration for effective targeting is the role played by different personnel in making the decision to employ a person with disability. While in small organisations a single person (the business owner) is likely to take sole responsibility for this, the literature highlights a more complex decision making process in larger (and we would include medium sized) organisations, which, in itself would appear to be a primary barrier to employing people with disability. Ultimately, in many cases, there may be a need for support and endorsement from leadership, middle management and human resources managers for businesses to proceed. Again, however, without knowing the extent to which larger and medium sized organisations are represented within the 'open' attitudinal segment, it is difficult to draw conclusions about how this should be addressed at this stage.

All of this points to the need to develop a segmentation model for the employer population. Designing a research program to inform an effective communications or intervention strategy on any behavioural change topic is a complex task, particularly when there is likely to be such

divergence in the attitudes and behaviours of the target audience. A segmentation model can help to deconstruct the business community in these terms, enabling 'diagnosis' of the optimal modes of intervention for each group, set realistic objectives, and identify those groups more likely to be 'activated' by communications.

### 1.3.3 Strategy direction

Following an analysis of existing evidence through the lens of social marketing theory, the Department may wish to consider two broad campaign approaches. They are purposefully different in scale, in consideration of potential budgetary and timing constraints. It should be noted that these are preliminary ideas based on the available research, and would need to be refined considerably following the conduct of primary research in relevant areas, should this be undertaken.

In summary:

- **Option 1** prioritises employers who hold prejudicial beliefs and attitudes which act as primary barriers to considering hiring a person with disability. These attitudes are entrenched and likely to be difficult to change in the short-term, suggesting that such a campaign would require a mass media approach, with a long term, sustained focus.
- **Option 2** targets employers who are already positively/ neutrally predisposed to employing people with disability, using communications targeting workplaces, focussing on raising awareness of unconscious biases, and building self-efficacy to act. The literature suggests that these businesses may be larger in size – which in the Australian business context would translate to 'large' and 'medium' sized businesses – however some smaller businesses may also be 'open'. We believe that this approach is likely to elicit the greatest return on investment for DSS at this stage.

A preliminary analysis of the potential focus for each approach serves as a useful starting point for formulating ideas, and helping to direct any subsequent primary research.

A more detailed overview of the key considerations for each approach appears overleaf:

**Table 1: Option 1 – Challenging prejudice on a broad scale**

## **Option 1 – Challenging prejudice on a broad scale**

### ***Objectives and focus***

Given low participation rates, and the pervasiveness of prejudice amongst employers, it can be hypothesised that the majority of employers have negative attitudes, and little interest in engaging people with disability. While some granularity no doubt exists in the beliefs and attitudes of those showing unwillingness to employ people with disability (which qualitative research could effectively unpack), it can be assumed that it is **prejudice** – in some form - that lies at the heart of their disinclination. More specifically, this may manifest in beliefs that:

- “People with disability are less productive”
- “People with disability are more likely to be absent from work”
- “There are many risks associated with employing people with disability”
- “People with disability require special treatment in the workplace”
- “Employees with disability will create tension amongst staff”
- “Employees with disability will not represent the business well”

Another related aspect of employers’ unwillingness to see people with disability as a viable option concerns the perception that there are **few economic benefits** to employing people with disability. This reflects the prejudicial beliefs around their productivity and suitability in a work environment, as cited above, and the assumption that making the required workplace adjustments will be costly. While there is some recognition of social benefits, these appear to be insufficient to outweigh the perceived costs.

Given how engrained prejudice and stigma on this issue appear to be, successfully changing the attitudes or behaviours of this cohort of employers through communications is likely to be considerably difficult, particularly in the short-term. A campaign aiming to target this employer group would need to focus on:

- As a first step, **challenging prejudicial attitudes, ‘reframing’ their concept of disability away from a medicalised view focussing on incapacity and risk to a social/ economic view focussing on ability and gain (mass media);**
- As a second (and related) step, **building a ‘business case’ for employing people with disability; by demonstrating economic benefit and correcting misconceptions about financial cost (workplace targeted communications).**

### ***Delivery***

The review draws attention to the benefits of mass media for targeting prejudice on a wide scale. Given the pervasiveness of stigma around this issue, a sustained **mass media** campaign may be required in the first instance to **re-position disability and target employer prejudice.**

Following on from this, **workplace targeted communications and resources** could effectively focus on increasing awareness of the business benefits of employing people with disability and building understanding of how this can be achieved. It is suggested that this follow the mass media element to leverage audience engagement and receptivity to messages on the issue at this point in time.

## Option 1 – Challenging prejudice on a broad scale

### *Framing*

The review highlights the considerable influence of cognitive biases in perpetuating stereotyped views of people with disability. Amongst this cohort of employers, the decision not to employ someone with disability is not purely rational – they are unlikely therefore to respond to purely rational messaging in the communications.

Rather, the review demonstrates the important role that framing can play in presenting an image of disability that implicitly challenges stereotypes and re-positions the issue away from ‘health’ and incapacity. The review also demonstrates the powerful impact of contact (either direct or indirect) in challenging prejudice.

For the **first stage** of the campaign (challenging prejudice), consideration could therefore be given to:

1. **Humanising disability and providing indirect ‘contact’**: featuring real life, personal stories that can challenge what appears to be a largely detached and rigid view of disability (based on stereotype and prejudice), by personalising the issue, focussing on the individual rather than an arbitrary concept;
2. **Focussing on the diversity of disability**: Avoiding stereotyping disability by challenging the perception that disability is any one thing. This could be done implicitly by featuring people with a range of disability types creative executions and drawing attention to disability which is neither visible nor obvious. Care should be taken to ensure that existing stereotypes are not reinforced.
3. **Demonstrating workplace success**: Focussing on success in the workplace, and providing true to life success stories and employer testimonials. Presenting the viewpoint of both the employer and the employee may help to challenge misconceptions and concern about the productivity/ suitability of employees with disability and their impacts on the business;
4. **Focussing on ability**: Featuring people with disability working in a range of jobs and situations, requiring different skills and abilities;
5. **(Implicitly) acknowledging fear**: Neutrally acknowledging the fears of both employers and employees (to ensure credibility and involvement), but demonstrating that these are unfounded or could be resolved easily;

The **second stage** of the campaign (building the business case in workplaces) could be more factual and business-like in tone, drawing on empirical data to demonstrate the economic benefits, and disprove myths about the productivity/ needs/ risks involved in hiring people with disability. The focus should be on presenting ‘hard evidence’ that cannot be challenged by employers.

**Table 2: Option 2 – Correcting misconceptions and increasing self-efficacy within the workplace**

**Option 2 – Correcting misconceptions and increasing self-efficacy within the workplace**

***Objectives and focus***

We know from social marketing theory, that communications are likely to have greatest impact on those who are, to some degree, **open** to engaging in the desired behaviour – and are attitudinally, either neutral or positive in their outlook, though they potentially include non-hirers as well as light hirers. These groups represent the 'low hanging fruit' for communications, particularly on a topic that for many people, is laden with bias, prejudice and stigma.

In the context of this study, the barriers to employing people with disability for this cohort of employers are likely to relate most strongly to **limited self-efficacy, misconceptions about people with disability, and workplace challenges**. Despite their 'open' attitudes, it is likely that these employers will still hold biases and negative preconceptions about people with disability and their suitability for employment (even without being conscious of this), though not as overtly as amongst employers for whom prejudice is likely to over-ride any other consideration. Biases and negative preconceptions are typically less rigid and less entrenched than prejudice. Overall, therefore, the attitudes of the 'open' employer segment (Option 2) would not need to be radically confronted; rather, communications would need to **build understanding, raise consciousness of implicit biases, instil confidence and increase skills**: far more achievable goals than challenging deep-seated prejudice.

In the absence of a statistical segmentation, it is difficult to hypothesise what types of businesses are likely to be represented within this segment, though the literature suggests that they may be larger, rather than smaller in size (the literature generally refers to descriptors of 'large' and 'small' businesses, with minimal evidence of likely impact with medium sized businesses, though we would hypothesise in this case they would be more open to change than small businesses). It is important to reiterate that that, at this stage, this is only a hypothesis, and would need to be tested through a segmentation of the business community. It is possible that there may be some representation of smaller businesses within this cohort, in which case they would also be targeted.

If our hypothesis does prove correct, however, targeting medium-larger employers may provide the opportunity to create a **'ripple effect'** more broadly, as the behavioural impact of communications takes hold: positioning employers who hire people with disability as **role models** and leaders, increasing awareness of employment success, and positioning this as an important and worthwhile issue. Recognising that most of the public are in employment, such an approach could help to create a climate of support for employers who are engaging people with disability, and increase acceptance of people with disability in the workplace. As the literature indicates, the more **'visible'** that employing people with disability becomes, the greater the likelihood that, with time, biases and stereotypes can be broken down.

Any communications approach targeting **employers from medium sized and larger sized businesses** would need to consider the role of different staff in inputting into the decision to employ a person with disability, both from the perspective of targeting approach and message content. The literature suggests that one of the most significant hurdles for larger employers is the need to obtain **commitment from various staff and manage workplace tensions**. At this stage, it is difficult to determine exactly how this should be approached, reflecting gaps in our understanding of the decision making process and influence of various personnel (leadership vs

## Option 2 – Correcting misconceptions and increasing self-efficacy within the workplace

management vs HR). This would also need to be a focus for qualitative research, should this option be pursued.

Overall, communications targeting this group would need to:

- Raise awareness of implicit **biases** and correct common **misconceptions** about the competencies of people with disability, their suitability for employment, and impacts on the workplace;
- Demonstrate **benefits** in employing people with disability, both from social and financial perspectives;
- **Increase self-efficacy** around employing people with disability, by building confidence and assuaging fear;
- Build **knowledge and skills** to create inclusive working arrangements and management approaches and addressing negative attitudes amongst staff;
- Provide **validation and support** for positive attitudes and behaviours, positioning employers who engage people with disability as role models and inspiring others to follow their lead.

### **Delivery**

Noting review findings that highlight the significance of context in terms of where messages are delivered, consideration could be given to rolling out a **workplace targeted intervention**, with a focus on providing **information, resources and support** for employers considering employing people on how this should be undertaken. A **website** (with more detailed information) may be an effective resource to support communication.

Depending on feasibility, complementary activities could include:

- **Conferences and seminars** to build employer confidence in this area, while providing opportunities for employers to form **networks** and liaise with other employers on this issue – the appeal of which is also noted in the literature;
- Opportunities for **direct contact** with people with disability through work experience programs;
- Workplace **training** to increase skills around management and hiring approaches, legal compliance, workplace adjustments and accessibility.

The appeal and potential effectiveness of these (and potentially other) approaches should be tested with target audiences in any developmental research.

### **Framing**

Framing for these communications should:

- Focus on **success**: demonstrating positive employment experiences to validate and reinforce the primary audience's already positive attitudes and behaviours;
- **Personalising and providing indirect 'contact'**: featuring real life, personal stories that focus on the individual rather than an arbitrary concept of disability.

## Option 2 – Correcting misconceptions and increasing self-efficacy within the workplace

- **Focussing on the diversity of disability:** Avoiding stereotyping disability by challenging the perception that disability is any one thing. This could be done implicitly by featuring people with a range of disability types in creative executions.
- **Focussing on ability:** Featuring people with disability working in a range of jobs and situations, requiring different skills and abilities.
- **Demonstrating workplace success:** Focussing on success in the workplace, and providing true to life success stories and employer testimonials. Presenting the viewpoint of both the employer and the employee may help to challenge misconceptions and concern about the productivity/ suitability of employees with disability and their impacts on the business.
- Feature employers who are engaging people with disability as **spokespeople** for the campaign, as a means of involving the audience, providing credibility to messages, and positioning them as **role models** and leaders.
- Focus on success stories that highlight the **process** of hiring people with disability; helping to build self-efficacy by demonstrating that making workplace adjustments do not have to be difficult, and allaying confusion about where and how to start.
- Motivate, by presenting a strong and positive **call to action**.
- Convey a **positive, supportive and encouraging** tone.

Resources on this issue should focus on increasing understanding and building skills in the workplace, taking a more factual and informative in tone. Advice and instruction would need to be relatively simple and straightforward to counter the perception that this would be an arduous task. Creative executions should also reflect a **clear and simple tone**.

### 1.3.4 The need for primary research

While the review has certainly helped to formulate preliminary thinking around a campaign strategy, it has also **highlighted a need for primary research** with the target audience as a means of determining the 'right' approach and allowing communications objectives, messaging, and tone to be fleshed out. This would require:

- A quantitative segmentation of the employer population (as mentioned previously), to identify the size and profile of those with different attitudes/ behaviours. This should provide insight into how the specific segments fall out in terms of business characteristics including business size and industry, as well as media preferences. Through this approach communication can be targeted more effectively – this will be particularly important for a workplace targeted initiative, focusing on the industries, business types and individuals most likely to be receptive to this approach; and
- Qualitative research with the intended target audience/s (once confirmed through the segmentation) to elicit a more in-depth understanding of their knowledge, attitudes and perceptions, including (potentially) testing concepts reflective of the broad strategy approach. Qualitative research will provide greater insight to the relative strength of barriers and drivers for target segments (also defined by size and industry), including the strength and balance of unconscious biases vs overt prejudice amongst the target cohort, allowing messaging to be prioritised.

## 2. Introduction

This report was commissioned by the Department of Social Services (DSS). As part of its remit to improve the wellbeing of people and families in Australia, DSS provides support to people with disability through a range of initiatives. This includes Disability Employment Services (DES) which aim to assist people with disability into paid employment in the open labour market.

In 2015, the Australian Government commissioned a Disability Employment Taskforce to undertake a review of the extant disability employment framework, seeking feedback from people with disability, families and carers, employers and service providers in order to improve the existing model for the DES in 2018. The Taskforce identified that employers play a critical role in facilitating improvement of employment outcomes for people with disability.

In response to this finding, a component of the DES Reform Discussion Paper, *new disability employment services from 2018*, involved building employer demand for people with disability. The Discussion Paper identified limited knowledge and negative attitudes of employers as a significant barrier to employment participation amongst people with disability, through both limited understanding of the benefits of employing people with disability and prejudicial attitudes about their productivity and capability. Three initiatives were identified:

- Trialling employer-nominated initiatives aimed at identifying innovative and effective solutions to employing people with disability;
- Tax incentives; and
- Implementing targeted disability employment communications, education and awareness raising and employer engagement activities.

In order to inform the development of a communication strategy targeting employers, DSS commissioned Kantar Public to conduct a comprehensive review of the literature on the topic of employment participation amongst people with disability, focusing on identifying the key drivers and barriers to employment and the role of employers to this end. This work will help to inform the development of an evidence-based communication strategy targeting employers across Australia.

This report provides a comprehensive review of relevant and available national and international academic and grey literature pertaining to barriers and drivers of disability employment. It draws on literature provided by DSS, as well as sources obtained from online searches and interviews with key stakeholders.

### 2.1 Research Objectives

The objective of the literature review is ultimately to inform the development of an evidence based communications strategy that will educate, encourage and support employers in engaging people with disability. The review sought to address the following research questions:

- What is the existing knowledge and awareness of employing people with disability amongst employers?
- What beliefs and attitudes influence the decision of employers to employ a person with disability and what are the key drivers and barriers to doing so? How do these change for different subgroups of employers?

- How do people with disability experience seeking for and gaining employment and what do they see as the key drivers and barriers to doing so?
- What is the range of communications approaches shown to be effective in raising awareness of the benefits of employing people with disability, and encouraging employers to do so?
- What are the areas of commonality shared by successful approaches?

## 2.2 Methodology

The approach to searching for and collating existing research involved the use of complementary methods, as a means of ensuring efficiency, thoroughness and quality of outputs. Specifically, it included:

- A review of relevant literature provided by DSS.
- Interviews with a number of key stakeholders and subject matter experts from the disability and employment sectors, as identified by the DSS. Note that the input of these stakeholders was used to direct the search process. Their views and opinions on the issues in focus do not form part of this review.
- Desktop review via a comprehensive search of Australian and international databases in relevant areas.

### 2.2.1 Types of literature reviewed

This report reviews both academic literature (e.g. peer reviewed and published studies, government-published literature) and grey literature (e.g. research output produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats, but which is not controlled by commercial publishers).

Various literature was recommended by the DSS and stakeholders. In addition to this, literature was retrieved through independent online searches using keywords such as disability, employment, workplace, attitudes, and discrimination studies. The following table provides details on some of the major databases used to retrieve relevant literature:

**Table 3: Databases**

Database	Content
Public service databases	Including the Department of Social Services, Department of Employment (state and federal), Fair Work Commission/ Fair Work Ombudsman, state Departments of Family/ Community Services, Australian Human Rights Commission etc.
Family and Society Plus	Research, policy and practice issues concerning Australian families and society. Includes journal articles, government documents and publications from Not for Profit and advocacy organisations
Australian Bureau of Statistics	Social, health, demographic and economic Australian research and data from 1996-2006

Database	Content
Academic Research Library	Broad range of general reference subjects including arts, business, humanities, social sciences and sciences
Libraries Australia	Searches combined catalogues of Australian libraries, as well as Australian Repositories Online to The World, Picture Australia, the British library Catalogue, Consortium of British University Research Libraries, Library of Congress catalogue, and OCLC World Cat
Elsevier	Major global provider of one of scientific, technical, and medical information, including the Science Direct collection of electronic journals
Taylor & Francis Group Database	International academic publisher with offices in the UK, USA, Singapore and Australia, publishes over 450 journals and over 1500 new books each year.
ProQuest	Online research platform that hosts an aggregate of 1.5 billion digital pages of dissertations, e-books, government archives, periodic journals, and academic journals.
EBSCO Host	A library resource for academic, medical, K–12, public library, law, corporate, and government markets. 375 full-text databases, a collection of 600,000-plus eBooks, subject indexes, point-of-care medical references, and an array of historical digital archives

## 2.3 About this report

### 2.3.1 Scope

The literature review predominantly focuses on barriers and drivers of employment of people with disability. In so doing, it draws on empirical data (e.g. findings of surveys targeting business owners/managers, human resources, and people with disability), however theoretical information has also been considered where relevant. The dominant focus is on the employer perspective, as the primary target audience for the campaign. The views of people with disability around drivers and barriers to employment are explored to some degree, with the primary aim of identifying any additional barriers that the communications could effectively address, or unanticipated issues that should be considered.

A secondary focus for this review is identifying a communications approach drawing on evidence around effective means of communicating on this issue, available in the literature. This section of the review prioritises disability-related (media) campaigns that have undergone a formal evaluation. However, due to the paucity of existing research available in this area, the review also features a number of case studies of relevant campaigns and communications for which evaluation data is not available. Each of these draws on one or more approaches to messaging, framing or delivery endorsed in the literature., and is therefore considered useful for illustrating key findings.

This review only draws on literature considered to be relevant to the Australian context. Where possible, the primary focus is on literature from Australia, though research undertaken in the following countries was also deemed relevant, given their social and cultural similarities:

- New Zealand;
- United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales);
- Canada;
- The United States of America;
- Europe (those nation-states comprising the European Union);
- Scandinavia (Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland).

The review primarily concentrates on recent literature, limited to research undertaken no more than ten years prior to the conduct of this review (2007 onwards).

As anticipated, existing research on certain issues was unable to be sourced. We anticipate that primary research will be required to fill these gaps.

### 2.3.2 Important Definitions

Definitions of recurring and significant terms and concepts are provided below. These definitions have been sourced by constructing a consensus of extant literature on the topic.

- **Disability:** A disability is any continuing condition that restricts everyday activities. A disability is that which is:
  - a) attributable to an intellectual, psychiatric, cognitive, neurological, sensory or physical impairment or a combination of those impairments;
  - b) permanent or likely to be permanent;
  - c) may or may not be of a chronic or episodic nature;
  - d) results in substantially reduced capacity of the person for communication, social interaction, learning or mobility and a need for continuing support services. (Disability Services Act, 1993).
- **Discrimination** (in the context of disability): Differential, prejudicial, and unjust treatment owing to one’s disability status (Thompson et al., 2011).
- **Stigma:** A deeply discrediting attribute that also reduces the bearer (of the stigma) from being perceived as a whole and instead renders them a tainted, discounted person (Bos et al., 2013).
- **Attitude:** a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour (positive attitude) or disfavour (negative attitude; Eagly and Chaiken, 2007).
- **Self-efficacy:** refers to the extent or strength of belief in personal ability to complete tasks and reach goals.
- **Business size:** References to small, medium and large sized employers are made throughout the report. There is some inconsistency in how these cohorts are defined through the literature, though overall, the following classification is most commonly cited.

**Table 4: Business sizes**

Business classification	Approximate number of staff
Small business	5-14 staff

<b>Business classification</b>	<b>Approximate number of staff</b>
Medium business	15-249 staff
Large business	250+ staff

## 3. The role of prejudice

Prejudice emerges in the literature as a significant barrier to employing people with disability, in many ways, lying at the foundation of the costs and risks that employers associate with people with disability. This section of the report provides an overview of the role of prejudice in influencing the beliefs and perceptions of employers and their attitudes to people with disability. It is intended to provide context for a more detailed assessment of specific belief based costs and risks in Section 4.2.

### 3.1 The pervasiveness of prejudice

Prejudice, biased assumptions and negative stereotypes are identified as significant barriers to employment for people with disability across a number of papers (Australian Network on Disability, 2016; Business Council of Australia; Deane, 2009; Evans et al., 2016; National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016, National Disability Forum, 2014). For instance:

- In the National Disability Forum (2014), prejudice was ranked as the most important barrier to work, with 68% of respondents reporting that discrimination impacted their workforce participation.
- Similarly, people with disability participating in the National Disability Strategy Consultation project conducted in 2009 stated that few employers were willing to employ a person with disability, and attributed this primarily to negative attitudes and misconceptions about disability (Deane, 2009).

People with disability note that such prejudice is not only pervasive, but is something they experience since childhood. As one advocate submission into the Australian National Willing to Work Inquiry (2016) put it:

*“Disabled kids today are not taught to dream about a career...The perception of disability as an unconquerable barrier to participation to the workplace begins in early life” (p.5).*

In line with the views of people with disability, many **employers** also cite prejudice as a key barrier to employment. For example, a New Zealand study by Woodley, Dylan & Metzger (2012) found that 78% of employers believed that people with disability were discriminated against, with one respondent stating that *“stereotypes from employers are the biggest problem”* (p.22).

The **reality** of employer prejudice and discriminatory attitudes towards people with disability is also demonstrated in this study, with:

- Most (83%) employers agreeing that there is a mismatch between the picture of an “ideal” employee and their picture of a person with disability;
- 39% of employers perceiving people with disability as “not like us”; and
- Nearly one-third (30%) stating that even if a person with disability had the correct skills and qualifications they would still not hire them (Woodley, Dylan & Metzger, 2012).

Research conducted in the UK also highlights the prejudices surrounding the way in which employees with disability are viewed. Employers in one study were found to talk enthusiastically about their employees without disability as extended family, but changed to a tone of fear and reluctance when the topic changed to (potential) employees with disability (Gluck, 2014).

The literature reveals considerable misconceptions around disability on a more fundamental level, with some research identifying a common belief that the **nature of the work undertaken**, rather than the design of the workplace or the job, is inherently **unsuitable for people with disability** (Australian Network on Disability, 2016). For instance:

- In an American study, nearly three-quarters (72.6%) of business respondents cited that a major obstacle associated with hiring people with disability is that they cannot effectively perform the nature of the work required, stating that it is ‘too challenging’ (Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma, 2008);
- In Australia, Hays (2014) found that only 40% of organisations reported being able to accommodate staff with a physical or mental disability, while 31% were unsure and 29% reported not being able to accommodate staff with disability. However, such views were contested by employees and employers who had some experience working with people with disability.

Many examples of employer prejudices that impede the opportunity for people with disability to find work are cited in the literature. Manifesting in a variety of misconceptions about people with disability, these prejudices underpin the perceived costs associated with the employment of people with disability, as described more fully in Section 4.

### 3.2 Unwillingness to disclose: a consequence of prejudice

The literature suggests that the belief that prejudice is a major barrier to work creates **fear of disclosure** amongst people with non-visible disability (National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016), leading many to avoid disclosing their disability to an employer (Evans et al., 2016). The research highlights a perception that disclosing may result in **fewer recruitment offers**, or cause an employer to withdraw an offer or regret having made one (National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016). The statement below from the National Disability Forum (2014) in Australia from a person with disability illustrates the significance of this issue for employees:

*“As someone that has recruited for different organisations, I think many employing organisations have unwarranted fears, negative attitudes and stereotypes about employing people with disabilities. These attitudes need to be challenged.... That is why participation and social inclusion is ranked my number one issue” (p.8).*

In one case reported in a New Zealand study by Te Pou (2013), a person with disability deliberately avoided signing up with a disability employment service as this would identify them as a person with disability which, they thought, would automatically mean they would not get the job. As put by a respondent in the Hays (2014) study of employer attitudes *“Stigma is a very powerful foe. If told of a disability people immediately have a set way in which they view you” (p.14).*

Nonetheless, the literature indicates that for employers, non-disclosure itself is perceived as a **major barrier to employment**. A recent UK study (Reed in Partnership, 2016) found that for some employers the most significant challenge to employing people with disability is applicants’ disinclination to disclose their disability, with nearly half (47%) of the respondents stating that it would help if job applicants were more willing to be open about their condition.

Echoing these findings, employers in Australia also cite negative experiences with non-disclosure, with one participant in a forum stating that discovering the employee has restrictions after hiring can *“leave a sour taste in the mouth”* (Employment Monitoring and Evaluation Branch, 2011, p.13). In another Australian study, employers asserted that non-disclosure left them feeling as if they had

been 'deceived' even if they understood why the person with disability had not disclosed (Waterhouse et al., 2010).

*"If someone didn't disclose to me I would feel ambushed as an employer. There's got to be trust to be fair to both of us. I understand why they wouldn't want to disclose but there's a million hazards out there and I have a duty of care"* (Waterhouse et al., 2010, p.17).

Another employer, citing a negative experience with non-disclosure, noted that it adversely impacted on the person with disability's employment potential because the nature of their disability meant that they could not perform the job. This respondent asserted that had the employer known beforehand, they would have still hired the person but tried to find them a more fitting position:

*"It is not a question of 'had I known I wouldn't have employed her' but 'had I known I could have created a different job'"* (Employment Monitoring and Evaluation Branch, 2011, p.13).

Conversely, some employers claim that disclosure may be key to the person with disability succeeding at their workplace, because it means they are able to ensure they have the right tools to do so (AHRI, 2011).

### 3.3 Challenging prejudice through familiarity and normalisation

When deeper causes for prejudices are explored in the literature, many employers attribute them to **unconscious biases** resulting from a lack of **familiarity** with people with disability in the workplace, and a lack of **knowledge and understanding** of disability which serves to perpetuate negative assumptions about, and attitudes towards, employees with disability. For example, one employer noted a 'chicken and egg' problem whereby there were relatively low numbers of people with disability in the workforce (often due to prejudice on behalf of employers) and that this lack of visibility only serves to reinforce the perception that they are therefore not effective in the workforce (National Willing to Work inquiry, 2016). Prejudices are also reinforced by poor prior experiences, leading some simply to find it easier to say 'no' (National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016).

The significance of familiarity in challenging prejudice is a recurring theme in the literature. Many studies have demonstrated that employers who have hired people with disability previously are far more likely to do so again (Keating, Beaton & Foster, 2007). Research shows that this is largely due to the role that familiarity plays in countering negative attitudes and assumptions, leading employers to focus on employee ability rather than disability, and demonstrating that concerns about productivity or absenteeism are unfounded (Coutts & Riddle, 2012; Hemphill & Kulik, 2016; Te Pou, 2013).

Interestingly, the literature suggests that people need not necessarily have experience of people with disability in the workplace to offset some of the prejudicial attitudes and assumptions that pervade wider culture. Indeed, having a close friend or family member who has a disability has also been found to increase the likelihood of employing a person with disability (Woodley, Dylan & Metzger, 2012).

#### Key take-out

Stigma remains a key barrier to employment for people with disability. Perpetuated by ignorance and bias, it has a fundamental influence on the way that employers view people with disability and their suitability for work.

Importantly, people with disability in several studies note that they do not believe discrimination comes from malice (Evans et al., 2016) but rather reflects a general lack of understanding of

disability, including limited knowledge of the range, type and impact of different disabilities (National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016).

## 4. The cost-benefit equation

The inclination of employers to hire people with disability is also shaped by their perceptions of the relative costs and benefits of doing so. This section details the cost-benefit equation, drawing on the available literature to understand what employers believe they will gain through employing people with disability, and what they believe they may lose – and the interplay between these factors. Many of the beliefs underpinning an assessment of the costs and benefits are manifestations of the prejudice around people with disability, and are factually incorrect (as detailed in Section 9). This section describes prejudicial beliefs in more detail and demonstrates how they operate as barriers to employment. Exploration around this theme allows us to understand not only what the perceived costs vs. benefits are, but how well entrenched these beliefs are, and if and how they can be countered through communications.

The literature suggests that many employers are insufficiently aware or convinced of the business benefits of employing people with disability, and this detracts from their motivation to do so (National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016). While there is some recognition of positive impacts, benefits are predominantly viewed in terms of **organisational diversity, inclusivity and social responsibility**, with less recognition of positive economic impacts overall.

### 4.1 Perceived benefits

The literature demonstrates that the **social benefits** of hiring people with disability are well recognised (Business Council of Australia, 2015; van Kooy, Bowen and Bodsworth, 2014). For example, some 90% of employers from the Business Council of Australia's (2015) survey, said hiring people with disability was important for their overall diversity strategy, 65% said they are motivated by the desire "to reflect the community" in which they operate, while 60% cited that it was important to corporate values. Similarly, in a New Zealand study, employers thought that diversity in the workplace made their teams more cohesive and taught tolerance, acceptance and empathy (Te Pou, 2013).

Overall, however, there is markedly less recognition of the **economic benefits** of employing people with disability. The most frequently identified business benefits focussed on filling **skills shortages** and gaining access to a larger and **more diverse talent pool** (Business Council of Australia, 2015). There is also some recognition of opportunities to engage people with disability to fill time-limited vacancies (van Kooy, Bowman and Bodsworth, 2014) such as for casual Christmas work. People with disability are viewed as a viable alternative supply of labour because employers often need entry-level workers at low cost and with minimal risk.

Recognition of any additional economic benefits associated with employing people with disability appears to be limited across the business population, except amongst those who **have experience in hiring people with disability**. This group of employers are more appreciative of economic benefits, including:

- **Staff loyalty and reliability:** According to the study by the Employment Monitoring and Evaluation Branch (2011) many DES users expressed positive attitudes towards hiring people with disability, particularly in terms of loyalty and reliability. As one employer in the study noted: "I have always found that if a person with disability stays in the business long term, that these people will become the most loyal, reliable and sometimes the hardest workers" (p.8);

- **Retention:** Similarly, the literature demonstrates recognition amongst those who have hired people with disability, that doing so helps to increase retention and reduce turnover (AHRI, 2011; Coutts & Riddle, 2012 and Fraser et al, 2010). The systematic review by Burke et al. (2013) further confirms this, demonstrating that employers who have experience hiring people with developmental disabilities value the lower rates of turnover, and their high quality performance (Burke et al., 2013);
- **Attitude and work ethic:** Many employers who have employed people with disability recognise benefits in terms of the positive attitudes and good work ethic (AHRI, 2011; Burke et al., 2013). In the study by Coutts & Riddle (2012) there was a perception that the work ethic and attitude of employees with disability was better than those without disability;
- **Innovative thinking:** Some employers are reported to appreciate the ‘new’ and innovative perspective that employees with disability bring to a business (Business Council of Australia, 2015; Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2014);
- **Gaining insight into disability consumer markets:** The literature also reveals some recognition of the potential financial benefits of tapping into the disability consumer market. Employers in several studies are reported to see employees with disability playing an important role in enhancing their understanding of the wants and needs of consumers with disability, with clear commercial benefits (van Kooy, Bowman and Bodsworth, 2014; Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2014).

Overall, however, the literature suggests that for the majority of employers, employing people with disability is more likely to be viewed as **morally and socially desirable**, and reflective of good corporate social responsibility, **rather than business savvy**. (Deane, 2009; Evans et al, 2016). For example, one employer in Waterhouse et al’s (2010) study stated that he has *‘engaged quite a few over the years’ because he has a social conscience and while there is a community benefit, in terms of economics ‘it just doesn’t add up’* (p.19).

Similarly, respondents in another study recognised few benefits to hiring a person with disability other than “feeling good”. It was asserted that from a ‘hard-line’ business point of view, there were no positives aside from the potential for some good publicity (Employment Monitoring and Evaluation Branch, 2011).

## 4.2 Perceived costs

Scepticism about the economic impacts of employing people with disability reflects a number of prejudicial beliefs about people with disability, as described below:

### **Employer belief: “People with disability are less productive”**

Prejudices around the productivity and capability of people with disability are often reported in the literature. Several studies indicate that employers often unconsciously avoid hiring people with disability due to their beliefs about future work performance, which are based on inaccurate negative stereotypes (Duggan et al., 2010; Williams-Whitt and Taras, 2010).

For instance, Louvet et al. (2009) showed that people tend to evaluate employees with disability as being **less competent professionally** than people without disability. These more negative evaluations can reduce the likelihood of hiring people with disability, thus serving as a key attitudinal barrier to employment (Henkens et al., 2008). As Deane (2009) notes, such concerns echo the outdated medical model of disability that both fails to acknowledge any positive aspects of

disability, and presents all the difficulties of disability as centred within the person, rather than within the structures of society.

Empirical literature surveying employer attitudes demonstrates the pervasiveness of the perception that people with disability are less productive and less capable, and the significance of this perception as a barrier to employment. For instance:

- Woodley, Metzger & Dylan's (2012) survey found that 79% of respondents (all employers) believed that a person with disability is less productive, with 39% citing the perceived lack of capability as a barrier for employers.
- Similarly, in Hemphill & Kulik's (2016) Australian study, nearly one-third (32.5%) of participating employers felt they could justify never having hired a person with disability because of the belief that they would have limited capacity to perform the job.
- AHRI's (2011) member survey further found that nearly half of respondents (all employers) believe there is a perception within workplaces that a person with disability would not perform as highly as a person without disability, with around 20% holding this view themselves.
- Moreover, the NPDCC (2009) found that the common belief amongst employers that workers with disability could slow the production of their business was one of the main barriers to employing this group.
- Perhaps even more confronting is Woodley, Metzger & Dylan's (2012) finding that employers who believe that an employee is simply not able to perform the job due to their disability tend to believe that this barrier could never be overcome.

The perception of the limited productivity and capability of individuals with disability is underpinned by misconceptions and prejudices in relation to the **time required to learn or perform tasks**: A recurring theme regarding the productivity of people with disability is the belief that they take much longer to learn or perform the same task as people without disability (Amir et al., 2009; Hemphill & Kulik, 2016). Concern is often voiced in regard to the perceived **impact of this on profits, other staff, and managers** (National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016). For example, an employer who had never hired a person with disability made the following statement in Hemphill & Kulik's (2016) study:

*"I just couldn't make things profitable if it's gonna take too long and it would require too much support of that individual . . . I just couldn't afford it" (p.548).*

As noted by Waterhouse et al. (2010), employers worry about costs in terms of money, time and productivity, not only of the employee with disability but also of the work teams which they believe will have to bear some of the responsibility for a person with disability's performance. Amir et al. (2009) also highlight a common perception that people with disability are less able to get jobs done on time and, as a result, other workers need to assist them in doing so. This concern may extend to a perceived negative impact on managers and supervisors. A participant in the AHRI (2011) study, for instance, reported an example in which a person with disability required much more supervision than anticipated at a level above and beyond what was needed for employees without disability.

Following on from prejudicial attitudes around the productivity and capabilities of people with disability, the literature draws attention to a common assumption that **people with disability cannot genuinely compete with other applicants** (National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016), or are only suited to positions requiring little or no education. One submission to this inquiry (2016) described the experience of a person with disability who had been told by their DES manager to

remove a reference to their university degree in their resume because they had such little chance of obtaining a job that required higher formal qualifications and skills.

Indeed, there is some exploration in the literature around what kinds of work are considered 'suitable' or 'best' for people with disability from the perspective of the employer. One study indicated that regardless of a candidate with disability's gender, employers thought that they should perform more feminised roles (e.g. 'service-based') roles (Meyer, 2014); while in another study, employers were found to believe that people with disability should primarily perform conventional and routine tasks (Nota et al., 2013).

#### **Employer belief: "People with disability are more likely to be absent from work"**

Prejudicial perceptions over **increased absenteeism** also feature prominently in the empirical evidence examining employer concerns around hiring people with disability (Amir et al., 2009; Copestake et al, 2014; Employment Monitoring and Evaluation Branch, 2011; Fraser et al, 2010; Fraser et al, 2012; Reed in Partnership, 2016; Woodley, Metzger & Dylan, 2012). Woodley et al (2012) found that an alarming 73% of employers believed that employees with disability take more time off work. This belief was also identified in qualitative studies with employers conducted by two American studies: Amir et al. (2009) and Fraser et al (2010, 2012).

People with disability also identify perceptions around absenteeism as a barrier to employment, believing that employers often conflate disability and ill-health and therefore presume that people with disability will take a lot of time off (Copestake et al, 2014).

Interestingly, the literature points to significant difference in perceptions of absenteeism for organisations of different size. According to the Employment Monitoring and Evaluation Branch (2011) study, larger employers were most likely to disagree that employees with disability are more likely to take time off; medium-sized employers were more likely to disagree than agree whereas small employers were more equivocal.

It is important to note that while this belief may be commonly held, its strength as a barrier to employment may not be as significant as other prejudices around people with disability. For example, in one UK study by Reed in Partnership (2016), absenteeism only rated as a concern for 12% of survey respondents.

#### **Employer belief: "There are many risks associated with employing people with disability"**

A primary aspect of prejudice associated with employing people with disability concerns the notion that employers may view people with disability as a **risk**. The literature frequently notes that there is a belief amongst employers that hiring a person with disability will cost the business more in terms of **insurance** and that they therefore **present greater business risk** (National Willing to Work, Inquiry, 2016). Research conducted by AHRI (2011), for instance, found that 22.49% of employers who had never hired a person with disability stated that one of the major reasons was that they believed that such a person would be 'high risk'.

The literature points to particular employer concern about risks associated with **workplace health and safety**. For instance, Woodley, Metzger & Dylan (2012) found that 69% of employers in their sample reported that a major barrier to hiring people with disability was that they are a health and safety risk. Research with US employers (Fraser et al, 2010, 2012) also identified a prevalent belief that people with disability were a threat to their own safety as well as that of their co-workers.

A more in-depth analysis of the perceived risks involved in engaging people with disability highlights a high degree of stigma and ignorance. The literature reveals some evidence that employees with disability are considered **unpredictable or unsafe** (Human rights Commission,

2010; Waterhouse et al., 2010). For example, Waterhouse et al., (2010) found that employers were concerned about the safety of employing people with disability because they believed that both managers and co-workers would think their behaviour would be unexpected (i.e. unpredictable), and would be unsure about how to respond to such behaviour in a safe way.

Further, some research notes that employers are concerned about being able to explain workplace safety and risk to people with disability. A participant in the AHRI (2011) study, for instance, stated that they had to let someone go because they were concerned that the employee did not adequately understand the health and safety risks associated with the job.

Allied to this, employers show a significant degree of **fear about litigation** brought on by employees with disability (Burke et al., 2013; Fraser et al., 2010; Fraser et al., 2012; Reed in Partnership, 2016; Waterhouse et al., 2010). The study by Reed in Partnership (2016), for instance, found that almost a third (31%) of employers indicated that businesses are worried that people with disability will make discrimination claims if the job does not work out.

Waterhouse et al. (2010) found that fears over litigation in relation to workplace accidents were also common. In this study, some employers were found to be concerned that they would inadvertently breach occupational health and safety regulations or anti-discrimination laws, which could give rise to workers' compensation claims or tribunal hearings. It was asserted that even if they were exonerated, this would result in considerable costs in terms of resources, time and anxiety.

People with disability identify the perception that they are a workplace health and safety risk as a form of prejudice that serves as a significant barrier to employment (National Disability Forum, 2014). One submission to "Shut Out", a large-scale Australian study of the experiences of people with disability (Deane, 2009) came from a person with disability who asserted that employers' excessive concern over people with disability as being a workplace safety risk led to discriminatory practices, under the guise of welfare. In his example, he reported that after incurring a (physical) disability, he was no longer allowed to drive a work vehicle at his place of employment, despite having no restrictions on driving outside of the workplace. This meant he could not continue working there without great difficulty (e.g. having to get other employees to drive him).

Indeed, the literature indicates that the experience of discrimination is often heightened amongst those returning to work after a period of illness or injury – especially if this is work related, and particularly if there had been a workers' compensation claim. Moreover, the need to disclose previous workplace compensation claims was viewed as a strong barrier to getting back into employment, perceived as having shown "bad faith" for filing a compensation claim (National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016).

### **Employer belief: "People with disability require special treatment in the workplace"**

The literature also points to a pervasive belief amongst employers that people with disability have greater needs and thus require **greater support in the workplace**, with associated impacts on costs and resources (Amir et al., 2009; Australian Chamber of Commerce, 2017; Business Council of Australia, 2015; Evans et al., 2016; Fraser et al., 2010; Fraser et al., 2012; National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016; Te Pou, 2013; Woodley, Metzger & Dylan, 2012).

Amir et al. (2009) found that employers often believe that people with disability require special treatment and accommodations in order to work. In the study by Woodley, Metzger & Dylan (2012), one of the key reasons that employers cited as the basis for their belief that there was a mismatch between the 'ideal employee' and their vision of a person with disability centred around the perceived effort of making workplace modifications, with some 83% of employers in this study

demonstrating the belief that employing people with disability can require big, disruptive or expensive changes to the workplace. Some openly stated that they felt it was easier to employ someone who did not have an impairment and so were not 'a hassle'. Concerns over the perceived need for ongoing workplace modifications are frequently cited in the literature (Anema and Sligar, 2010; Reed in Partnership, 2016; Solovieva et al., 2010).

#### **Employer belief: 'Employees with disability will create tension amongst staff'**

The research suggests that the challenges that people with disability face within the workplace may not be solely attributable to the attitudes of employers, but are in part driven by co-workers who contribute to a **negative workplace culture** due to limited exposure to and experience of working with people with disability. For example, the survey by Evans et al. (2016) showed that 20% of respondents with disability perceived there to be evidence of workplace harassment and bullying, 24% noted exclusion from networks and 26% cited evidence of an exclusive culture.

While some employers accept this as a cultural barrier for people with disability, the literature also demonstrates a perception that people with disability have trouble getting along with others on the job (Amir et al., 2009, Louvet 2007; Nota et al. 2013). In Fraser et al.'s study (2010) employers were found to believe that an employee with disability would have an **adverse impact on co-workers**. Much of this perception was related to the belief that co-workers would need to work harder to compensate for the lower productivity of employees with disability, as explored earlier. As one employer who had hired a person with disability before noted in a focus group study by Hemphill & Kulik (2016).

*"It put them [co-workers] under a lot of stress, and when they stressed out, he stressed out and it stressed the rest of the team" (p. 544).*

Similarly, related to the perception that people with disability could be a health and safety risk, some employers believe that employees will find working with a disabled person stressful, particularly if the person displays unpredictable or aggressive behaviour (Mills and Rose, 2011). There are mixed findings in the literature around the extent to which concern about the reactions of co-workers serves to discourage employers from hiring a person with disability. While in the survey by Reed in Partnership (2016) only 18% of managers were concerned about attitudes of co-workers, Woodley, Metzger & Dylan (2012) found that two-thirds of the employers in their study said they would be influenced by negative reactions from staff. Around half the sample asserted that their staff would not be completely comfortable working alongside people with a broad range of impairments or conditions, (with the exception of someone in a wheelchair), and/or that people with disability would not 'fit in' (48%), or would unsettle existing workers (50%).

Conversely, however, this study also demonstrated that many employers would be encouraged to employ people with disability if staff reacted positively (77%).

#### **Employer belief: "Employees with disability will not represent the business well"**

The literature also highlights employer concern that people with disability will not represent their business well to clients. For instance, some 75% of respondents in Woodley, Metzger & Dylan's (2012) study stated they would be influenced by the **negative reactions of clients and customers** (Woodley, Metzger & Dylan, 2012), with one employer asserting:

*"Suspect that clients would not perceive a disabled person as having the same credibility as able bodied people" (p.16).*

Aligned with this, the study found that some (11%) employers placed considerable value on employees' looks and presentation, and expressed concern that clients may feel "uncomfortable

about any outward signs of the person's disability." Conversely, Waterhouse et al. (2010) reported that one employer had concerns about his business being represented by some of his employees because of their difficulties with communication and relationship skills.

However, Woodley and Metzger (2012) also noted that positive reactions from clients would be a motivation to employ, with 79% of employers in this study stating that they would be influenced by the positive reactions from customers and clients.

### **Employer belief: "Workplace adjustment is cost prohibitive"**

Many employers assume that employing people with disability may be **extremely costly** – a perception which serves as an additional barrier to hiring people with disability (Anema and Sligar, 2010; Hemhill & Kulik, 2016; Reed in Partnership, 2016; Solovieva et al., 2010). Indeed, the cost associated with workplace modifications was one of key barriers cited by participants in several studies (Business Council of Australia's, 2015; Australian Network on Disability, 2016, National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016).

In the National Willing to Work Inquiry (2016), one employer cited it as "prohibitive", while respondents to Vision Australia's (2016) survey asserted that the expense of adjustments and technology needed to employ a person with severe vision loss was the single biggest barrier to employing people with visual impairments. Moreover, often the cost for workplace modification and integration is perceived as ongoing (Anema and Sligar, 2010).

Importantly, the literature also points to a **lack of awareness of government reimbursement schemes for workplace adjustments and modifications**, including the Australian Government's Employment Assistance Fund (EAF). Alternatively, where there is awareness, many employers assert that the funds are insufficient, or too inflexible. (National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016). Concerns reflect the inability to obtain funds for workplace modifications prior to the employee starting. The red tape involved in securing EAF funding is also reported to be frustrating for employers (Evans et al, 2016; National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016).

Interestingly, there is some indication that attitudes to the cost of workplace modifications vary according to employer size, with small employers displaying greater sensitivity to potential upfront costs associated with disability (Employment Monitoring and Evaluation Branch, 2011).

### **Key take-out**

These findings highlight the importance of recognising a business case for employees with disability, positioning the employment of people with disability as economically advantageous rather than (solely) socially desirable. In order to do so, however, there is a need to challenge the prejudicial attitudes and beliefs that underpin the notion that people with disability cannot contribute to business success. It is interesting to note the differing views of those with experience of employing people with disability, attesting to the importance of familiarity in challenging stigma.

# 5. A question of efficacy: Confusion, concern and complexity as a barrier to hiring

The literature suggests that even when employers do not hold (or do not believe they hold) prejudicial attitudes and recognise the benefits of recruiting people with disability, there is a paucity in understanding and knowledge of how to go about this. This undermines the sense of efficacy that employers feel in employing people with disability, creating uncertainty about both process and outcome. Efficacy therefore emerges in the literature as a key barrier to employing people with disability, as described more fully below.

## 5.1 Low 'disability confidence'

The literature highlights **low levels of confidence** around employing people with disability across the business community. Related to the lack of familiarity of disability in the workplace, there is a prevalent view amongst employers that a key barrier is “not knowing what to do or where to start”, and a constant and pervasive fear of “doing the wrong thing” (Business Council of Australia, 2015).

For instance, some 65% of employers in one survey reported that employing people with disability is a step into the 'unknown' or scary (Woodley, Metzger & Dylan, 2012). Waterhouse et al. (2010) found that employers may not see the problem as one of incapability on the part of the people seeking employment, but rather, of their own insecurity and lack of knowledge about disability, translating to concern about how they would 'cope' if they were to take on a person with disability.

As one submission from the National Willing to Work inquiry (2016) put it:

*“The majority of employers we are in contact with are crying out for assistance and help because they want to do the right thing” (p.187)*

Moreover, the research indicates some employers are reluctant to ask questions in order to understand better (National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016). The Business Council of Australia (2015) note a sense that employers want to be understanding but feel that they need to know more to do so, and this leads to concerns about seeming discriminatory and intrusive.

The literature identifies several issues that appear to be a source of confusion and concern for many employers, as described below.

### Facilitating workplace adjustment

One of the most significant barriers found consistently across employer surveys is the perception that **making workplace adjustments is difficult and costly** (Australian Network on Disability, 2016); Business Council of Australia, 2015; National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016, Vision Australia, 2016). In one study, by Evans et al. (2016) the “Reasonable Adjustment” process was seen to be a barrier amongst around 30% of employers particularly because of the time taken to make adjustments, and in knowing who to go to for help. For example, one employer in the study reported having to wait on average for a month for specialised equipment to be installed, while another expressed frustration:

*“I don't think it's easy. I think it could be a lot easier. The amount of red tape that you've got to go through to make things happen is, I'd have to say, horrendous” (p. 52).*

The emphasis on workplace adjustment identified in the literature points to the possibility of a **'knowing-doing gap'** among employers who often lack tools and capacity to bring in new practices to support their workers (van Looy & Karpur, 2013).

For example, in one survey, 22.6% of respondents said they were not aware of any software that could help make adjustments. Respondents in the same survey noted that when they did know how to make modifications, that customising documents and adapting software packages were time consuming and difficult, with 14.7% even calling the modifications needing to be made "disruptive" (Vision Australia, 2016).

In a similar vein, there appears to be a lack of understanding of different kinds of adjustments, and knowing where to go for assistance. A submission into the National Willing to Work Inquiry (2016) stated that:

*"I was trying to buy a special iPad for a young person with disability who we had hired and I just couldn't work out a way of getting the equipment. Our own internal processes were so difficult. I couldn't make this happen for one person" (p. 192).*

Perhaps more fundamentally, the National Willing to Work Inquiry (2016) suggests that employers may also struggle to understand what reasonable adjustment comprises, pointing out that no examples are given in the section as to what kinds of adjustments are envisaged to be 'reasonable' (National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016).

### **Negotiating workplace law**

Allied to the above, the National Willing to Work Inquiry (2016) indicates that many employers find the legislation and policies surrounding the employment of people with disability to be **complex**. Many claimed to struggle to interpret the relevant law, and were fearful of accidentally not complying and ending up with a lawsuit. Employers also felt there was too much uncertainty caused by frequent changes and reforms. One employer called the framework of laws "burdensome" and thus a barrier to employing people with disability (National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016).

In a related issue, the Inquiry also pointed to concern around the restrictions on some awards and enterprise agreements, which were thought to create difficulties in offering employees flexible work arrangements (National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016).

### **Employee management**

Several studies highlight low levels of self-efficacy around the **management** of employees with disability. The BCA's 2015 survey, for instance, found that a quarter of managers reported not feeling confident managing people with disability (Business Council of Australia, 2015). Concern about doing the wrong thing is a common theme, with Evans et al. (2016) asserting that fears range from making a decision that would make things worse for someone because they did not understand the person's disability properly, to concern about paying too much attention to that member of staff and 'favouring' them over others in the team. Coutts & Riddle (2012) found that managers were self-critical and talked about doing their best, while remaining unsure that this was enough.

### **Questions about employee suitability**

Even when employers show positive intentions around employing a person with disability, the literature suggests that they may be deterred by concern that they will not find someone who offers **suitable skills and experience** (Amir et al., 2009; Erickson, 2013; Erickson et al, 2014;

Waterhouse et al., 2010). Erikson's (2013) study found that the most common barriers cited by HR professionals were in relation to skills and experience needed by applicants with disabilities. These included the perception of a lack of qualified applicants (51.2%), lack of skills and training (36%), and a lack of related experience (29.8%). In a second survey Erikson et al (2014) found similar results with slightly over half (51.2%) the respondents reporting that a lack of qualified candidates was a major barrier.

### **Finding prospective employees**

Further, with limited awareness of Disability Employment Services (see Section 7.2) employers also report difficulty in reaching candidates with disability. One employer noted that despite advertising positions through the National Disability Recruitment Coordinator (NDRC), very few applications had been received. Alternatively, if they did receive applications they were from candidates who were not 'job ready' or 'high quality'. For example, many employers in the National Willing to Work Inquiry (2016) asserted that they did not want people who had been unemployed for a long time or who hadn't worked before (which was the case they noted for many candidates with disability) because they felt that retraining time and expenses would be excessive.

### **Key take-out**

Employer confidence is clearly a significant barrier to the employment of people with disability. Increasing awareness of the process and outcomes of employing people with disability will help address challenges in this area. There is clearly also a role for training and ongoing support, including providing access to trusted third parties, experts and opportunities for knowledge sharing, as detailed further in Section 10.

## 6. Workplace barriers

The literature highlights the important role played by corporate culture and organisational structure in the employment of people with disability. In the Disability Confidence survey undertaken by the Australian Network on Disability (2016) around a third of employers were unsure why they had not hired a person with disability, but many attributed it to a lack of overarching strategy, plan, leadership, and commitment to the inclusion of people with disability in the workplace (Business Council of Australia, 2015; National Willing to Work inquiry, 2016). It is clear from the literature that these aspects of organisational structure and culture work in concert – supporting or obstructing the employment of people with disability in various ways.

The inclination for employers to hire people with disability is certainly a reflection of their inner beliefs and attitudes around disability and what it might mean for their business. External and environmental factors also, however, guide behaviours. This is particularly evident in the context of the wider corporation: the policies, cultures and hierarchies within organisations, which may support or oppose the employment of people with disability.

### 6.1 Leadership and organisational support

The decision to employ a person with disability is often a complex one for organisations. While for smaller businesses, business owners inevitably make any decisions about hiring themselves, in larger organisations, **several personnel** may contribute to the decision. This can be problematic when, as would appear often to be the case, there are different perspectives, motivations and concerns around employing people with disability across the business.

The decision to employ someone largely appears to rest on interest and engagement from both **business leaders and line management**. The literature suggests that of the two, leaders may hold the upper hand. As one employer in the AHRI (2011) study noted:

*“I had hoped that further opportunities would arise where we could get the candidate back but it was a struggle convincing managers” (p. 15).*

Many employers identify a need for visible top management endorsement in demonstrating a serious commitment to employing people with disability (Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma, 2008). This is also indicated in research by Waterhouse et al. (2010) which reveals strong employer consensus that an organisational culture conducive to employing people with disability is defined by leadership proactivity and support. Leaders were seen to play an essential role in placing value on diversity and inclusion within the workplace, both in an ethical and practical sense; linking this with good corporate citizenship, and appreciating the impact of familiarity in breaking down stigma and prejudice within the workplace. The most proactive employers were reported to **mandate a commitment to diversity** both within the organisation (including setting staff performance indicators to reflect this) and amongst suppliers.

Nonetheless, the literature suggests that leadership commitment is often insufficient or non-existent, which presents a major obstacle to the recruitment and retention of employees with disability within any organisation. The National Willing to Work Inquiry (2016) reported that, without leadership endorsement, recruitment approaches to inclusion tend to be more ad-hoc without any real plan of action. Moreover, hiring managers and recruitment teams may experience difficulties in setting objectives for employees with disability without direction and support from senior leaders.

The research also draws attention to the role of **line managers** in influencing the organisation's approach to employing people with disability. As reported in Section 5, many managers lack self-efficacy around managing an employee with disability, and may resent having to do so (Evans et al. 2016). As a result, business leaders who are supportive of hiring people with disability may encounter resistance from managers. In light of their concern about the reactions of their staff, leaders may therefore choose not to proceed.

In view of the significance of leadership in driving the employment of people with disability within organisations, a number of suggestions have been put forward by industry leaders and experts aiming to engage business leaders on this issue. This includes calls to introduce **mandatory reporting** of disability employment (AHRI, 2012, Gluck, 2014, Disability Employment Australia, 2013), setting **employment targets** for larger organisations and adding **compliance clauses** for organisations tendering for government contracts (AHRI, 2011).

## 6.2 Policy and plans

Some organisations espouse a commitment to diversity, and may have a clearly articulated **corporate social responsibility** plan and/or inclusion strategy or policy or Disability Action Plan (Waterhouse et al., 2010).

While a formal plan or policy can be important for creating an organisational culture which is open to employing a person with disability, the literature suggests that it may not have the desired effect. The use of an overarching diversity and inclusion strategy can, for instance, create **competing priorities** in which people with disability lose to other causes (Business Council of Australia, 2015; National Willing to Work inquiry, 2016).

As one submission into the National Willing to Work inquiry (2016) put it, it was "*hard to focus on disability [with] so many other diversity balls to juggle*" (p.189). Similarly, findings from the Business Council of Australia's (2015) survey suggested that for many companies, a focus on disability competes with other diversity areas that are sometimes considered to take greater priority, such as gender balance and Indigenous engagement. Limited resources may mean that non-priority areas miss out.

Moreover, the literature suggests that there may be a lack of awareness within organisations about whether a specific policy exists (Australian Network on Disability, 2016).

## 6.3 Accessibility

A number of accessibility barriers relating to the employment of people with disability have been identified in regard to the design of jobs and workplaces (Coutts & Riddle, 2012; Evans et al., 2016; National Disability Forum, 2014; National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016; Te Pou, 2013). These include:

- poor building design making workplaces inaccessible;
- inaccessible technology and software (such as email for people with learning disabilities);
- lack of assistive technologies especially for those in higher-up in managerial positions;
- inaccessible methods of communication;
- lack of flexibility in work arrangements;
- failure of organisations to make reasonable adjustments and accommodations;

- failure to maintain adjustments if managers/supervisors change; and
- limited access to suitable transport for travelling to and from work.

Of these, issues pertaining to **accessible and assistive technology and workplace adjustments** are consistently ranked as most important and/or prevalent (Evans et al., 2016; National Disability Forum, 2014; National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016), and have been shown to have had significant detrimental impacts on the job prospects of employees with disability. For example, in the New Zealand Disability Survey (2013), 16% of employees with disability reported having to change their job because suitable accommodations were refused/not made by their employer. Evans et al. (2016) further found that people with disability often talk about having to ‘fight hard’ to get reasonable adjustments made for themselves and for other colleagues. As one participant, a public servant with a disability, put it:

*“I remember having to try and get some equipment for a physical disability and it was very difficult. .... Why does this person need this? It was so many questions it became an inordinate task” (p.53).*

Inaccessible design also impacts the opportunity for people with disability to find employment. For instance, **recruitment processes** often involve the use of telephone interviews and psychometric testing not set up for people with hearing and vision impairments, and/or a requirement for skills that automatically exclude them from eligibility even if the skills are not actually part of the role (e.g. having a driver’s license). Some employers acknowledge this, with the Hays (2014) study finding that only 41% of employers felt that their standard induction procedures are accessible to a person with a disability. Many submissions in the National Willing to Work Inquiry (2016) assert that there is insufficient funding to support people with disability through this process.

**Managerial attitudes**, particularly around time management and flexibility in working arrangements, are also commonly identified by people with disability as a barrier. An employee participant in Evans et al’s (2016) study reported how people without disability were not judged for taking flexi-time, such as leaving early to pick up their children, but when they used the flexitime policy to give themselves a rest or go to an appointment they faced resistance and judgement (Evans et al., 2016).

Waterhouse et al. (2010) found that the capacity to design and redesign jobs in order to employ people with disability productively emerged as a strong need, and employers expressed desire for support with these processes. The literature suggests that the modifications that employers are most willing to make are purchasing new equipment, and changing work patterns such as by embedding flexible hours, while the least popular accommodations may be the provision of different working environments (such as quiet areas to work) and introducing a sick leave policy for those with a disability (Reed in Partnership, 2016).

An employee in one study discussed the potential for ‘**universal design**’ in regard to workplaces which would remove the need for ‘special needs’ to be catered for. Reasonable adjustments would still have to be made, but these would be viewed as just an integral part of the workplace (Evans et al., 2016).

The desire for a universal design was echoed by findings from Te Pou (2013) who noted from interviews with people with disability that they did not want to be singled out in policies and work benefits due to a disability (such as extra leave), or only having disabled staff networks (and not networks for other groups). Rather, they thought that these should be part of a wider inclusive workplace so that people with disability were not seen as receiving special treatment. As an example, Reed in Partnership (2016) notes that flexible working is one of the most commonly

requested forms of reasonable adjustment made by disabled people, can benefit everyone, be relatively easy and inexpensive to implement.

Interestingly, in another study, one employer asserted that their organisation's move to more universal design had a positive impact on the whole company. They explained how having to change the company's recruitment processes to accommodate people with disability created more flexible processes and management across the organisation (Coutts & Riddle, 2012).

### **Key take-out**

It is clear from the literature that many structural, cultural and managerial issues within businesses make it difficult for people with disability to find and maintain employment. While communications can go some way to raising awareness, this reiterates the need for more targeted training and support programs within the workplace, equipping employers and managers with both the skills and the drive to provide greater opportunities for people with disability.

# 7. The role of government support

This section considers the literature relating to the role of government reimbursement and wage subsidies in building demand for employees with disability. It focuses on employers' knowledge and perceptions of these initiatives and how effective they appear to be as an inducement for business. It is important to note that the review focuses on literature relating to these incentives in a general sense only. Due to the ongoing review of Disability Employment Services, research exploring experiences with DES specifically is outside the scope of this study.

## 7.1 Perceptions of government reimbursement and subsidy schemes

Overall, the literature suggests that **government reimbursement and wage subsidies** are largely endorsed by employers, though the extent to which they **motivate** employers to hire a person with disability may vary (Employment Monitoring and Evaluation Branch study, 2011).

In some cases, the financial incentive is thought to have directly underpinned an employer's decision to hire someone with disability (Te Pou 2013, Coutts & Riddle, 2012). For example:

- In the Business Council of Australia's (2015) survey, some 35% of employers cited accessible government resources and assistance as key enablers.
- In Te Pou's (2013) qualitative study, when asked what would be the one thing that would help organisations increase the number of workers with disability that they employed, 'funding to support employees' was mentioned by several employers.
- Similarly, Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma (2008) identified a strong belief that employer tax credits and other economic incentives would be helpful to increase employment amongst employers who had employees with disability.

However, **wage subsidies are generally not the only consideration for employers**. Most emphasise that the candidate with disability still has to be right for the job. Incentives are largely seen as helpful for offsetting initial costs, but more often as an **attractive 'bonus'** rather than an absolute requirement for employment (Employment Monitoring and Evaluation Branch, 2011).

The literature also draws attention to some criticism of financial schemes voiced by employers. This includes concerns around:

- The impact of incentives on the perceived value of people with disability. While in the minority, a few employers in the study undertaken by Employment Monitoring and Evaluation Branch (2011) stated that financial incentives should not be offered as it sent the signal that the employee receiving the subsidy was 'less' than employees without disability and could be demoralising for the individual.
- The perception that they might encourage 'churn' (hiring an individual and employing them only for the minimum period required in order to receive the incentive). In the same study a small number of employers said that churn would always be an issue, particularly if only offered short term, as there would always be unscrupulous employers out to abuse the system (Employment and Monitoring Evaluation, 2011). In the main, however, most employers in this study dismissed this notion on the basis that they want value for money, which usually means keeping an employee for as long as possible. They pointed out that it would be wasteful to recruit and train someone for a short period just to receive a one-off wage subsidy.

Indeed, the literature suggests that people with disability generally support wage subsidies. The National Willing to Work Inquiry (2016) indicated that many people with disability view wage subsidies as an effective incentive for hiring a person with disability, strengthening understanding of the positive contribution made by people with disability, and encouraging employers, wider staff, and the community more broadly to recognise the person and their abilities first and foremost, rather than focussing on their disability.

Despite these broadly positive perceptions of wage subsidies, this review did not identify any empirical evidence for their effectiveness in increasing employment rates for people with disability.

## 7.2 Awareness of existing schemes

The literature highlights a **lack of awareness amongst employers of existing support or assistance for employing people with disability**. For example:

- In a study by AHRI, more than one-third (38.89%) of employees reported that they did not know about the financial assistance available to employers using DES, while 35.35% said they were somewhat aware of the existence of the assistance but not exactly sure on how to access the services. Moreover, over half (54%) of the employers who had never used DES reported that they had never heard of it.
- A previous study by DEEWR (2008) indicated that knowledge amongst corporate leaders (CEOs and HR managers) was extremely low with 75% unable to name a service without prompting. To the limited extent they showed awareness, participants assumed that support was only available in the form of financial subsidies.

One submission into the National Willing to Work Inquiry (2016) summed it up as follows:

*“People don’t know about [JobAccess]. Employers and employees should be better informed of what is available. She [employee] knew what she was entitled to and how to get it, but without her knowing that I don’t know how we would have navigated that process...it needs to be easier” (p. 188).*

### Key take-out

The literature suggests that while financial incentives and wage subsidies are an attractive bonus for employers, they are not a primary motivator. Though there is a case for raising awareness of existing employer focussed financial incentives, the extent to which they should be highlighted in communications remains uncertain – particularly in light of concerns around how they might affect employers’ perceptions of people with disability.

# 8. Differences across the employer community

Business owners are not a homogenous group, and show variation in their motivations, attitudes, priorities and concerns around employing people with disability. This section focuses on exploring the nature of these differences, in terms of business size (small, medium, large) and industry sector.

## 8.1 Business size

The literature reveals notable differences in the attitudes and perceptions of employers of different sizes on the topic of hiring people with disability, and the barriers and drivers that appear to underlie their decision to do so. In their review, Burke et al. (2013) found that the size of the organisation (small, medium or large) influenced not only attitudes toward employing people with disability at a general level, but also the types of concerns employers held.

The chart below provides a ‘snapshot’ of the differences in the concerns of businesses of different sizes around this issue. It is based on findings from a large scale quantitative study of employers in the USA (Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma, 2008), which specifically examined size related differences in their perspectives of and attitudes towards employing people with disability. A discussion of the specific concerns of small, medium and large businesses drawing on this research, and other literature from Australia and elsewhere follows.

**Figure 2: Employer concerns about hiring people with disability by business size (Percentage of businesses citing concerns)<sup>1</sup>**

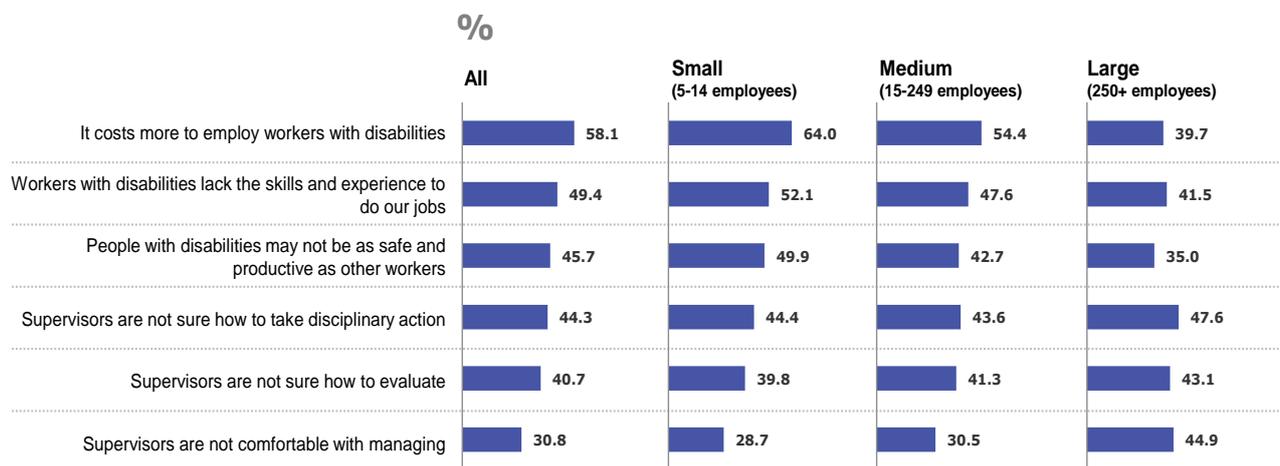


Figure 2 shows the top six concerns businesses have in employing people with disability. Based on all responses, the biggest concern is that it costs more to employ workers with disability (58.1%). This is followed by concerns around the skills and experiences of workers with disability (49.4%), as well as their

<sup>1</sup> Source: 2008 Survey of Employers Perspectives on the Employment of people with Disabilities, ODEP; Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma

Q19: Some employers have concerns about hiring people with disabilities. Here are some of the concerns we often hear from employers. For each, please let me know how much of a concern it is for your company" The following responses were available: a major concern, somewhat of a concern, not a concern.

Base: All companies, n= 3,797

safety and productiveness (45.7%). The last three concerns are all related to supervisors lacking skills, particularly in disciplinary action (44.3%), undertaking evaluations (40.7%) and managing a person with disability (30.8%).

### 8.1.1 Small business

Several studies draw attention to a wide range of beliefs and attitudes that deter smaller businesses from engaging people with disability. Indeed, the literature suggests that many of the primary attitudinal and belief based barriers cited in this report are magnified for this cohort of employers (Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma, 2008; Houtenville & Kalygrou, 2012; Jasper & Waldhart, 2013; Randle & Reis, 2016; Zapella, 2015). The more negative attitudes observed amongst small businesses are considered to be the result of limited familiarity with workers with disability, and, associated with this, limited knowledge about disability generally (Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma, 2008; Jasper & Waldhart, 2013).

The specific concerns that would appear to be particularly pronounced for smaller businesses focus on the following:

- **Greater prejudice around disability:** Several studies suggest that the barriers that smaller employers are likely to hold (or express) more negative views about people with disability compared to larger employers, (Jasper & Waldhart, 2013; Randle & Reis, 2016), including that they are less productive, will be absent more often and tend to be unqualified or unable to perform the required tasks (Burke et al, 2013; Fraser et al, 20; Employment Monitoring and Evaluation Branch, 2011; Houtenville & Kalygrou, 2012; 3; Randle & Reis, 2016). The Employee Monitoring & Evaluation Branch study (2011) for instance, found that employers in smaller organisations were more likely than employers in larger organisations to agree that:
  - *“people with disability tend to be less productive”* (mean score of 4.5 vs 3.6 for larger employers where a score of 10 =strongly agree).
  - *“people with disability are more likely to take time off due to illness’* (mean score of 4.7 vs 3.5 for larger employers, where a score of 10 = strongly agree).
- Smaller businesses have also been found to be more concerned about the reactions of customers (Jasper & Waldhart, 2013).
- **Lower self-efficacy, heightened external barriers:** The literature indicates that smaller businesses may also lack the knowledge, time, contacts, confidence and resources to be proactive in sourcing, recruiting and employing from equity groups, including people with disability (Waterhouse et al., 2010). Smaller employers in Waterhouse et al’s study (2010) asserted that they lacked the critical mass to justify the time required for building capability in this area. The more limited resources of SMEs relative to larger firms means that they struggle to navigate through complex legislation, especially if they do not have access to targeted resources and assistance. This results in the perception that employing people with disability is too difficult and thus detrimental to the “bottom line” (National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2016).
- **Greater cost sensitivity:** Cost has been shown to be a particularly sensitive issue for smaller employers, reflecting their often weaker financial security (Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma, 2008; Jasper & Waldhart, 2013; Randle & Reis, 2016; Employee Monitoring & Evaluation Branch, 2011).
- The literature reveals that smaller employers regularly express concern that costs associated with workplace accommodations, healthcare/insurance costs, and workers’ compensation place a greater burden on them than on larger employers, and are therefore a key barrier to hiring staff with disability (Burke et al., 2013; Houtenville & Kalygrou, 2012; Fraser et al., 2010;

Jasper & Waldhart, 2013; Zapella, 2015). Concerns are heightened if those costs are upfront (Employment Monitoring and Evaluation Branch, 2011). Some research also highlights that the assumption that there will be considerable costs involved in training and supervising people with disability may be more prevalent amongst smaller employers (Fraser et al., 2010).

- **Greater risk aversion:** A fear of litigation – tied to concern around workers' compensation claims is also of particular concern to smaller employers (Jasper & Waldhart, 2013, Waterhouse et al, 2010). In the study by Waterhouse et al. (2010), small employers also believed they were at greater risk than larger employers in the case of non-disclosure. Furthermore, the perception that people with disability heightened safety concerns were also pervasive amongst smaller employers (Houtenville & Kalygrou, 2012; Zapella, 2015).

### 8.1.2 Medium sized businesses

Research focussing on the barriers for medium sized businesses is more limited. There is some suggestion that medium businesses may be similar to smaller businesses in their outlooks and attitudes towards people with disability, particularly in terms of observed **prejudice** around their productivity, capability and job suitability (Jasper & Waldhart, 2013, Fraser et al, 2010).

Medium sized businesses appear to show comparatively less concern than smaller businesses, however, about **cost** (Fraser, 2010; Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma, 2008), **productivity** (Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma, 2008), physical accessibility (Fraser et al, 2010) and the **risk of litigation** (Fraser et al, 2010).

Perhaps unsurprisingly given their larger size, the research indicates that medium sized employers have a stronger focus on how **other staff** (both managers and co-workers) would react to an employee with disability (Fraser et al, 2010), though workplace tensions around this issue do not appear to be as pronounced as for larger business (see below).

### 8.1.3 Large business

Larger employers may be more appreciative of a wider range of **business benefits** through the employment of people with disability compared with their smaller counterparts. A study by Kalargyrou & Volis (2014), for instance, explored the views of industry leaders in hospitality (including Marriot Hotels, McDonalds, and the Hyatt Corporation). They reported that these large employers cited numerous benefits around hiring people with disability including:

- Gains from a more diverse workforce, such as improving innovation, tapping into wider problem-solving abilities and unique ideas, gaining insight and relevance across diverse markets and reacting to the expectations of diverse consumers;
- Benefits gained from exhibiting CSR objectives, including establishing a positive company image, improving marketing initiatives, and attending to social sustainability; and
- Productivity benefits, including maximising workforce talent, increasing retention, improving management skills, and creating barrier-free environments.

As confirmed by other studies, the concerns of smaller businesses around productivity, suitability, cost or risk are therefore less salient for this group (Fraser et al., 2010; Jasper & Waldhart, 2013; Employee Monitoring & Evaluation Branch, 2011; Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma, 2008). Rather, research exploring the barriers for larger organisations draws attention to **internal tensions** on the issue of employing people with disability that reflect conflicting perspectives amongst managers and leadership. Senior managers within these organisations highlight **resistance amongst line**

**managers**, claiming that they tend not to see the benefits of diversity, and are concerned about cost (Fraser et al., 2010; Jasper and Waldhart, 2013). Conversely, however, line managers point to resistance from **senior leaders** (AHRI, 2011; Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma, 2008).

## 8.2 Industry

The review reveals very little existing research examining differences in the drivers and barriers to engaging people with disability across businesses in different industries. While many studies focus on the issues for employers in one sector<sup>2</sup> this did not necessarily translate to the identification of findings that were pertinent to any one particular industry (i.e. most of the results replicated broader findings across industries).

The two exceptions were one US study that explored industrial differences quantitatively (Houtenville & Kalargyrou in 2015), and another US study that explored differences qualitatively between for profit and non-for-profit sectors (Hernandez et al., 2011). Drawing on the findings of the quantitative study, together with insights gleaned from research focussing on individual industries, the following themes emerge.

### 8.2.1 Service industries

Overall, there is most focus in the **literature on the leisure and hospitality sector** (and this generally extends to hoteling and restaurant). Employers in this sector have been found to show positive attitudes to hiring people with disability, in some cases, more so than employers in other industries (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2015; Paez & Arendt, 2014). Many businesses in this industry were found to have implemented diversity initiatives on the principle that a diverse workforce will provide a better customer experience to a clientele that is itself diverse (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2015).

Employers in this industry report benefits including tapping into a more **diverse talent pool** (and therefore new ideas, innovation, and greater problem-solving capacity), gains from an **enhanced public image and fulfilling CSR objectives**, as well as **higher retention and absenteeism rates**. However, there may also be drivers that are more specific to the sector – namely that employing people with disability meant establishing a more universally accessible space (i.e. ‘barrier-free’) which helped businesses access and welcome a much more **diverse range of customers** (Kalargyrou & Volis (2014).

While the concerns of employers in this industry have been reported to be less than for employers in other industries (Kalargyrou & Volis (2014), some studies indicate that they may view **customer attitudes** as being at least somewhat of a challenge when hiring people with disabilities (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012; Jasper and Waldhart; 2013). Hernandez et al. (2008) noted amongst a sample of employers from this sector (as well as healthcare) that perceptions of **manager bias** (relating to productivity and absenteeism concerns) also emerged as a major theme.

There are mixed reports in the literature around the significance of **costs** associated with workplace adjustment for employers in this sector.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Evans et al., 2016 focused exclusively on the Australian Public Service; Kalargyrou & Volis, 2014 focused exclusively on hospitality; Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012 and Jasper & Waldhart, 2013 focused exclusively on leisure and hospitality; Hernandez et al., 2008 focused exclusively on hospitality, leisure, and healthcare; Nota et al., 2013 focused exclusively on metalworking; and Paez & Arendt, 2014 focused exclusively on hotels and restaurants.

## 8.2.2 Goods producing industries

There is far less in the literature around the specific concerns of employers in goods producing industries such as manufacturing, logistics and warehousing (possibly reflecting the more limited participation of people with disability within these industries).

Overall, employers in this sector appear to be more likely to see the **nature of the work is such that it cannot be effectively performed by people with disabilities** (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2015, Nota et al., 2013; Domzal et al, 2008). One study found that this was a particular concern for employers in industries that require physically demanding work (Domzal et al, 2008).

## 8.2.3 For profit vs not for profit

A study examining the attitudes of employers in the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors also identified some interesting differences between the two groups (Hernandez et al., 2011):

- For-profit firms were found to be driven to hire people with disability as part of an overall selling strategy. This was attributed to the perceived positive impact on the company's image; or because hiring people with disability was seen as a viable source of labour when supply otherwise was low.
- By contrast, not-for-profit organisations were more likely to hire people with disability on the basis of building and sustaining community.

## 8.3 'Open' business

On an overall level, there is commonality in the literature around the types of businesses most likely to be open to employing people with disability on two key aspects:

- **Businesses which are larger in size:** For instance, compared with smaller businesses, and, to a lesser degree, medium sized businesses, employers in larger businesses:
  - have more **experience** in hiring people with disabilities (Randle & Reis, 2016; Houtenville & Kalygrou, 2015; Burke et al, 2013; Jasper & Waldhart, 2013);
  - are more likely to **recognise benefits** associated with hiring people with disability, and less likely to identify **costs** around productivity and suitability (Randle & Reis, 2016; Employee Monitoring & Evaluation Branch, 2011; Jasper & Waldhart, 2013; Fraser et al, 2010; Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma, 2008);
  - are less likely to attach **risks** to hiring people with disability (Randle & Reis, 2016; Employee Monitoring & Evaluation Branch, 2011; Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma, 2008; Jasper & Waldhart, 2013; Fraser et al, 2010);
  - are more likely to believe they have the **capacity** to support people with disability in the workplace (Employee Monitoring & Evaluation Branch, 2011);
  - may be less sensitive to the costs of **workplace adjustments** to accommodate people with disability (Employee Monitoring & Evaluation Branch, 2011).
- Businesses with some **previous experience** in hiring people with disability (Hemphill & Kulik, 2016; Waterhouse et al, 2010; Evans et al, 2016; Copestake et al, 2014; te Pou, 2013; Keating, Beaton & Foster, 2007; Zapella, 2015).
- In addition, international studies suggest that businesses in **service industries** (particularly leisure and hospitality) may be more open to employing people with disability (Kalargyrou &

Volis, 2014; Haoutenville & Kalargyrou, 2015; Paez & Arendt, 2014). Limited Australian research on this issue makes it difficult to draw conclusions about industrial differences in an Australian context however.

### **Key take-out**

Differences in the drivers and barriers across the business community point to the importance of targeting in any intervention strategy addressing this issue. The evident variation in the priorities and concerns of smaller and larger sized businesses, and businesses in different industries should be accommodated through messaging and media in a communications strategy (as described further in Section 11), ensuring a targeted approach that focuses on the most pertinent concerns for each business cohort. It is important however to note the gaps in this component of the review, particularly around industry. This may highlight a need for primary research to deepen our understanding of industrial differences in employer attitudes to hiring people with disability.

## 9. Disproving the myths

As this report demonstrates, one of the key barriers to the employment of people with disability relates to employers' perceptions of their productivity and suitability for work, and the risks associated with their employment. Empirically, the literature shows that many of their concerns are unfounded. This section provides an overview of the 'facts' about employees with disability, and their impact on business.

### **Myth 1: "People with disability are less productive"**

In fact, the literature suggests that employees with disability may be just as, or more productive as people without disability, and contribute to the profitability of the business. For instance:

- According to the survey conducted by the Australian Network on Disability (2016) 89% of organisations who employ a person with disability noted various positive benefits, with **four in ten citing an increase in productivity (42%)**.
- A survey of employers in the hospitality sector in the US, revealed that when compared to workers without disability, employees with disability obtained nearly **identical average ratings on job performance** (Hernandez and McDonald, 2010).
- The literature also attests to the **work ethic** of employees with disability. In research conducted by Employment Monitoring and Evaluation Branch (2011), employees with disability were reported to be **hard workers**, demonstrating a **positive attitude to work** and **dedication to the job**.

### **Myth 2: "People with disability are more likely to be absent from work"**

The literature suggests that people with a disability have **reduced rates of absenteeism**.

- A study by the Disability Investment Group (2009) found that employees with a disability have **fewer days of sickness absence** compared to the average employee, with the accrued cost of sickness absence for employees with disability less than half of the cost for an average employee (\$408 vs. \$881).
- Further, a US study found that there were no significant differences between scheduled or unscheduled absences between employees with disability and employees without disability across the healthcare and retail industries (Hernandez et al., 2008).

### **Myth 3: "There are many risks associated with employing people with disability"**

The literature indicates that employers' concerns around the risks associated with employing people with disability may be unfounded. For instance, a review by the Australian Safety and Compensation Council (2007) found that, compared with the 'average employee':

- employees with disability are in **workplace health and safety incidents** six times less frequently;
- **worker's compensation incidents** amongst employees with disability were four times lower; and
- compensation pay-outs are less.

Indeed, rather than representing a risk in the workplace, people with disability are frequently associated with loyalty and reliability. Several studies highlight their lower turnover rates and greater loyalty to the business (Disability Investment Group, 2009; Employment Monitoring and Evaluation Branch, 2011; Working Links, 2012).

For instance, in a study of 314 workers in health care, retail, and hospitality, Hernandez and McDonald (2010) found that **workers with disability stayed on the job 4.3 months longer than workers without disability**.

#### **Myth 4: “People with disability require special treatment in the workplace”**

While this review did not reveal recent Australian research on this topic, the international literature suggests that the belief that employees with disability require special treatment in the workplace may also be unsubstantiated.

For instance, in a survey of employers working in the hospitality sector in the US, when compared to workers without disabilities, employees with disabilities were reported to require **similar levels of supervision** (Hernandez and McDonald, 2010).

#### **Myth 5: “Employees with disability will create tension amongst staff”**

Rather than creating tension, employees with disability have often been reported to have a **positive impact on other staff**: Sizeable proportions of employers in several studies have associated employing people with disability with an increase in staff morale. For instance:

- 61% of employers in a survey conducted by the Australian Network on Disability (2016) said that hiring a person with disability had helped to **improve workplace morale**;
- 70% of employers in a study undertaken by Business Council of Australia (2015) claimed that one of the benefits of having a focus on people with disability in the workplace was increased **morale and staff engagement**.

The research also demonstrates the qualitative impact of employees with disability on the workplace, including, encouraging **tolerance in the workplace**, engendering a sense of **goodwill**, (Employment Monitoring and Evaluation Branch, 2011), and enhancing **corporate culture** (Business Council of Australia, 2015; Disability Investment Group, 2009).

#### **Myth 6: “Employees with disability will not represent the business well”**

In fact, many employers report that employees represent the business well, and promote a positive public image. For instance:

- Some 70% of employers in the survey by the Business Council of Australia (2014) stated there was a **reputational benefit** to hiring a person with disability.
- In research on the hospitality sector in the US, Kuo and Kalargyrou (2014) found that consumers demonstrated a **positive purchase intention** in restaurants employing significant numbers of service staff with disability.

#### **Myth 7: “Workplace adjustment is prohibitively expensive”**

- The literature suggests that workplace adjustment may actually be considerably less expensive than employers anticipate. While this review did not reveal any recent Australian research on this topic, international studies demonstrate that workplace adjustment costs may be relatively low. For instance:

- Several studies suggest that **over half of the accommodations that increase job/workplace accessibility may be low cost or cost nothing** - rather, reflecting adjustment to working arrangements such as allowing flexible hours. (Hernandez and McDonald, 2010; Meinert, 2012).
- Meinert (2012) indicated that the accommodations that do cost money typically involve a one off expense of about US\$500 (e.g. a larger computer monitor to accommodate an employee with a visual impairment).
- Woodley et al (2012) found that those respondents in their study who had employed people with disability had made no or only minimal workplace adjustments and incurred no or only minimal costs.
- The literature also highlights positive impacts of making physical accommodations for **consumers with disabilities** as well as employees, expanding a business' customer base and increasing long-term profitability (Faria et al., 2012; Poria et al., 2011).

**Myth 8: “People with disability offer businesses few economic benefits”**

- In fact, the research identifies many positive **economic impacts** for businesses employing people with disability. For instance:
- Several studies demonstrate that there may be **cost savings** in employing people with disability, by lowering turnover and hiring costs (the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2014; Lengnick-Hall, 2007). Further, when a wage support scheme exists, people with disability are a source of subsidised labour (Employment Monitoring and Evaluation Branch, 2011).
- In addition to reducing labour costs, the research also draws attention to the potential **earnings** created by employing people with disability. For instance:
  - Employees with disability are reported to offer insights into the **customer market of people with disability**. This could be significant from a business perspective, given that one in five have some type of disability and the rate is growing as the population ages. As the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2014) suggests, this is a significant growth sector.
  - Employers also associate employees with disability with **business innovation**. For instance, some 65% of employers in a survey conducted by the Business Council of Australia (2015) reported that having a focus on employees with disability encouraged innovation.

**Myth 9: Employees with disability are unlikely to be suitable for the role**

- The literature highlights the **broad pool of talent** that people with disability represent. Indeed, much of the research suggests that one of the most obvious business benefits is that the disability labour market may help to meet skills shortages across a range of industries and occupations (Australian Network on Disability, 2016; Business Council of Australia, 2015; Waterhouse et al., 2010).
- Importantly, the distribution of employees with disability across industries and occupations is broadly comparable with those without a disability<sup>3</sup>, demonstrating the breadth of roles that employees with disability can successfully perform (ABS, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> With the exception of labouring, where people with disability have higher levels of representation

**Key take-out**

The research confirms that the prejudices and stereotypes which deter employers from hiring people with disability are, to a great degree, false. Using empirical evidence to debunk these misconceptions may go some way to increasing awareness of the 'truth' about employing people with disability. Nonetheless, it is important to note that many of these beliefs are deep-seated and engrained, and founded to a greater degree on heuristics and biases than on rational thought. They are therefore likely to be difficult to change, particularly in the short-term. While statistics can be used to good effect in 'myth-busting', the extent of stigma surrounding this issue presents a fundamental challenge for communications. There is some concern that such an approach would actually serve to reinforce prejudices.

# 10. Employers' information, training and support needs

The literature reveals a strong need for employer targeted information, training and support, both in debunking the myths and misconceptions that may deter employers from considering people with disability, and in building employers' confidence and capacity to employ people with disability. Carefully designed information, resources, support and training could help to address these challenges. This section describes employers' preferences in this regard.

## 10.1 What are the priority issues?

As this review demonstrates, businesses have a need for support and assistance across many aspects of disability employment. In their qualitative research into effective strategies for engaging and supporting employers, Waterhouse et al (2010) identifies a range of issues about which employers expressed a need for assistance or information.

Drawing on the Waterhouse et al (2010) study, in addition to a number of other papers, the table below provides a summary of these information and support needs, across the various stages of employing a person with disability.

**Table 5: Summary of employer information and support needs by employment stage**

Stage of employment	Information and supports needed
Pre-employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Accurate information about the capabilities of people with disability, and their suitability for work (Burke et al, 2013; Domzal, Houtenville &amp; Sharma, 2008)</li> <li>▪ Accurate information about the cost of accommodation (Burke et al, 2013)</li> <li>▪ Understanding and managing people with disability, explanation of the condition (Waterhouse et al, 2010; Woodley et al, 2012)</li> <li>▪ Understanding rights and responsibilities under employment law (Waterhouse et al, 2010, Burke et al, 2013)</li> <li>▪ Assistance in building a business case (Business Council of Australia, 2015)</li> <li>▪ Assistance in assessing workplace needs, culture and readiness to employ (Waterhouse et al, 2010)</li> <li>▪ Direction to 'work ready' candidates (Waterhouse et al, 2010)</li> <li>▪ Availability of subsidies and support (Waterhouse et al, 2010)</li> </ul>
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Explaining the nature of disability and capabilities (Waterhouse et al, 2010, Woodley, 2013)</li> <li>▪ How to encourage open disclosure (Waterhouse et al, 2010)</li> </ul>

Stage of employment	Information and supports needed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How to make 'reasonable and adjustments' (Waterhouse et al, 2010)/ access or adaptive technology (Woodley, 2012)</li> <li>▪ Cost subsidies for 'reasonable adjustments' (Waterhouse et al, 2010, Woodley, 2012)</li> <li>▪ How to minimise risk (Waterhouse et al, 2010; Woodley, 2012)</li> <li>▪ Information on the performance of individual DES (Business Council of Australia, 2015)</li> <li>▪ Assistance with recruiting/ selection (Waterhouse et al, 2010)</li> <li>▪ Assistance with processing paperwork to access government subsidies (Waterhouse et al, 2010)</li> <li>▪ Links to specialist service providers (Waterhouse et al, 2010, Burke et al, 2013)</li> </ul>
Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Information on good practice in key business areas (Business Council of Australia, 2015)</li> <li>▪ Information/ advice around managing people with disability (Woodley, 2013)</li> <li>▪ Disability awareness training for staff (Waterhouse et al, 2010, Woodley 2012)</li> </ul>
Post-placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 'Reasonable adjustment' in performance appraisals and assessments (Waterhouse et al, 2010)</li> <li>▪ Workforce development strategies (Waterhouse et al, 2010)</li> <li>▪ 'Strengths based' practice (Waterhouse et al, 2010)</li> </ul>

## 10.2 What type of assistance do employers want?

Reflecting the perceived complexities of disability employment, the literature suggests that employers desire **ongoing support and consultation**, opportunities for **collaboration and knowledge sharing**, and supportive **information and resources** that are accessible and practical. More detail about each of these appears below.

### 10.2.1 'Learning' and ongoing support

In view of the significance of employer skill and confidence in engaging people with disability, there is considerable support for training employers as a means of increasing their 'disability confidence' (Reed in Partnership, 2016). Employers place particular emphasis on **ongoing support** (Employment Monitoring and Evaluation Branch, 2011; Te Pou, 2013, Waterhouse et al, 2010), Business Council of Australia, 2015, Woodley et al, 2012; Burke et al, 2013), and **informal or "on the job" learning**: working with an employee with disability, while having access to the support of an informed consultant or knowledgeable third party for information, support and assistance (Business Council of Australia, 2015; Waterhouse et al, 2010).

In Waterhouse et al's (2010) study, employers highlighted the need for ongoing learning opportunities that focus on **real workplace events**, and can be accessed as required. They saw particular value in:

- Forming relationships with **'trusted knowledge brokers'** and intermediaries such as consultants from group training organisations or DES providers. The opportunity to draw on the expertise of a 'trusted third party' in an ongoing capacity was thought to be particularly helpful in building a business case, interpreting and negotiating processes (including government assistance, job design and workplace adjustment), providing on the job support for employees, and mentoring for employers.
- Opportunities to access **'experts'** for advice and support around expectations and approaches for employing people with certain types of disability, including 'picking up the signs', in scenarios where disability was undisclosed.

The literature suggests that this type of informal and ongoing learning and support is overwhelmingly preferred to more formal or accredited one-off training 'programs', particularly for small and medium sized employers.

The literature is less forthcoming about the training and support needs of larger businesses. It is clear however, that larger businesses are generally relatively well informed about disability employment and have the knowledge and resources to remain up to date without requiring extensive external support (Waterhouse et al, 2010). Rather, Houtenville & Katagyrou (2012) suggest that they may be more likely to see benefit in mentoring and disability awareness training for staff.

### 10.2.2 Knowledge sharing and collaboration

The literature points to considerable interest in **collaboration and knowledge sharing** across the employer community (Waterhouse et al. 2010, Business Council of Australia, 2015, Woodley, 2013). Employers see appropriate networks as providing vital support in successfully identifying, accessing and recruiting people with disability and then ensuring that they achieve employment success. A large proportion (70%) of respondents to the BCA's survey (2015) said they were interested in accessing networks where they could find opportunities to collaborate with like businesses/industry partners, citing this as a major enabler. Some 40% also identified a need for assistance from the government to identify potential partners.

Volkoff, Clarke and Walstab (2008) also highlighted considerable interest amongst employers in developing effective partnerships and networks, though note some concern around the perception that connectivity amongst relevant disability employment organisations (including government and non-government providers) is very limited.

### 10.2.3 Information and resources

There is also recognition of the need for information around various aspects of disability employment. Some 35% of respondents to the Business Council of Australia's survey (2015) nominated 'accessible government resources/ assistance' as offering assistance in overcoming barriers to employing people with disability.

Even so, the literature points to low levels of awareness of existing information and resources, particularly amongst smaller businesses (Waterhouse et al, 2010; National Willing to Work Inquiry, 2015), while those who are aware of information are reported to find it confusing (Waterhouse et al,

2010). Employers in the Waterhouse et al study (2010) saw a need for an **intermediary** to 'translate' important information in ways that employers could understand, and apply to their specific situation. Findings therefore highlight the importance that information is **accessible** for employers, suggesting that, for small and medium enterprises, this is often not the case.

Larger organisations are generally considered to have greater awareness of relevant information and be better able to interpret it (Waterhouse et al, 2010). Nonetheless, their primary focus is on changing cultural attitudes and convincing other staff to accept employees with disability, and they may be keen to access information and resources that can help them to do that (Fraser et al, 2010; Houtenville and Kalargyrou, 2012; Jasper and Waldhart, 2012). For instance, Fraser et al (2010) identified a desire amongst larger employers for Information about the positive work performance of employees with disability that they could share with line managers in order to 'prove' their value as employees (Fraser et al, 2010).

There is little in the literature around preferred formats and delivery channels for employer-targeted resources or information, highlighting an area of focus for any subsequent primary research.

### **Key take-out**

The literature clearly highlights a need for business to be better supported through the process of employing a person with disability. Providing opportunities for informal learning through ongoing support, and knowledge sharing through peer networks should perhaps be the focus of any intervention in this space, though suitably accessible information and resources also have an important role to play. Preferred formats and delivery channels could be explored through qualitative research with the target audience.

# 11. Communication insights

In this section consideration of recent literature on communications around employment for people with disability is examined. The focus is on exploring key themes informing best practice for campaigns in this area, in terms of strategy, targeting, delivery, and message framing.

## 11.1 Theoretical frameworks

Initiatives aiming to increase employment amongst people with disability are commonly underpinned by two broad theoretical frameworks. Each aims to explain workplace inclusion/exclusion and puts forward targeted interventions as a means of increasing the participation of people with disability in the workforce. A brief description of each theory appears below as a means of providing context for the role of communications to this end.

### 11.1.1 Rational Economics

The “rational” economic outlook suggests that **economic incentives** are what drive inclusion/exclusion, and thus what stops or encourages an employer to hire people with disability are considerations such as their level of **productivity**, and the additional **resources** (cost, time, effort) of implementing necessary assistance. According to this theory, economic incentives for hiring people with disability, such as wage subsidies, are strong motivators for increasing employer demand, and any costs that may come with hiring a person with a disability need to be reimbursed (Gluck, 2014).

Communications are also seen to play a role in building employer demand, by correcting misconceptions about productivity (i.e. that people with disability are unproductive); and raising awareness of the financial incentives and reimbursements available to employers. This theory also advocates providing information and support around how to design and build more inclusive workplaces.

### 11.1.2 Social perspective – social model of disability

Central to the social model of disability is the notion that ‘**disability**’ is **socially constructed** – i.e. the result of interaction between people living with impairments and the way that society is organised and structured. According to this theory, the environment presents numerous physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers that must be challenged in order to accommodate people living with impairment – so, for example, an inability to walk is not what keeps a person from entering a building, the design of the building is.

This theory maintains that **prejudice**, rather than a material issue, is the main barrier to social and workforce inclusion. This is caused by incomplete, incorrect, and negative portrayals of people with disability in the media and society at large and the lack of control that people with disability have over their own voice, image, and representation. From this perspective comes the well-known rallying cry “Nothing about us, without us” reflecting the belief that people with disability need to be active participants in any decisions made about them (Thompson et al., 2011).

The implications of the social model of disability for increasing employer demand are principally two-fold: economic incentives are insufficient for building more inclusive workplaces because

rational economic motives do not hold – a person with disability might in real terms be as productive as a person without a disability but they are continuously misperceived as being less so. Moreover, the theory suggests that even when employers' perceptions of the productivity of people with disability are less discriminatory, the social stigma/structure of social exclusion surrounding people with disability may still serve as a barrier to considering employing them.

Overall, the social model theory highlights the critical importance of the **framing** of communications on this issue; and the need to complement communications with adjustments to the wider social structures (e.g. a wider move to implement flexible working arrangements for everyone).

### 11.1.3 The role of communications

As both the economic and social models of disability demonstrate, communications have an important role to play in increasing employer demand for people with disability. The lack of awareness, understanding, contact and experience leads to, in anthropological terms, a creation and fear of 'the Other' which underlies discriminatory attitudes (Waterhouse et al., 2010).

This is highlighted throughout the literature. The submission by Brain Injury Australia to the Australian Government's discussion paper on the future of Disability Employment Services (Rushworth, 2009) identified a lack of information as the reason for employers' negative attitudes and misconceptions. Similarly, Morin et al. (2013) found that fears related to 'knowledge of capacity' are associated with negative attitudes toward people with an intellectual disability (Morin et al., 2013), and that provision of even a small amount of information about the disability can positively influence attitudes (Scior, 2011).

This pervasive theme of a **lack of awareness and understanding** has also led to frequent calls for education and awareness raising (Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma, 2008). For example, when asked what information or support could be given to employers that might encourage them to hire someone with a disability, 20% of respondents in one survey cited an education and awareness campaign (Woodley, Metzger & Dylan, 2012).

Overall, the literature suggests that communications can play an important role in:

- Educating employers and increasing awareness and knowledge of people with disability and their capabilities within the workplace (Randle and Reis, 2016, Woodley, Metzger & Dylan, 2012);
- Promoting the benefits of employing people with disability – providing evidence regarding work ethic, commitment and productivity and the positive impact of diversity on workplace and organisational culture (Randle and Reis, 2016);
- Demonstrating effective job-matching and positive outcomes for both employers and employees (Randle and Reis, 2016);
- Challenging prejudice (Szeto & Dobson, 2010, Haller & Ralph, 2001); and,
- Instructing employers about how to create an inclusive workplace and management approaches, and where to access support services (Randle & Reis, 2016, Copestake et al., 2014).

Empirically, much of the research examining the impact of communications in this area focuses on employment amongst people with mental illness. Nonetheless, as Randle and Reis (2016) assert, there is sufficient commonality across the drivers and barriers to employment for all people with disability to allow us to learn a great deal from the successes and failings of such campaigns.

Drawing on Randle & Reis' (2016) review of communications in this area, as well as on research conducted in Australia and overseas, some of the best practice principles for designing communications on the topic of disability and employment are described below.

#### 11.1.4 Strategy

The literature points to three broad communications strategy approaches used to challenge stigma and prejudice.

- **'Protest'** approaches use messages that demonstrate the immorality of prejudice and stigma, and directly ask the audience to change their behaviour. Thompson et al (2011) suggest caution with this approach, noting that if the message comes across as too direct, then it may elicit a defensive response. Nonetheless, the literature demonstrates that this approach can have a positive attitudinal impact. For instance, in a study by Walker & Scior (2013) students watched a documentary film about a hate crime experienced by a person with an intellectual disability. The study's results demonstrated that in the short-term the film was effective at improving attitudes regarding social inclusion and social distance and evoked strong emotional reactions.
- **'Educational'** approaches focus on using information to correct false beliefs and stereotypes – thereby challenging prejudicial attitudes. This approach is often used in anti-stigma campaigns, though Thompson et al (2011) note that its impact is unclear; while such campaigns are frequently shown to result in short-term attitudinal change, the effectiveness of this type of approach in the longer term is less certain.
- **'Social contact'** approaches prioritise facilitating face-to-face contact with the stigmatised group. Some research suggests that this approach elicits more positive impacts in the longer term (Corrigan et al, 2003). Noting its impracticalities for a mass audience, Thompson et al (2011) point to the potential benefits of adapting this approach to provide audiences with indirect contact with people with disability through the presentation of personal stories and anecdotes (see Section 11.1.5 below). This approach has become increasingly popular since conscious efforts have been made to move away from the medical model of disability and corresponding medicalised images (Bolt, 2014).

#### 11.1.5 Delivery

The literature suggests that, given their reach, **mass media campaigns** may help to challenge stigma and prejudice on a community scale (Crisp et al, 2005 and Gaebel et al, 2008).

Nonetheless, Szeto & Dobson (2010) point to the benefit of a **more targeted approach through workplace communications**. While not eliciting the reach of mass media campaigns, workplace based communications may be able to offer more detailed information of specific relevance to workplaces, and, potentially, deliver impacts that can be sustained in the longer term.

Researchers also highlight the importance of **context** to message take-out. Several experimental studies demonstrate how the context in which information is presented has a considerable effect on its impact (Barden et al., 2004), and may only contribute to attitudinal change when the audience is in the same situation in which the information was presented to them (Gawronskiet al., 2010; Krupa et al., 2009). This clearly highlights the importance of workplace targeted communications in challenging employer prejudice around the capabilities of people with disability in the workplace.

A number of campaigns have sought to tackle prejudice and lack of awareness regarding people with disability in the workplace. Case studies of the UK campaign, “Let me Work”, “Don’t DIS my Ability” in Australia and “What Can You Do” campaign in the US) appear in Section 12.

As part of workplace targeted intervention, the literature also points to the benefits of providing opportunities for **face-to-face contact** between employers and people with disability (Randle & Reis, 2016; Corrigan & Gelb, 2011). Corrigan & Gelb’s guide to changing stigma (2011) draws on research that demonstrates the positive impact of contact and familiarity on attitudes. This research advocates using targeted programs to provide repeated exposures of people who are relatable to a specific group. Randle & Reis (2016) suggest that contact might be best achieved through education programs or seminars targeting employers. Trial employment programs (including volunteering and work experience) are also suggested as a means of lowering the perceived risks of offering permanent employment.

Drawing on the ‘contact’ approach, Ireland’s Job Shadow Day campaign aims to build employers’ familiarity with working with people with disability, by inviting a person with disability to spend a day ‘shadowing’ an employer at work. A case study of this campaign appears in Section 12.

While face-to-face contact is impractical for media campaigns, ‘indirect’ contact strategies are commonly employed, whereby an audience feels as if they are having a conversation with a person with disability in real life. Such approaches often use **personal anecdotes and storytelling** thus making the audience feel as if they are getting to know the person in real life.

The literature also draws attention to the significant role played by **intermediaries**, notably, **group training organisations**, in communicating to employers on this issue (Waterhouse et al, 2010). As described in Section 10, intermediaries offer considerable support and assistance to employers in building their capacity to engage people with disability, including through the provision of information that is clearer for smaller sized businesses, than much of the information provided by government and professional disability support services.

### 11.1.6 Targeting

There is overwhelming consensus in the social marketing literature that communications messages must be targeted to different audience sub-groups. Effective targeting, by challenging the perceptions and attitudes that underlie the behaviour of specific audience cohorts, increases the likelihood that messages are noticed, accepted and internalised.

#### Targeting based on attitude/ behaviour

Social marketing theory points to the importance of considering variation in the existing attitudes and behaviours of the target audience in developing targeted messages.

The only attitudinal/ behavioural segmentation of employers revealed in this review was in a qualitative study conducted in Australia by Hemphill & Kulik (2016). This study divided employers into antagonists (those who would not hire people with disability), non-hirers (those who hadn’t hired people with disability but weren’t actively opposed to it), light hirers (those who had hired a person with disability once or twice) and loyal hirers (those who proactively recruited people with disability). Findings point to the potential effectiveness of customising messages for each segment, as follows:

- For antagonists: the study concluded that antagonists were best left alone due to what were regarded as insurmountable barriers to employment for this group. It was asserted that tackling

the stigma around disability would require a significant cultural shift, possibly beyond the scope of communications.

- Non hirers: unlike antagonists, non-hirers were thought to represent a viable target audience for communications aiming to build employer demand. Communication messages should promote the business case for hiring people with disability and increase awareness of the various types of available support, such as services that assist with recruitment and the cost and implementation of workplace modifications.
- Light hirers: focus on promoting awareness of assistance (advice, training, knowledge, money) with hiring people with disability so as to show that it is not difficult and/or costly, and the benefits (social and economic) of hiring people with disability.
- Loyal hirers: no need for targeting (doing so may cause resentment as they feel inundated with requests and are already taking a proactive stance).

This review did not identify any statistical segmentation models of employers in relation to their attitudes to employing people with disability.

### Targeting based on business size

In the context of disability and employment, as described in Section 8.1, employers of different sizes also demonstrate different priorities and concerns around the employment of people with disability. The literature indicates that messages should be tailored accordingly, with some commonality in suggested themes for each.

- Larger businesses: Much of the research points to the increasing importance of corporate social responsibility for larger corporations. Workplace diversity is an important indicator of corporate social responsibility, highlighting the potential resonance of messages that draw attention to the employment of people with disability in these terms (Cordero et al., 2014; Randle & Reis 2016).
- For smaller businesses, research suggests that messaging should focus on highlighting **satisfactory job performance** and positive impacts on productivity (Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma, 2008, Fraser et al, 2010). Randle & Reis (2016) argue that messages highlighting the financial support available for workplace adjustment may also be meaningful. Further, Fraser et al (2010) suggest that this group may be receptive to communications focussing on **commitment and loyalty**. This study notes that as a smaller business, employers are more likely to have direct contact with employees with disability, and thus show more empathy for people with disability on a personal level, which can be leveraged effectively through communications.

#### 11.1.7 Framing

The framing of messages in communications also plays an essential role both in driving audience involvement and engagement, and contributing to the credibility, relevance and impact of messages. Much research has focussed on the most effective means of framing communications focussing on disability. The approaches below have been found to be most successful in general communications around disability, particularly in challenging prejudicial attitudes and perceptions.

#### **Focussing on ability rather than disability:**

The literature highlights the importance of focussing on personal ability rather than disability in any communications on this issue, highlighting achievements and performance rather than impairments or personal needs (Randle & Reis, 2016, Von Sikorski & Schierl, 2014).

A German study by Von Siroski & Schierl (2012) showed that focusing on a person with disability's capacity and not their limitations, results in more positive attitudes. In this study, the impact of two news frames were tested – one framed the story of an athlete with disability in regard to his disability exclusively, and the other framed the story of an athlete with disability in regard to his performance in competitive sports. Findings pointed to a significant 'framing' effect on the participants' attitudinal evaluations of the depicted athlete with disability, whereby those who read article with the "sports" frame had more positive attitudes than those who read the article with the "disability" frame.

Campaigns such as "Don't DIS my Ability" and the "What Can You Do" campaign utilise this approach and focus exclusively on the workplace, as described further in Section 12.

### Using positive framing and avoidance of pity

There is broad consensus through the literature that communications should use positive framing and avoid eliciting audience pity (Kamenetsky et al., 2016, Randle & Reis, 2016). The New Zealand Limitless with Support campaign (2017) is a good example of this, featuring a person with disability taking part in activities that may be considered stereotypically 'too extreme'.



*With the assistance of a professional mountain climber, who was keen to help, Neelu Memon climbed Mt Aspiring in 2010.*

### Normalising images of disability

The positive impact of normalising disability through the use of presenting an image of disability that is 'naturalised' rather than 'stigmatised' or 'medicalised' is also a recurring theme through the literature (Haler & Ralph, 2001; Randle & Reis, 2016). For example, a study by Smedema, Ebener & Grist-Gordon (2012) found that a humorous stand-up routine by a comedian with disability elicited far more positive audience responses than a serious documentary about a person with disability. Humour, as noted by Gluck (2014) is one the most effective strategies for achieving normalisation.

The "I am Artist Campaign" in New Zealand's ongoing Think Differently initiative is also a good example of a normalising approach, as is the NSW "I can, I am" campaign in the Don't DIS my Ability initiative, explored further in Section 12.



### Depicting positive interactions and social support

Allied to the above, demonstrating positive interactions between people with disability and people without disability has also been found to be effective, helping to shape the belief that people with disability are just like everybody else and contributing to more positive attitudes towards inclusion.

Positioning interactions in everyday situations assists in normalising disability (Randle & Reis, 2016; Von Sikorski & Schierl, 2014). A study by Von Sikorski et al. (2012), for instance, found that attitudes towards an athlete with disability were significantly more positive when the visual frame included spectators in the background picture (implying social support for the athlete) compared to when there were no spectators in the background.

The “Let Me Work” campaign illustrates this effectively by showing one of the featured people with disability having lunch with his co-workers and making his boss laugh. The #iseebeyond campaign also provides a good example of this, depicting positive interactions between people with disability and carers, co-workers, and friends (see Section 12).

### Using personal anecdote and story-telling and featuring ‘real life’ spokespeople

The use of personal anecdote helps to connect the narrator and the audience, and is effective both as a means of involving the audience and for enhancing the credibility and take-up of messages.

Employers, in particular have been found to respond more positively to testimonials from other employers. In order to optimise relatability, the selection of employers should be matched to the intended audience segment in terms of business size and industry (Randle & Reis, 2016). Well known identities may also be used to raise the profile of the campaign, or demonstrate achievement (Randle & Reis, 2016).

### Avoiding ‘government speak’

The literature also highlights disinclination amongst smaller employers to engage with professional or ‘politically correct’ language around disability— often used by government and advocates. Waterhouse et.al (2010) assert that for many smaller employers, this language is often “*indirect*,

*opaque and confusing*" (p.21). Rather, their research suggests that employers are likely to respond better to factual and direct information framed in response to their specific concerns.

### **Key take-out**

These findings provide useful direction for the development of a communications strategy, drawing on best practice approaches. There remain gaps in our understanding of some of the key aspects of communications development in this area, however, pointing to the need for primary research with the target audience.

## 12. Case studies

The case studies are intended to provide examples of the practical application of communications principles and theories detailed in Section 11. The communications presented below include multi-component media campaigns (12.1), as well as communications and resources intended for use within workplaces (12.2). All have been selected as examples that appear to epitomise best practice in this area.

### 12.1 Campaigns

#### CASE STUDY: 'Let Me Work' campaign

**Name of campaign/ program and organisation:** The 'Let Me Work' campaign was launched by Livability, charity organisation that provides disability and community services and with a focus on promoting inclusion.



**Location and year of campaign:** The campaign was launched in 2013 in the United Kingdom (UK).

**Objective/ about:** The campaign was predicated on research that found that employers' attitudes towards disability are the most significant barrier for people with disability when it comes to employment.

The campaign calls on employers to take on a more pro-active approach and help widen access to employment for people with disability. This is in line with Livability's (2013) overarching organisational aim which is centred on helping people with disability achieve their full potential and eliminating the many barriers that prevent them from doing so. They recognise that employment, work experience and volunteering opportunities are key to a person with disabilities' long term independence.

**Audience:** The target audience of the campaign is employers in the UK (across all industries).



**Format:** The campaign consists of one video (a film) featuring two people with disability who work in different industries (graphic design and science) narrating their personal story of overcoming the barriers that people with disability typically face in the workplace.

**Specific messages used:** The campaign title “Let Me Work” affirms that it is not the disability serving as a barrier to work, but rather places the emphasis on employers, as representing the primary barrier, by stopping people with disability being given a ‘fair chance’.

**Theoretical approach:**

The campaign takes the perspective of the social model of disability (Oliver, 2013). It asserts that prejudice, not disability, is what is behind higher-than average unemployment rates for workers with disability. By promoting images of people with disability in the workforce, the campaign intends to ‘normalise’ this (Bolt, 2014).

**Strategic approach:** The campaign also combines all three communication strategy approaches:

- ‘Contact’ - by getting the audience to ‘know’ the featured person with disability better and thus familiarise themselves with disability;
- ‘Education’ - by promoting awareness of benefits; and
- ‘Protest’ - by highlighting the impact of discrimination.

It is also a particularly good example of workplace targeting. By focusing on the workplace it can provide detailed information necessary for raising awareness and challenging stigma specific to this context.

**Best practice guidelines:** Additionally, the campaign illustrates many other best practice guidelines in regards to how to frame disability in the media effectively, such as:

- Normalising images of people with disability.
- Depicting positive interactions between people with disability and people without disability.
- Using personal anecdote and storytelling as a device.

**Evaluation/ efficacy:** Although there was no formal evaluation, the press and PR manager for Livability said “people have found them [the films] both moving and informative... although they tackle difficult issues, the films also manage to be uplifting at the same time and aim to make people want to take action and get involved”. Furthermore, the films won a number of awards including an IVCA Clarion Gold Award (Spectrecom, 2016).

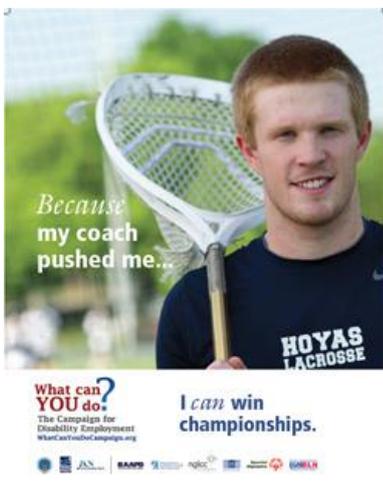
## CASE STUDY: The 'What Can YOU do' campaign

**Name of campaign/ program and organisation:** The 'What Can YOU do' campaign for disability employment was funded and launched nation-wide by the U.S. by the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (What Can You Do, nd).

**Location and year of campaign:** The campaign has been running since 2010 and has had three staggered phases – "I Can", "Because" and "Who I Am".

**Objective/ about:** The overarching aim of the campaign is to change attitudes around the employment of people with disability, and promote dialogue around this important issue. As the campaign notes: "Work is fundamental to our lives – it offers purpose and the opportunity to lead an independent, self-directed life for all people, including people with disabilities." (What Can You Do, nd). The campaign aims to ensure that people with disability know that they have a right to work, and a right to be evaluated on their ability, "because after all, at work it's what people can do that matters" (What Can You Do, nd).

**Audience:** General population, with a focus on people with disability; employers.



**Format:** The 'What can YOU do?' campaign is multi-faceted but predominantly involves two key components:

- Three public service announcements (PSAs) - "I Can," "Because" and "Who I Am", realised at different stages across the campaign lifespan.
- A website, with information resources for people with disability and for employers. The website is also a platform for people with disability to share how they can positively contribute to a workplace, starting with the phrase "I am..."

The "I Can" PSA features seven people at work showing that they make a valuable contribution to their workplace every day. To date it has aired more than 65,500 times on television, cable and radio stations nationwide and in AMC theatres.

The "Because" campaign was released in January 2013 and included the PSA, posters and discussion guides. It features seven real people who have realised their goals with the support and encouragement they receive from everyday people in their lives. To date it has aired more than 103,000 times on television and cable stations nationwide, through various outdoor mediums, and as part of meetings, conferences, and presentations.

The "Who I Am" PSA debuted at the White House in October 2014. It features nine people with disability sharing their story. It is still airing on television stations and cable outlets nationwide. To date it has been aired more than 100,000 times. It is also available to the public on an accessible DVD and in multiple formats on the web.



**Specific messages used:** Each of the phases of the campaign has its own message. These are:

- The "I Can" phase aimed to demonstrate what people with disabilities can do at work, urging employers to capitalise on these talents through inclusive employment practices that benefit everyone.
- The "Because" phase aimed to increase expectations of youth with disabilities, their parents, mentors, as well as future employers, about what they can achieve in their careers.
- The "Who I Am" campaign asked “when we look at someone, do we see all of who they are?” – a call not to see someone as defined by their disability.

**Theoretical approach:** Focusing on ability, each phase of the ‘What can YOU do?’ campaign promotes the social model of disability and reflects the approach advocated for by the disability sector.

**Strategic approach:** The campaign’s overall strategy is a mix of ‘education’ (raising awareness) and ‘contact’ (exposing and introducing and increasing the familiarity of people without disability to people with disability).

**Best practice guidelines:** The campaign is a good example of how to effectively frame disability in the media by adhering to best practice guidelines such as:

- Focussing on ability rather than disability
- Using positive framing and avoidance of pity
- Using personal anecdote and story-telling:
- Normalising images of disability
- Depicting positive interactions and social support
- The campaign explicitly targets the workplace, and as such can provide more specific information. The literature suggests this is likely to have a longer lasting impact (Randle & Reis, 2016).

**Evaluation/ efficacy:** The review did not source any evaluation data for this campaign.

## CASE STUDY: The Don't DIS my Ability campaign

**Name of campaign/ program and organisation:** Don't DIS my Ability is a campaign run by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services. It supports the Government's ongoing priority areas to develop positive community attitudes and behaviours and increase the number of people with disability in meaningful employment (Don't DIS my Ability, nd)

**Location and year of campaign:** The campaign is a NSW based initiative that began in 2004. The last wave of the campaign (2016) ran from 21 November to 11 December and was called "I can, I am".



**Objective/ about:** The Don't DIS my Ability campaign has the overarching aim of encouraging people to 'think and act inclusively, in all aspects of life'. The campaign 'celebrates the diversity and ability of people with disability', and provides them with a platform 'to have a voice and celebrate their achievements' (Don't DIS my Ability, nd).

The 2016 wave of the campaign ("I can, I am") celebrated people with disability who have overcome barriers to gain meaningful employment. It aimed to inspire and foster confidence in people with disability to assist them in finding employment. It also challenged the public to re-evaluate their attitudes around the employment of people with disability.

**Audience:** General population

**Format:** The "I can, I am" phase included three videos and two blog posts, each featuring people with disability sharing their experience with gaining employment and working in their respective industries/workplaces. In doing so, it aimed to encourage other people with disability to strive to seek meaningful employment and challenge employer misconceptions that a person with disability would not be a capable member of their workforce.

**Specific messages used:** The slogan "I can, I am" orients the public focus to be on what people with disability CAN do rather than what they cannot.

**Theoretical approach:** The campaign draws on a number of theoretical approaches, including:

- It reflects the social model of disability which asserts that the way society is structured, and not disability, is the main barrier to success employment (Oliver, 2013).
- It uses personal narrative, illustrating the foundational principle advocated for by the disability sector, "nothing about us, without us".

**Strategic approach:** In order to achieve its objective, the campaign implements three strategic approaches:

- 'Contact' - introducing the audience to people with disability;

- 'Education' - raising awareness that people with disability want to, and can participate in the workplace; and
- 'Protest' - bringing up common examples of discrimination e.g. prejudicial attitudes and misperceptions that people with disability in the workplace face in order to challenge them.



A film series about people with disability at work.

WATCH NOW

**Best practice guidelines:** Don't DIS my ABILITY illustrates best practice guidelines for communicating in this area, such as:

- Normalising images of people with disability, by accurately depicting them, avoiding dramatization or characterisation
- Depicting positive interactions between people with disability and people without disability
- Using personal anecdote and storytelling as a device
- As a targeted campaign focusing on the workplace, it is able to provide more detailed information (e.g. on misconceptions) that are relevant to this specific context. The literature suggests this is likely to elicit longer-term impacts.

**Evaluation/ efficacy:** The review did not source any evaluation data for this campaign.

## CASE STUDY: The #Iseebeyond campaign

**Name of campaign/ program and organisation:** #Iseebeyond

The campaign is an initiative by two neurological charities Headway (for acquired brain injury) & Epilepsy Ireland and funded by the Department of Justice and Equality's Disability Awareness Raising Grant Scheme.

**Location and year of campaign:** #Iseebeyond was launched nationwide in Ireland in 2016. Following the success of the first phase, the campaign is set to launch a second phase in early 2017.



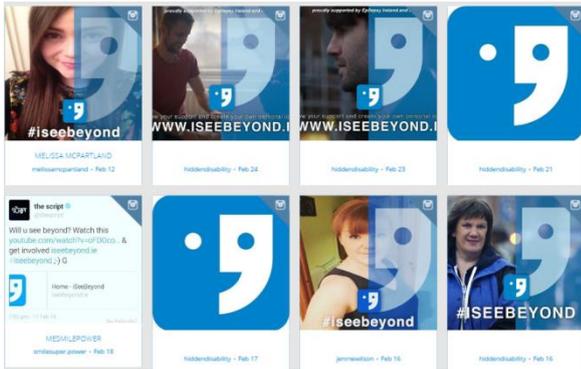
**Objective/ about:** While the campaign addresses disability in general, its primary aim is to challenge the stigma associated with 'hidden' disabilities. The #Iseebeyond campaign is predicated on research that showed only 3 in 10 people would feel comfortable disclosing to their employer that they have a hidden disability (Headway & Epilepsy Ireland, 2016). This research highlighted the evident need to increase awareness and improve understanding of hidden disabilities in order to address the pervasive prejudice and stigma associated with them. It endeavours to inspire a more tolerant and inclusive society in which people no longer feel the need to hide their disability (even though they can).

**Audience:** General population



**Format:** The campaign revolves around 6 short videos that were disseminated and promoted through social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube). These videos narrate the personal stories of people with disability in various contexts – in the home, at the workplace, out and about, and each illustrating the invisibility of certain disabilities. The first four videos are narrated in third person, while the final two are from the perspective of the person with disability.

A secondary component to the campaign was the use of a hashtag (#Iseebeyond) enabling people to show their support and actively join the conversation about hidden disability on social media. The campaign also featured a collaborative 'wall of support' whereby people could submit a photo of themselves which was merged with the campaign logo to create an online collage of public advocacy.



**Specific messages used:** The campaign’s full slogan is “People with hidden disabilities such as Acquired Brain Injury and Epilepsy are all saying the same thing... See Beyond!”. The short version, “see beyond”, is used though out the campaign to bring attention to specific examples of prejudice and stigma, and as a call to action to shift perspective/behaviour.

**Theoretical approach:** The campaign drew on a number of theoretical approaches, including:

- The use of multiple settings helps to eliminate any context-dependent prejudice (where prejudice is removed or activated depending on the context; Randle & Reis, 2016) paving the way for a society that’s more inclusive in all spheres.
- It uses “people first language”, an approach that is preferred and advocated for by people with disability (Lorcan et al., 2016).
- It reflects a social model of disability, demonstrating the premise that disability is just another ‘slice of life’. This approach is seen as key to ‘normalising’ disability and reducing the stigma around it (Bolt, 2014).
- The last two videos centre on the perspective of the person with disability. This is an effective illustration of the “nothing about us, without us” principle, a clear call from the disability sector to be centred and represented in all conversations about them.

**Strategic approach:** The campaign’s overall strategy is a mix of ‘education’ (raising awareness) and ‘contact’ (exposing, introducing and increasing the familiarity of people without disability to people with disability).

**Best practice guidelines:** The #iseebeyond campaign demonstrates how to effectively frame disability in the media by adhering to best practice guideline, such as:

- Normalising images of people with disability, by accurately depicting them, avoiding dramatization or characterisation.
- Depicting positive interactions between people with disability and people without disability.
- Using personal anecdote & storytelling as a device.

**Evaluation/ efficacy:** An evaluation of the campaign was conducted by Amarach Research (IPU Review, 2016), surveying n=2000 respondents (no further description of the sample is available) prior to and following the campaign’s launch. The evaluation indicated that #iseebeyond was able to:

- Increase awareness of the concept of hidden disability: 41% of respondents are aware of the concept of hidden disability compared to 32% in the previous survey;

- Create greater comfort around disclosure: Over one third (37%) said they would feel comfortable informing their employer that they had a hidden disability – a 7% increase);
- Build awareness at community settings: 20% felt their workplace/place of education showed awareness for people with hidden disabilities – an increase of 5%;
- Increase awareness of challenges faced by people with epilepsy: Nearly half of respondents (49%) were found to be aware of the daily challenges faced by someone with epilepsy – a rise of 4%
- Increase awareness of challenges faced by people with acquired brain injury: 39% said they were aware of the challenges faced by a person living with acquired brain injury (ABI), up from 15%. (IPU Review, 2016).

## CASE STUDY: Job Shadow Day, Ireland

**Name of campaign/ program and organisation:** Job Shadow is an Irish initiative to provide people with disability an opportunity to shadow at a work site in a career/job of interest to them. Job Shadow day is overseen by the Irish Association of Supported Employment (IASE), The IASE is a registered charity and a not-for-profit organisation established in 1994 to promote equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities using the supported employment model.

**Location and year of campaign:** The campaign has been operating nationwide since 2008, coinciding with the National Supported Employment Week each year.

**Objective/ about:** Job Shadow is a day of awareness to promote equal employment opportunities for people with disability by highlighting the valuable contribution they can and do make within a workplace. Job Shadow Day increases disability awareness, promotes social inclusion, and encourages equity and diversity within the community, while fostering job creation and job matching. In addition to this, it gives employers an opportunity to express, and uphold, their commitment to inclusion in the workplace.

**Audience:** Job shadow day has three key audiences:

- Job seekers: it provides people with disability an opportunity to gain insight into a particular job or career, build work experience and explore employment opportunities.
- Disability Support Organisations: it creates employment opportunities by facilitating conversations with employers and creating awareness of the service they offer.
- Employers: It also gives employers an opportunity to experience first-hand the benefits of employing people with disability, and subsequently works to dispel potential myths about the barriers. In addition to this, it gives them an opportunity to understand and learn about recruiting and retaining people with disability within their workplace.

**Format:** A person with disability has the opportunity to 'shadow' an employee for the day within a role or career of interest to them. A trained employment facilitator coordinates the pairing, linking a participant with a suitable employer who has signed up to take part.

**Specific messages used:** The Job Shadow Day uses the tagline 'working for inclusion' through out their communications.

**Strategic approach:** Familiarity is key to this approach. The Job Shadow initiative is designed to increase 'contact', facilitating personal connections in order to challenge unconscious bias and counter negative attitudes and perceptions around people with disability's productivity and suitability for work. The Job Shadow initiative works to mitigate potential risks that employers might associate with employing someone with disability as it allows them to experience first-hand, and in a tangible way, what it would actually entail or require.

**Evaluation/ efficacy:** The success of Job Shadow day has increased every year since its launch. In its inception year, 238 employers and 358 employees took part which resulted in 24 job placements. In 2015 close to 800 individuals with a disability shadowed at over 500 employment sites with 55 securing a permanent job placement as a direct result.

- Following on from its success in Ireland, National Supported Employment Week, of which Job Shadow day is a part, was rolled-out across Europe, with twelve countries committing to take part in 2015. Work Solutions Gippsland, in Victoria Australia has also implemented a localised version of the campaign, running annually since 2014.

## 12.2 Workplace resources

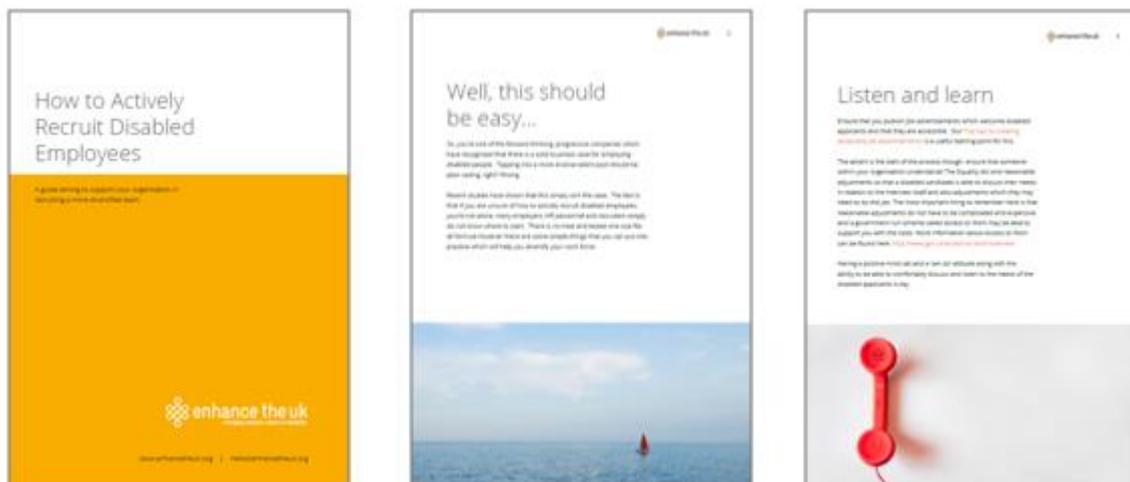
A selection of resources intended for use by employers within the workplace is presented below. While not formally evaluated, these resources seem to address some of the needs and concerns of employers as identified through the literature.

### User guides

**What it is:** Free user guides for employers, providing advice and information around employing people with disability.

**Source:** Enhance UK

Enhance the UK is a user-led charity aiming to educate people of all ages about disability as well as assist those with a disability in playing a full and active role in society. They work with a number of organisations to offer disability awareness training, advice and support in many different areas of disability.



### What makes it a worthwhile resource:

- Clear look and feel
- Accessible language
- Concise
- Accessible entry point
- Acknowledges perceived complexity and challenges
- Presents solutions/ strategies
- Avoids 'government speak'

## Information toolkit

**What it is:** Information toolkit

Visit the [Ministry of Social Development NZ Website](#) for more information.

**Source:** Ministry of Social Development NZ

The Lead Toolkit was developed as part of the Disability Confident campaign. It contains a range of information and resources for business owners, leadership teams, managers and human resources teams, with a focus on helping them through the process of employing people with disability.



### **What makes it a worthwhile resource:**

- Provides clear processes or steps to take for becoming an inclusive business.
- Clear- but not confronting- self-assessment as a means of 'diagnosing' extent of workplace inclusivity, and providing a clear path forward.

## Online tool for asking questions

**What it is:** Frequently unasked questions – a section on the Enhance UK website that allows visitors to ask the tricky questions they think, but don't often ask.

**Source:** Enhance UK



### Frequently Unasked Questions

This section contains all the Frequently Unasked Questions about disability. People are often afraid to ask questions and worry about how to treat disabled people in order to avoid offending.

It's quite a complex subject, because disabled people are all different and have different opinions so we asked some of our disabled friends and colleagues what they thought. You can also find out more about our panel and their experiences of disability on our [meet the panel](#) page.

[SEND US YOUR QUESTIONS](#)

#### What are the correct terms to use when talking about disability?

Mel: "I'm personally not too worried about 'correct terms', but I call myself a 'wheelchair user' and 'hearing impaired', because most people think that being deaf means you can't hear at all. If you're hard of hearing, some people seem to think that all they need to do is shout at you to make themselves [read more](#) >

#### What counts as discrimination?

Gary: "The law has its own definition, but it's really about the intention to put barriers in someone's way based on their disability. Social Model and all that!" Mel: "This is a tough one because I think that different people have very different views on what discrimination is. I personally feel that discrimination is when [read more](#) >

#### Should I talk slowly to deaf people?

Mel: "No! Please don't. Use a normal tone and speed, but be clear. Look directly at the person you're talking to, so they can lip read, and don't SHOUT! This is my pet hate and it happens all the time. When someone shouts all they're doing is distorting the sound of their voice, which then [read more](#) >

### What makes it a worthwhile resource:

In enabling questions to be asked anonymously, it allows employers to ask questions that they might not otherwise have done, for fear of seeming discriminatory or intrusive.



## Disability confident' badge

**What is it:** Employers take steps to become 'disability confident', which then enables them to use the disability confident badge in their marketing.

Visit the [Disability Confident Campaign Website](#) for more information.

**Source:** Initiative by the UK government.



### **What makes it a worthwhile resource:**

Focuses on linking a commitment to employing people with disability to positive corporate image and reputation – which is a key driver for larger organisations.

# 13. Gaps in the literature and future research needs

This review certainly provides a great deal of insight into the drivers and barriers that may underpin employers' inclination to employ people with disability, their information needs and effective communications approaches. Nonetheless, little existing research was able to be sourced on a number of key aspects, which limit the extent to which findings can be practically applied to the development of communications and other types of intervention.

Specifically, gaps in the literature are identified as follows:

- Empirical data to determine the impact of employer targeted strategies (including communications) on employment rates for people with disability.
- The relative weight of, and interplay between, individual prejudicial beliefs for different cohorts of employers, and the way this impacts employment decisions.
- Differences in employer perspectives reflecting industry and location
- Specific barriers for 'middle' sized businesses.
- Differences in employer perspectives relating to employees with disability from culturally and linguistically diverse and Indigenous backgrounds.
- The decision making process in larger organisations, and the respective roles of HR/ leadership and line managers in driving and facilitating this.
- Drivers and barriers relating to retention, dispute resolution and advancement in the workplace
- 'Proven' or preferred delivery and format options for employer targeted communications, training or educational resources.
- Employer perspectives on the role of government vs NGOs/ industry associations/ chambers of commerce in delivering communications or other initiatives in this area.

Furthering our understanding of these issues through primary research would assist in the development of communications. Given communications objectives, a priority should perhaps be placed on assessing:

- The relative weight of, and interplay between, individual prejudicial beliefs for different cohorts of employers, and the way this impacts employment decisions (to inform message development)
- Differences in employer perspectives reflecting industry and location (to ensure effective targeting)
- Specific barriers for 'middle' sized businesses (to inform message development/ targeting)
- Differences in employer perspectives relating to employees with disability from culturally and linguistically diverse and Indigenous backgrounds (to determine specific approaches for communicating to these audiences)
- The decision making process in larger organisations, and the respective roles of HR/ leadership and line managers in driving and facilitating this (to determine target audience, messaging and content needs)

- Preferred delivery and format options for employer targeted communications, training or educational resources.
- Employer perspectives on the role of government vs NGOs/ industry associations/ chambers of commerce in delivering communications or other initiatives in this area.

Qualitative research with the employer community is likely to help unpack many of these areas. Nonetheless, a statistical segmentation would provide more robust understanding of the relationship between business characteristics and attitude/ behaviour – essential insight for targeted communications development.

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