

Working with a Disability: What it's really like in Australia

2021 Report



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Questions?

We'd love to discuss your diversity, inclusion and belonging initiatives. Please email aumarketing@indeed.com or reach out to your Indeed account manager to arrange a meeting.

Research methodology

The research in this whitepaper was commissioned by ThatComms Co on behalf of Indeed and conducted by YouGov. The study was conducted online between 11 - 17 February 2021, involving 2,060 working age Australians (aged between 18-64) currently in either full or part-time employment, or actively looking for work.

Age, gender and location quotas were applied to the sample and following the completion of interviewing, the data was weighted by age, gender and location to reflect the latest ABS Australian working age population estimates. Because official statistics for minority groups varies, the diversity groups identified in the survey were asked to opt in to identifying their status, the final size and composition of each minority group permitted to fall out naturally.

Sources:

1 comScore, Total Visits, March 2021

2 Google Analytics, Unique Visitors, February 2020



What is diversity, inclusion and belonging?

In Australia, the society we live in is made up of a broad spectrum of human demographics, so it makes sense that employers are becoming increasingly committed to supporting diversity and inclusion in the workplace. But what does it mean in practice and why is it so important?

Diversity is everything that makes us different

Diversity refers to the range of human characteristics that make us different from one another and there is no real exhaustive list of what these could entail. A diverse workforce that is truly reflective of wider society and its rich tapestry of cultural and social differences is not only important because it supports equal opportunity, but it can also bring many tangible benefits to companies.

By bringing together people with unique personalities, perspectives, and life experiences – who all think in different ways – diverse teams are said to be more innovative and better at tackling problems than less diverse teams.

Inclusion is what makes diversity possible

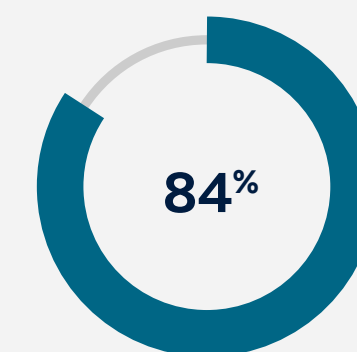
Inclusion refers to everything that makes achieving and maintaining diverse workplaces feasible. Inclusivity in the workplace is an enabler for diversity because it addresses the actions, behaviours, and social norms among employees that collectively create an environment where everyone feels accepted, respected, valued, and encouraged to participate.

Company hiring practices, the way people communicate, and strong shared values can all contribute to the extent to which people from different backgrounds feel included. Without inclusion, diversity in an organisation is neither sustainable, nor likely to yield the many positive business outcomes that diversity can bring.

Belonging is a feeling

People feel they belong when they experience a true connection with the workplace community, which includes all the people around them and the environment they work in. Belonging is about feeling free to ask questions while learning and growing alongside others regardless of your differences.

In collaboration with YouGov, Indeed has carried out one of the most comprehensive studies into diversity, inclusion and belonging (DI&B) within Australian workplaces. The Indeed/YouGov survey shows that an overwhelming majority of Australian workers (84%) think it's important to work for an organisation that promotes DI&B for everyone.



84% of people think it's important to work for an organisation that promotes DI&B for everyone.

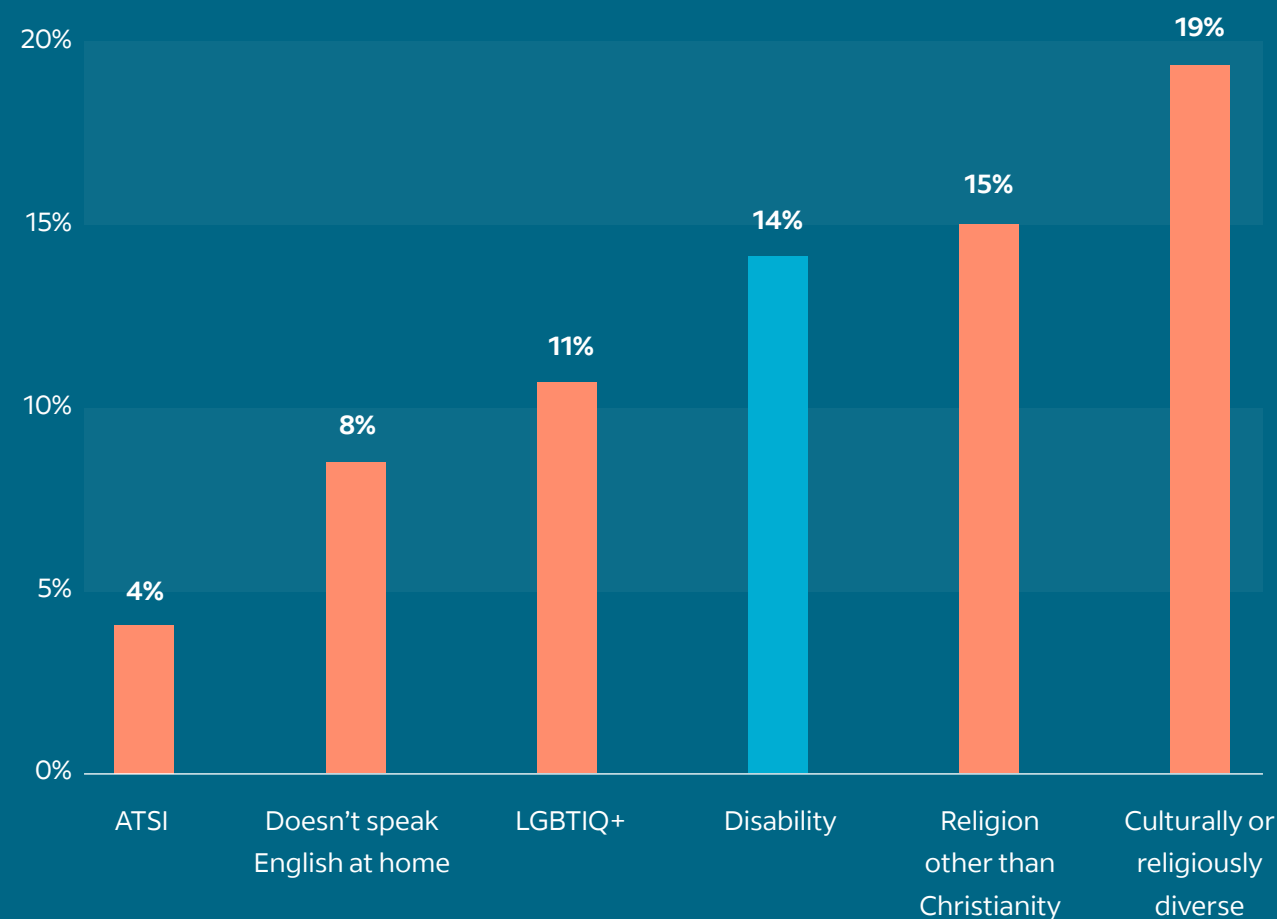
Getting perspective: Disability in Australia's workforce

Disability amongst Australian workers

The [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#) describes disability as an “umbrella term for impairments of body function or structure, activity limitations, or participation restriction.” For this reason, different disabilities, whether mental or physical in nature, can vary significantly in their severity and overall impact on a person's life. A 2021 YouGov survey commissioned by Indeed found that 14% of all working-age

Australians identify as living with a disability of some kind.

People living with a disability account for one of the largest minority groups in Australia's workforce, with more people than those who identify as LGBTIQ+, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI), or who don't speak English at home, and similar in size to those who have a religion other than Christianity.



What makes people with a disability feel like they belong at work?

When it comes to work life, most Australians living with a disability share some clear views about what makes them feel as though they belong in workplaces that support all the values of diversity, inclusion and belonging (DI&B). The Indeed/YouGov survey shows nearly 7-in-10 people (67%) with a disability agree that true DI&B in the workplace is about being treated equally to everyone else

and 6-in-10 (61%) agree that it's about being valued as an individual.

Women with a disability hold a more confident and positive view of what workplace DI&B looks like, compared to men with a disability. The survey shows that in most cases, women are between 14%-35% more likely to agree on some of the key hallmarks of DI&B at work.

35%

Women with a disability are up to 35% more likely to agree on the key hallmarks of DI&B.

What does 'diversity and inclusion' mean to you?



Leveling the playing field

When it comes to DI&B at work, it's important to take appropriate steps and measures to level the playing field for all your workers, so no one is unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged. Recognising people's talent and skills to perform in a role, regardless of disability, and supporting all workers to achieve their full potential despite any challenges, is key to encouraging feelings of inclusivity and belonging in the workplace.

"I would be judged as less competent if people knew my disability."

– Female, 28, VIC

The stark gender differences identified by the Indeed/YouGov survey emphasise how important it is to ensure that the principles of DI&B cut through and are felt among all demographics in the workforce. With the right ethos, workplaces can ensure there is equal opportunity for workers with a disability at every stage of the job cycle — from the recruitment process, to daily work life, right through to the awarding of promotions.

"If [the] boss knows you have previous injuries [they] would sack you."

– Male, 54, VIC



How inclusive are Australian workplaces for people with a disability?

Getting into the workforce is harder

Globally, Australia ranks 21 out of 29 among OECD nations for the employment of people with disabilities. We know from the Indeed/YouGov survey that a significant proportion of Australia's working population live with a disability, but despite this, it turns out they're not having the same experience

as the general population when it comes to landing a job. While 42% of all working-age Australians say they have found work relatively quickly (within six months), only 28% of working-age Australians with a disability say the same.

46% v 28%

46% of working-age Australians found work in under six months, compared to only 28% of workers with a disability.

"No one will hire people with disability in Australia."

– Male, 24, WA

"Most people think a disability stops you doing things."

– Male, 63, QLD



Unfortunately, people with a disability are also more likely to be out of work and looking for a job. Nearly one-third (32%) say they are currently out of work but seeking employment, while only one-in-five (20%) Australians without a disability say they are currently unemployed looking for work.

The clear differences show that Australians with a disability are experiencing barriers when it comes to either finding suitable work in the first place, or successfully progressing through the recruitment process. Ultimately, a person's ability to perform in a role should be the primary objective when hiring. Carefully crafting job ads that focus on skills, qualities

and accomplishments (not years of experience or cultural fit), will help organisations to attract talented candidates from a variety of backgrounds and circumstances.

Providing assurances around work flexibility as well as how a workplace promotes the values of DI&B could all be crucial features of a universally appealing and inclusive job ad.

Raising awareness among staff members of the type of conscious and unconscious biases that lead to discriminatory recruitment practices may also help to open the door to more opportunities for workers with disability.

Lack of flexibility could be a roadblock to improving the representation of workers with a disability

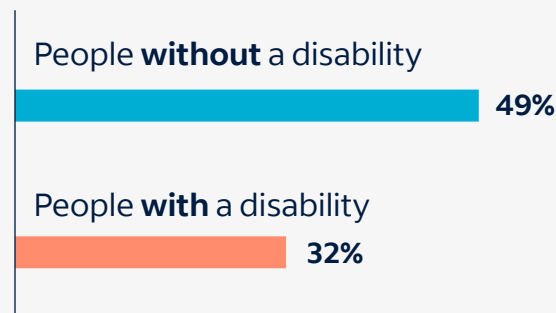
Nearly half (49%) of all Australian workers are working full-time, but this reduces to less than a third (32%) for those with a disability. While there could be many reasons why more people with a disability work part-time, this highlights that employers must do everything they can to provide safe and inclusive working environments, so people with a disability can work to their full potential.

Allowing flexible hours, work-from-home arrangements, and adapting job descriptions,

tools, and technology are examples of easily implementable strategies that might improve the representation of workers with a disability amongst Australian workplaces.

The Indeed/YouGov survey demonstrates the potential for flexible employment practices to make a positive difference. More Australians with a disability think allowing employees to work flexibly (44%) is key to DI&B in the workplace, compared to all working-age Australians (36%).

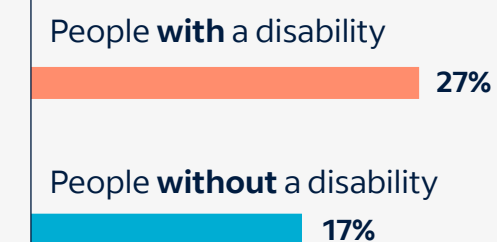
Percentage of workers who work full-time



In this context, it's probably not surprising that workers with a disability are also twice as likely to work in an outdoor setting (16%), such as a tradesperson, compared to all Australian workers (8%)— indoor and office

environments can be quite limiting to those with a disability if accessibility features aren't in place. Interestingly, 10% more workers with a disability are self-employed (27%) compared to all Australian workers (17%).

Percentage of workers who are self employed



Overall, the survey results might indicate that many workers living with a disability find 'structured' work environments too rigid for their individual needs. Without adequate alternatives in the Australian employment landscape, many people with a disability are taking matters into their own hands, specifically when it comes to gaining flexibility through self-employment and more casualised job types.

Emphasising the importance of flexibility to creating more inclusive workplaces for employees who have a disability, [a report of the National Inquiry into Employment and Disability](#) by the Australian Human Rights Commission outlines some key strategies to

encourage the adoption of flexible workplaces. Some of the many strategies include flexible access to annual leave, working from home arrangements, compressed working hours, and the availability of short periods of special leave for appointments.

Organisations should strive to be proactive to ensure that their premises, services and facilities are accessible and non-discriminatory to people with a disability.

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven that new and more flexible ways of working can and do work, improving accessibility to the workforce and providing an opportunity for a more level playing field for people with a disability.

Finding the right workplace takes time

Just over one-in-four (26%) workers with a disability aged 18-34 say they strongly agree their organisation promotes diversity, but this nearly doubles among workers with a disability aged 35-49 (49%). Similarly, while less than a quarter (22%) of 18-34-year-olds with a disability say they are confident they know where to get support if they need it, this doubles to nearly half (45%) among 35-49-year-olds.

The vast difference between age groups when it comes to having confident, positive perceptions of their employers' efforts to promote DI&B and offer support could indicate that it takes some time for workers with a disability to find a workplace they consider to be the 'right fit'. In other words, far fewer younger workers hold a confidently positive perception of their employer because their

2x

35-49-year-old workers with a disability are 2x more likely to know where to get support than those aged 18-34.

2x

35-49-year-old workers with a disability are 2x more likely to be confident that their workplace promotes diversity than those aged 18-34.

shorter time in the workforce means they are less likely to have found a working environment they feel comfortable in, and that adequately supports them.

Achieving DI&B is the individual responsibility of employers, but it's important for Australia's employment landscape to work towards greater consistency (and reliability) across the board when it comes to creating safe and inclusive environments for the many workers living with a disability. Workers with a disability could be unfairly disadvantaged in their careers if they are jumping between employers to find a work environment that meets their needs and expectations. At the same time, high staff turnover among talented employees because of failure to support DI&B in the workplace can have negative impacts on overall business performance.



CASE STUDY

Wayne Herbert

Director of Property and Progress
LEAD Disability Services

We all could be a person living with a disability tomorrow

“I think when you’re visible, valued, and your voice is heard and respected, you feel like you genuinely belong.”

In a nutshell, what do you do for work?

I'm the Director of Property and Progress at [LEAD Disability Services](#) where I have worked for 13 years. I'm also an international speaker, author, and stand-up comedian.

Why is it important to establish a diverse and inclusive workplace?

Because the greatest investment businesses will make is in its people. It's important to send a message that a workplace is diverse and inclusive because it's a way of showing the community that you value and respect a diverse range of opinions and perspectives. It's also a way to show that DI&B is not an optional extra— but an integral part of your organisation.

Has there been less of a focus on D&I during the COVID-19 pandemic?

My observation is that there's been more of a focus on it. We've come to understand that we need to find new ways of working. For many years, people with a disability (and disability advocates long before me), have been calling for the kind of flexibility and innovative ways of working that we now all know can work if we want them to.

I'm thankful for the opportunity that this crisis has given us to rethink the way we do business, because business as usual may not be what we go back to.

Some people have said, “I just want things to go back to normal”, but “normal” may have always been the problem. This pandemic has been a way for people to finally recognise that we've been underutilising the skills, abilities, talents and expertise of the disability community.



Our research shows that there is a disconnect between the perception of equal treatment of certain diverse groups in the workplace, and the lived experience of these groups themselves. Where are companies going wrong?

Many of the businesses I have worked with have a deep commitment to diversity and inclusion and often have great plans and strategies. The disconnect is between their strategy and how it's communicated. The workforce needs to know about what that

strategy means for them, how things are going to improve their experience in the workplace, and the flow-on effects of what it means for the wider community.

Diversity and inclusion benefits us all, it matters to us all, and it needs to be communicated in that way. Companies need to talk about what they're doing well, but also what they're not doing so well, so everyone can come together to find ways of doing things better.

Our research showed that many people with a disability are hiding this part of their identity at work. What are the broader consequences on employees' mental health and wellbeing of not being able to be themselves at work?

We know that people feeling like they need to hide or deny aspects of who they are at work has significant detrimental effects on wellbeing and on various aspects of mental health. We spend more of our time at work with our colleagues than we do with friends and family. When someone can't be their true self at work businesses also lose. They're missing out on a different way of thinking, or a different approach to a problem.

I don't want people to have to hide or be in the shadows. I want people to be in the light so we can highlight these serious issues, because we become stronger workplaces and a stronger nation when we shine a light on the darkest parts of our experience.

Did you ever feel the need to hide part of yourself or your disability when you first started out in the workforce?

I grew up in a close-knit, supportive family. One of the things they would always say to me was never compromise who you are for the benefit and ignorance of others, but see it as an opportunity to engage with people and create space for important conversations. That advice helped me not to have to hide, even when I think it might be easier to do so.

Perhaps being a comedian I'm a bit of a chronic oversharer, but I have always used humour and conversation to open the discussion to people who have questions or aren't sure how to approach diversity and inclusion.

For members of the LGBTIQ+ community and the disability community, of which I am both, the fear and anxiety around being their true selves is very real, damaging and long-lasting. I want to do all I can to reshape that discussion and change that experience.

We all could be a person living with a disability tomorrow. We need to think about what we would want things to be like if that was our experience. We need to ensure there's a place and space for people to be who they are in all aspects of themselves.

What advice can you give to businesses when considering their D&I strategies?

Don't overcomplicate, don't overstimulate and don't procrastinate on embedding a DI&B strategy that goes beyond the one-offs—one that is embedded in ensuring you build a culture and organisational response to business that respects and values diversity of opinion and experience. One of the most common problems that arises when you overthink a DI&B strategy is that you risk disengaging the very people who are going to be the beneficiaries of that strategy.

Diversity and inclusion is not just a discussion for particular times of the year—it's something that needs to be embedded in the fabric and culture of organisations and communities. We have made some great gains and we should celebrate these, but we should also recognise the shortfalls and continue to address them.

What advice can you give to businesses when considering their D&I strategies?

It's important to bring everybody into the discussion, regardless of whether they identify directly with those groups. Just like we all have a responsibility for workplace health and safety, I think we all have a responsibility for investing in and responding to issues of DI&B.

How can businesses help to foster a sense of belonging in the workplace so people don't just feel like a diversity hire?

I think when you're visible, valued, and your voice is heard and respected, you feel like you genuinely belong.

“Without opportunities we can't create change. Seek out those opportunities, crave those opportunities, and grab every one of them because that's when change starts.”

What advice can you give to individuals about being their authentic selves every day?

Be fearless and allow people the opportunity to see what they are missing. People need to see and celebrate the significant contribution that people with a disability and members of the LGBTIQ+ community make every day in so many ways. But first, we need to create opportunities for that to happen.

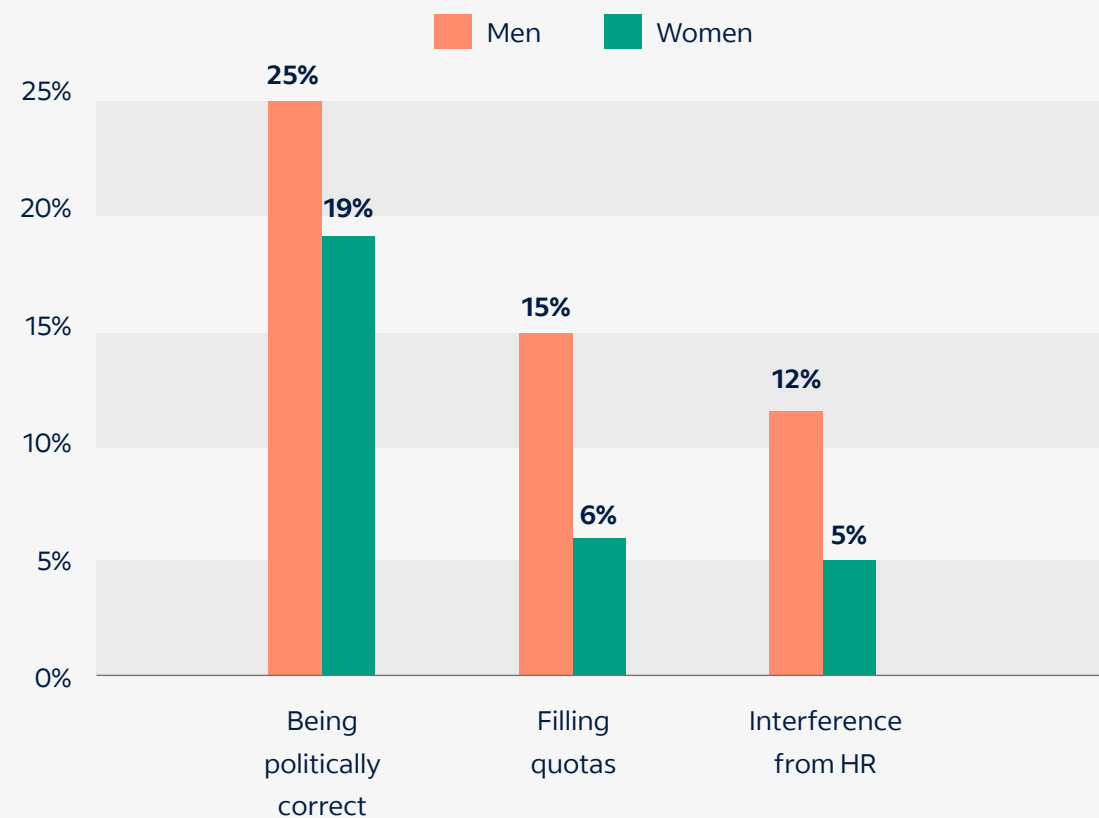
Without opportunities we can't create change. Seek out those opportunities, crave those opportunities, and grab every one of them because that's when change starts.

The relationship between authenticity and inclusivity

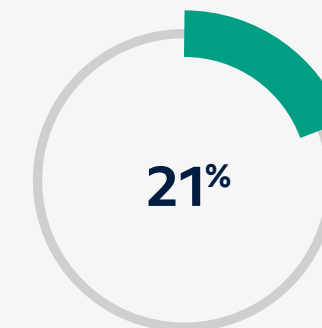
Do some Australian workplaces have an authenticity problem when it comes to creating inclusive environments for workers with a disability?

Nearly a quarter (22%) of workers with a disability associate DI&B in the workplace with political correctness. One-in-nine workers with a disability associate DI&B in the workplace with interference from HR (9%), and a similar proportion (11%) associate it with filling quotas. At the same time, men living with disability are much more likely than women – nearly twice as likely according to some measures — to hold a negative view of DI&B at work.

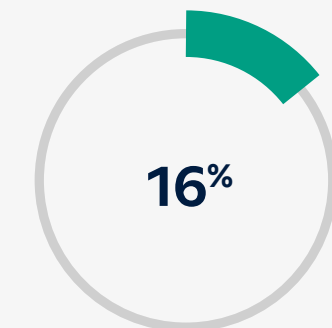
Workers with a disability associate DI&B with:



Some workers with a disability aren't confident in their organisation's DI&B practices



21% of workers with a disability don't believe their organisation promotes DI&B at all.



16% of workers with a disability don't think their organisation would take action in response to discrimination.

While not a majority, the prevalence of negative views around DI&B at work highlights the importance and challenges some Australian employers face ensuring steps to support and improve DI&B at work are truly meaningful and cut across all demographics (including gender, age, and background).

Without authenticity and universal cut-through, efforts to promote DI&B could have the opposite effect among minority groups who have more at stake when measures are perceived to be just words and no action.

When it comes to the consequences of a lack of authenticity around DI&B, the Indeed/YouGov survey shows that an alarming one-in-five (21%) workers with a disability don't believe their organisation promotes DI&B at all. Unsurprisingly, 16% of workers with a disability don't have peace of mind that their organisation would take action in response to discrimination, and 21% don't feel they can speak openly at work.

Workers with a disability are more likely than other minority groups to feel the impact of inauthenticity around DI&B

A similar proportion of people with a disability are likely to hide their disability (59%) as LGBTIQ+ workers who hide their sexual orientation (60%). But people with a disability are much more likely than other minority groups to hide their differences when compared to workers with a religion other than Christianity who hide their religion (21%), and workers who identify as being culturally diverse who hide their ethnicity (12%) or culture (20%).

While there could be many reasons why workers choose to hide their differences in environments where DI&B is not perceived as genuine, the elevated likelihood among workers with a disability may be driven by fear that they will be seen as less able to perform in their role or be treated differently.

In contrast, other differences such as religion or cultural background may be less likely to be perceived as a factor having an impact on work. Consequently, employers should focus on developing meaningful values and practical measures around DI&B that

5x

Workers with a disability are up to 5x more likely to hide their differences compared to other minority groups.

encourage openness, acceptance, and equal opportunity for all employees, regardless of their differences.

Authenticity in organisational efforts to support DI&B are key to driving inclusivity and more disability confident workplaces. Importantly, there are many checks and balances an employer can undertake to inspire greater confidence among their workers living with a disability — especially for those with hidden disabilities that are not immediately



apparent but who still need recognition and support.

For example, while every worker must have access to a trusted avenue to raise issues and challenges, appropriate training should be put in place to ensure staff engage their emotional intelligence when working in teams. At the same time, employers must demonstrate a consistent and non-discriminatory approach to recruitment and awarding promotions,

while encouraging and facilitating participation among all groups when it comes to social events and projects.

Disability inclusion is also crucial to the recruitment process. If candidates face barriers during the application and interview process, or sense that a business is not inclusive, they may look elsewhere. Companies that aren't proactive about disability inclusion risk missing out on great talent.

"I hide my disability for fear of losing my job."

– Male, 41

"Most don't know I am hearing impaired."

– Female, 35, VIC

"People find it hard to understand disabilities."

– Female, 51, SA

"I can miss out on opportunities if my disability is disclosed."

– Female, 26, QLD

How COVID-19 has impacted workers with a disability

Workers with a disability are already significantly less likely to work full time than most workers and 52% have a household income of less than \$50k compared to the average of 33% for all workers. On average, more than one-in-ten workers with a disability (10%) have either been stood down, lost their job (13%), or changed jobs (13%) since the pandemic began. This is slightly higher than the average of 9% for all working-age Australians.

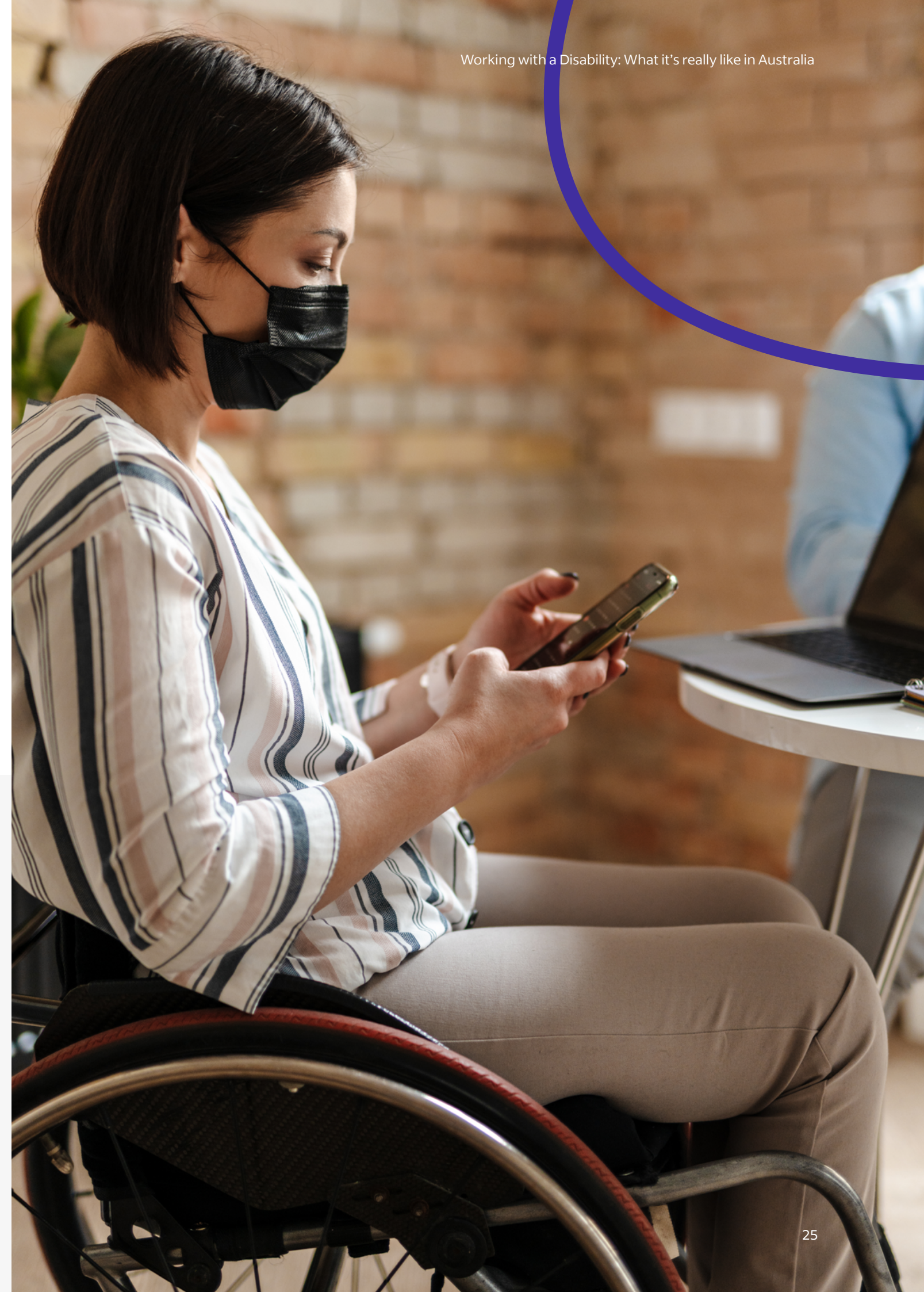
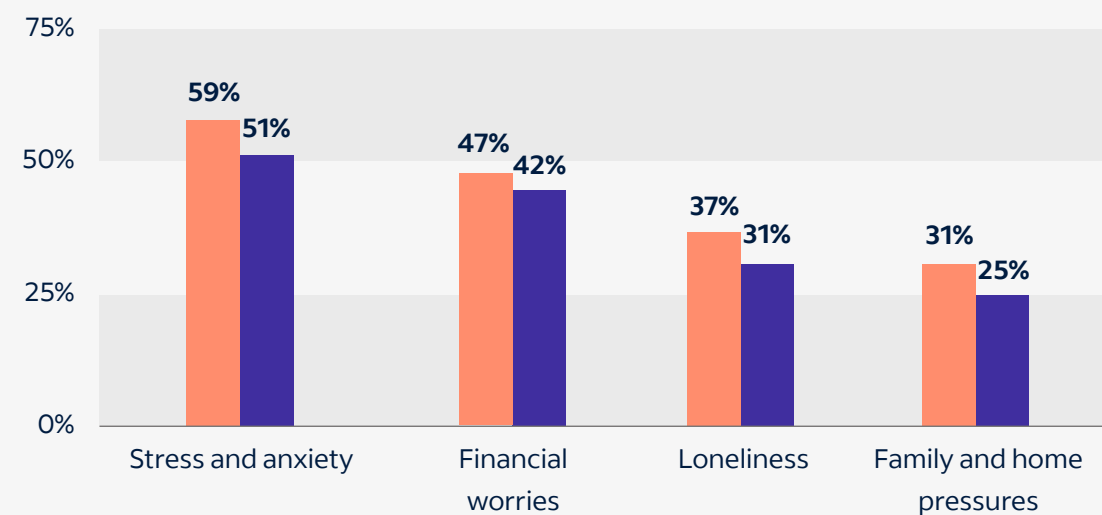
Unsurprisingly, the mental health impacts of the pandemic appear to be elevated among people with a disability. These include financial worries (47%), stress and anxiety (59%), loneliness (37%), and family and home pressures (31%). This compares to 42%, 51%, 31%, and 25%, respectively, among all working-age Australians.

Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of all workers is paramount during uncertain times, but workplaces should focus on doing everything they can to support the needs of those in the workforce who are most vulnerable.

As well as providing its own resources to help managers have confident conversations with team members who have a disability, the [Australian Network On Disability](#) identifies several ways to support the mental health and wellbeing of workers with a disability. Some key steps include setting up disability employee networks (connecting employees with disability so they can discuss common issues and challenges), identifying mental health first aiders who are knowledgeable in helping individuals through challenging times, peer-to-peer buddying, and regular wellbeing checks.

Mental health impacts of the pandemic

People with a disability All working-age Australians



How to support employees with hidden disabilities

The high proportion of Australian workers who say they hide their disability emphasises how many disabilities are hidden from the plain view of others. Invisible disabilities can include mental and neurological conditions such as autism, chronic pain, brain injury, PTSD, bipolar, and Asperger's, and just like many physical disabilities, they can present challenges to everyday activities and make looking for work more difficult.

In the workplace, the inability of others to immediately identify or see a person's disability can sometimes mean workers are left without the support they need to do their job, or are often misunderstood. For example, a person with autism who is challenged by social inclusion could be less engaged within a collaborative team environment without proactive efforts from their peers — which can impact morale and productivity, despite their skills and talent.

Improving the working lives of people with hidden disabilities is more about consciousness than it is about effort. A lack of mindfulness in the workforce around hidden disabilities can have a negative impact on team dynamics and collaboration. By raising awareness of hidden disabilities and how they can be recognised and easily supported, employers are likely to nurture happier, more cohesive, and more productive workforces overall.

Fortunately, there are some key steps employers can take to build workforces that can recognise and better support employees with hidden disabilities.

"ADHD, CPTSD, and various chronic illnesses are stigmatised heavily in most workplaces."

– Female, 30, QLD

"I'm autistic, so sometimes I don't understand certain interactions with people, but I don't always feel comfortable discussing it for clarification."

– Female, 44, VIC

"I have anxiety which makes me worry that others won't react well learning about me."

– Male, 19, QLD

"I have arthritis and fibromyalgia. Both are invisible diseases and I feel my work colleagues don't understand the level of pain and discomfort I feel regularly."

– Female, 61, SA

1. Offer flexibility

Being open to adjusting job requirements, offering flexible working hours, and allowing work from home arrangements are easy steps that could have a profoundly positive impact on a person's quality of work life. For example, while the impacts will vary across different disabilities, having a more flexible approach to working practices could allow workers with a hidden disability to attend important appointments alongside their work, provide the rest they need to perform at the best, or reduce lengthy commutes that can impact their health and wellbeing.

3. Encourage an open culture

There is no requirement to disclose a disability to an employer, but workers often choose not to discuss their disability, or challenges they experience at work, for fear of unfair judgements, isolation, stigmas, or not being treated equally to others.

Regularly communicating to the workforce about the importance of inclusivity and availability of support for employees with disability can help create an environment where people feel safer to be open about their circumstances. Facilitating and encouraging one-on-one meetings between managers and employees may provide a confidential way for people to confidently discuss more sensitive needs and challenges.

2. Provide access to support networks

Everyone in the workforce can play an important part in supporting workers with hidden disabilities but offering the opportunity to connect with others who face similar challenges can be an effective way to discourage feelings of isolation and instil confidence. Setting up an Employee Resource Group (ERG) which focuses on issues of hidden disabilities could allow workers with disabilities to learn from the experiences of others while becoming an empowering forum for raising issues with employers and improving support.

4. Raise awareness

Opening people's minds to some of the most common hidden disabilities is a great place to start when trying to encourage a more supportive environment for all workers.

Importantly, greater awareness of specific hidden disabilities and how the symptoms might present in the work environment can go a long way to encouraging patience, empathy, and eliminating unfair judgements—all the elements that could enable stronger, more trustworthy, and productive relationships between team members with different challenges.

CASE STUDY

Matthew Ting

National Innovation and Customer Engagement Manager,
AimBig Employment

Equality in the workplace is very different to equity

“One of the biggest mistakes companies make is that they spend far too much time thinking about it and less time doing it.”

In a nutshell, what do you do for work?

AimBig Employment is a disability employment services provider, which supports people with a disability to find meaningful and sustainable work. We cover all disabilities, and also provide specialist services for those with mental health and musculoskeletal disabilities.

As the National Innovation and Customer Engagement Manager, I develop new and innovative solutions to support our clients to get work-ready and into jobs. There's often a cookie-cutter approach to disability employment, so I look for ways to do things differently.

Can you give me an example of that?

An example of that is the BusyBeans program. A large cohort of our clients want to get into the hospitality workforce, but what we found was that people were getting placed into busy, public environments where they were getting stressed and anxious and would ultimately leave. That's how the BusyBeans program was born. It's an in-house barista service that's set up in office environments which are generally quieter and more suited to the people we were training, primarily people with intellectual disability, autism or mental health conditions.

In an office, the people making the coffee would have a chance to get to know their colleagues as they were regulars, and the pace was generally less chaotic. COVID-19 put a halt to that initiative, but it's coming back now.



How do you define D&I?

I define it as having a workplace that reflects the community your organisation is operating in. If you're looking around and seeing all the same faces, that's not representative of our society, or your customer base.

Why is it important to establish a diverse and inclusive workplace?

If you don't have a diverse workforce you're never going to be able to relate to a customer or a client, because everyone in your organisation has the same lived experience and perspective. How can you develop and market a product or service if you don't understand your customers? How can you be innovative without a diversity of voices? If your workforce isn't diverse, unconscious or conscious bias will be impacting your decision making. Perhaps

you're not judging applicants on whether they can actually do the job, so you're not getting the best talent.

What were the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the disability workforce?

Many people with a disability are employed on a casual basis and casuals were the first to lose their jobs at the start of the pandemic, highlighting the issue of insecure employment for many people with a disability. Casuals for the most part also didn't qualify for [JobKeeper](#) payments, which was an additional blow. Mental health was another big issue

There has been a positive side for some employees though. We see the shift to work-from-home as a real opportunity for those with physical or musculoskeletal disabilities, particularly in regional areas.

Our research shows that there is a disconnect between the perception of equal treatment of certain diverse groups in the workplace, and the lived experience of these groups themselves. Where are companies going wrong?

I hear the word equality a lot, but not equity. Some employers pride themselves on being equal opportunity employers, without understanding that some groups need more support than others.

In the D&I space, when you look at all of the different cohorts, I believe disability is the one where equity is the most important. For example, your gender, or your ethnicity, or your sexuality, generally don't have any impact on your ability to perform your job. Disability is the only one where you might need extra support, particularly in neurodiverse or mental health cohorts.

What advice can you give to businesses when considering their D&I strategies?

One of the biggest mistakes companies make is that they spend far too much time thinking about it and less time doing it. Don't put it into the too-hard basket, or let it get kicked down the road so it never gets done. Our approach is that it's not as hard as you think. It's about hiring humans. You're already hiring humans with all sorts of different backgrounds and experiences without waiting for specialised programs or strategies. People with a disability make up 20% of the workforce, meaning you're already supporting workers with a disability, you just don't know it.

Businesses also don't realise the amount of free support that is out there, including organisations like AimBig. There's a lot of funding from the government to help, such as wage subsidies and workplace modification funds. There are lots of experts to talk to including AimBig and the Australian Network on Disability.

How can businesses help to foster a sense of belonging in the workplace?

Sometimes D&I initiatives, although well-intentioned, can make people with a disability

“Sometimes D&I initiatives, although well-intentioned, can make people with a disability feel separated from their colleagues. Examples of this would be companies that announce to the entire team that they're just hired a person with a specific disability, and everyone

needs to do disability awareness training, and suddenly everyone will look at that staff member differently and worry about doing the wrong thing. You need to get to know people as individuals, like you would any other new employee.”

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