



Advancing Women with Disability in the Workplace

Needs Assessment & Gap Analysis Report Findings

June 2023

Acknowledgement of Country

People with Disability Australia (PWDA) acknowledges and pays respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia, who are the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and waters on which we live and work. We pay respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge the positive legacy left by ancestors.

We thank all those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have contributed to this project and who will continue to shape better outcomes for women with disability.

Acknowledgement of Lived Experience

PWDA acknowledges the lives and experiences of the women with disability represented in this report. We recognise the individual stories of resilience that form the basis of this project.

We thank all those women with lived experience who have contributed to this project and with whom we will continue to work to drive awareness of and break down the unique barriers to workplace participation and leadership experienced by women with disability.

Language

This document uses binary language such as ‘women’ and ‘men’ in many places. We recognise that gender is socially constructed and does not exist in binary categories. We also recognise that there are people whose experiences are not captured by the use of binary language, and that many of the experiences outlined in this document may be experienced by others in the Australian community. This project seeks to improve leadership representation of women, feminine identifying and non-binary people with disability in Australia. However, we acknowledge that by considering women, girls, feminine identifying and non-binary people together, the experiences of non-binary and transgender people may not be captured or addressed effectively by this project.

Contents

8	Executive Summary
11	The Intersection of Gender and Disability
12	Project Overview
15	Research
34	Analysis & Themes
38	Recommendations
41	Conclusion
44	Appendix
44	Appendix 1 – Literature Review
53	Appendix 2 – Interview Protocol
55	Appendix 3 – Expert Advisory Group Terms of Reference
61	Appendix 4 – Employer Survey
66	Appendix 5 – Women with Disability Survey
71	Appendix 6 - Co-design Panel Terms of Reference
77	Appendix 7 – Project Charter

Contributors



Karina Noble

Project Manager, People with Disability Australia

Karina is an autistic and queer woman living on the lands of the Whadjuk Noongar people. They are a passionate advocate for incorporating lived experience in working toward better outcomes for women and gender diverse people with disability. Karina centres a human rights-based approach in her work with expertise at the intersection of gender and disability. Through this project she endeavours to realise a more equitable representation of women and gender diverse people with disability in senior positional leadership.

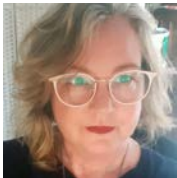
Karina brings a range of experience to the role, from both business and not-for-profits and most recently from the disability sector. She is an experienced leader in diverse range of settings and has strong history of creating and delivering education, coaching, mentoring and inspiring others. Karina is adept in facilitation, leadership development, business development and strategy, project management, and organisational change. They also bring to the role understanding and proficiency in working with lived experience through co-design facilitation, consultation, research, and day to day in a professional capacity.



Lizzy Fowler

Director of Communications & Strategic Projects,
People with Disability Australia

As an able-bodied white woman living on the lands of the Dharawal people, Lizzy acknowledges the privilege she has and leverages that privilege by joining the project team as an ally. Lizzy is an executive leader with more than 15 years' experience driving social impact across both not-for-profit and corporate organisations, including six years working in executive leadership within the disability sector. Lizzy brings a wealth of understanding of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and leadership, as well as demonstrated experience adopting human centred and co-design approaches to impart real impact. Lizzy holds an Honours degree from Durham University as well as a postgraduate diploma in Marketing from Cambridge Marketing College. Lizzy is currently studying for a Diploma in Leadership and Management.



Frances Quan Farrant, Consultant

Frances Quan Farrant has worked in the community and disability sectors for two decades. She is a social scientist (B.A Macquarie University) and a graduate social worker (MSW QUT).

Frances has an extensive background in advocacy, policy and disability rights including expertise on the UNCRPD. Frances has represented disabled people at the United Nations (Geneva, New York) on a number of occasions.

Frances is currently enrolled for a PhD at the University of Queensland researching the implementation of the CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) in Australia and internationally. She is based on Gubbi Gubbi Country north of Brisbane.



About PWDA

People with Disability Australia (PWDA) is a leading disability rights, advocacy, and representative organisation of and for all people with disability. PWDA is the only national, cross-disability organisation, representing the interests of people with all kinds of disability. PWDA is a non-profit, non-government organisation.

PWDA's primary membership is made up of people with disability and organisations primarily constituted by people with disability. PWDA also has a large associate membership of other individuals and organisations committed to the disability rights movement.

We have a vision of a socially just, accessible, and inclusive community, in which the human rights, belonging, contribution, potential and diversity of all people with disability are recognised, respected, and celebrated with pride. PWDA was founded in 1981, the International Year of Disabled Persons, to provide people with disability with a voice of our own.

PWDA is a NSW and national peak organisation and founding member of Disabled People's Organisations Australia (DPO Australia) along with Women With Disabilities Australia, First Peoples Disability Network Australia, and National Ethnic Disability Alliance. Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs) are organisations that are led by, and constituted of, people with disability. The key purpose of DPO Australia is to promote, protect and advance the human rights and freedoms of people with disability In Australia by working collaboratively on areas of shared interests, purposes, strategic priorities, and opportunities.



Executive Summary

Through the delivery of two streams of activity – an educational and training program for employer organisations and a mentoring program for women with disability (WWD) – the Advancing Women with Disability in the Workplace project seeks to increase the representation of women with disability in leadership roles; increase participation in the workplace by women with disability; and improve the safety of workplaces for women with disability. When combined, it is hoped that the educational and mentoring programs will impact 60 individuals, organisations and/or workplaces and support 39 women to secure sustainable, ongoing employment.

The project is being delivered in a number of phases between January 2023 and July 2026. This report speaks to the conclusion of Phase 1, during which research was undertaken to understand the barriers to employment and leadership for women with disability.

During the course of the research phase, a literature review, surveys and interviews with women with lived experience and employer organisations were undertaken.

Through surveys and interviews, 159 women with lived experience of disability were engaged to contribute their experiences and a further nine organisations shared their strategies and insights in relation to employing and supporting people with disability in the workplace. A literature review canvassed academic and grey literature

from the past five years, highlighting the systemic structural barriers faced by women with disability including sexism, stereotypes, ableism as well as discrimination and prejudice.

The barriers evidenced by the research are wide reaching and cannot be addressed by a single project. However, several consistent themes emerged from the research, that were taken into consideration in compiling the recommendations, including:

- **Recruitment:** Women with disabilities faced significant obstacles during the recruitment process, with neurodivergent individuals often at a disadvantage. Organisations need to adapt their recruitment practices to accommodate diverse talents, with some successful examples such as Services Australia's Aurora program specifically supporting people with neurodiversity.
- **Adjustments:** Reasonable Adjustments, or the lack thereof, posed a major barrier to sustaining employment and accessing leadership roles. Organisations struggled to understand and implement appropriate adjustments, while individuals were often unaware of their rights in this regard.
- **Representation:** Women with disabilities lacked representation as role models in the workplace, and many chose not to disclose their disability due to safety concerns. Initiatives such as Disability Champions and mentorship programs

specifically for people with disabilities aim to improve representation.

- **Internal Ableism:** Internalised ableism, where individuals discriminate against themselves, also posed a challenge. Many women with disabilities struggled with self-doubt and shame, affecting their willingness to disclose their disability and impacting their belief in their ability to advance in the workplace.
- **Lack of Mainstream Opportunities:** Women with disabilities who excelled in leadership often had to create their own opportunities, such as starting their own businesses. In certain environments, such as Disabled Person's Organisations, disability is embraced and championed.

Based on the research findings, the project team offers the following recommendations for the future development of the project:

1. **Participating organisations must demonstrate commitment to DE&I and already employ people with disabilities.** Sustainable leadership roles for women with disabilities require an organisation that values diversity, equity, and inclusion. Participation should be limited to organisations with established DE&I initiatives or disability inclusion action plans.
2. **Adopt a 'sponsorship' model for mentorship programs.** To support women with disability into leadership roles, they should receive sponsorship from senior peers within their organisations – who provide access to opportunities at work, and advocate for their career advancement.
3. **Mentees have access to WWD in positional leadership roles.** Mentees/ sponsorship should have access to external mentors or connections if no WWD are available internally in decision making leadership roles.
4. **Curriculum must address strategies to overcome internal ableism.** Sponsors/mentors should be equipped to understand and address ableism and internal ableism to support women effectively.
5. **Develop and deliver educational programs by women with lived experience of disability.** Authenticity and relevance can be ensured by ensuring educational and sponsorship programs are developed and delivered by women who have lived experience with disability.
6. **Educational curriculum for employers should address structural barriers, including ableism, stereotypes, discrimination and prejudice.** Educational content should cover the challenges faced by women with disabilities in the workplace and recruitment processes.
7. **Promote the profile of women with disabilities in the workplace.** Women with disabilities should feature in all program aspects and materials to foster a supportive environment.
8. **Establish a Community of Practice (CoP).** Both sponsors and mentees should have access to a CoP for support, guidance and to share learnings.

Ultimately, the research phase of the Advancing Women project has identified significant barriers and challenges for women with disabilities in the workplace. By implementing the recommended strategies, we can take meaningful steps towards creating a more inclusive and equitable environment.



The Intersection of Gender and Disability

Gender is not the only factor that affects women's and gender diverse people's experience of discrimination in the workplace. Disability, class, age, geographical location, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background and/or also intersect to affect how discrimination is experienced.

'Intersectionality' is a theoretical term that is now widely used to describe how these distinct factors interact to shape a person's experience. It offers a lens to interpret the combined effects of individual identities, that cannot be separated or understood in isolation from each other. 'Intersectionality' recognises that women with disability experience unique forms of discrimination not experienced by women without disability, due to the way gender and disability-based discrimination intersect (Frohman & Sands 2015, pp16-18). It also recognises that women with disability encounter barriers during recruitment and tenure from organisations, employers, colleagues and systems that are not experienced by women without disability.

In previous research, intersectionality has provided deeper insight into the experiences of a diverse range of women with disabilities, including the subgroups who face greater disadvantage in employment (Warner & Brown, 2011). For example, women who have a nonphysical disability are more likely to experience challenges in the workplace and job market than women with a physical disability, and significantly more likely than women who don't have any disability (Jetha et al, 2021).

The research conducted by PWDA in the Advancing Women with Disability in the Workplace project, has captured experiences at the intersection of disability and gender, and this report endeavours to highlight the additional barriers and discrimination that women with disability face in the workplace and labour market, that women without disability do not.

Project Overview

The Advancing Women with Disability in the Workplace (Advancing Women) project was launched on March 8, 2023 - International Women's Day. Funded by the Department of Premier and Cabinet as part of the **Women's Leadership and Development Program: Lead and Succeed** grant opportunity, the project aims to fundamentally improve outcomes for women, girls, feminine-identifying and non-binary people with disability in Australia across both leadership representation and workforce participation and safety.

Through the delivery of two streams of activity – an educational and training program for employer organisations and a mentoring program for women with disability – the project seeks to increase the representation of women with disability in leadership roles; increase participation in the workplace by women with disability; and improve the safety of workplaces for women with disability. When combined, it is hoped that the educational and mentoring programs will impact 60 individuals, organisations and/or workplaces and support 39 women to secure sustainable, ongoing employment.

The motivation and need for the project are clear. The Advancing Women project has been developed in recognition of the gross underrepresentation of women with disability in leadership and decision-making roles both overseas and across the Australian Workforce. While data specifically relating to women with disability in leadership roles is notably lacking, United Nations Women

noted in 2019 that women with disability are severely underrepresented in decision making. And while there is a growing recognition that organisations need to cultivate a more diverse workforce in order to reap the rewards that diversity brings, focus on people with disability is lacking. The timing of this project is therefore critical. While Australia makes great strides to improve the safety and representation of women and other underrepresented groups in the workplace, it is crucial that we do not leave women with disability behind – women who, as cited by Kylee Tyndall, 'experience the double bind of sexism and ableism in their day to day lives.'

It should be noted that many and significant structural barriers to workplace participation and leadership exist for women with disability; and real change in this area cannot take place sustainably without a national approach. As outlined by Women With Disabilities Australia in their 2021 submission to the National Disability Employment Strategy, these underlying structural barriers include but are not limited to poverty; gender bias and gender inequality; the intersection of gender and disability discrimination; lack of safe, accessible and affordable housing; lack of accessible and affordable transport; the high incidence of gender-based violence; the non-optional costs of disability; and inflexible work arrangements.

In delivering an educational and training program to employers that will support them in creating workplaces that are not

only diverse but are inclusive of women with disability; and in delivering a mentoring program that will support a diverse range of women with disability to access and sustain leadership roles; this project firstly sought to better understand the experience of women with disability and employer

organisations. This report outlines the efforts that have been undertaken to date to inform the delivery of programs that will ultimately achieve the project objectives – to increase the representation of women with disability in leadership roles.

Project Logic

Inputs

- Expert Advisory Panel comprising lived experience and subject matter expertise
- Co-design panel comprising lived experience
- Project team

Activities

- Project Research
- Project Needs Assessment & Gap Analysis
- Curriculum development
- Community of Practice

Outputs

- Educational and learning program for employer organisations
- Mentoring program for women with disability

Short and mid-term outcomes

- Employers have a greater understanding of their role and responsibilities in creating inclusive environments.
- From recruitment to offboarding, the experience for women with disability is safe, inclusive and accessible.
- Employers recognise the value of inclusion and diversity and actively create employment pathways for women with disability.

Long term impact

- Increased representation of women with disability in leadership roles.
- Increased opportunities for women with disability in the workplace.
- Improved safety for women with disability in the workplace

Project Timeline

The project will be delivered in a number of phases:

Phase 1

January - July 2023
Research & Project
Establishment



Research will be undertaken to understand the barriers to employment and leadership for women with disability. This will include a literature review, survey and interviews with women with lived experience and employer organisations. The output from this phase is an interim 'needs assessment and gap analysis report' that informs the build of the educational and mentoring programs. During this time, expressions of interest for the project co-design and expert advisory panel will be collected.

Phase 2

July – December
2023



Building on the findings of the research phase, the educational and mentoring programs will be developed over a six-month period in consultation with the Expert Advisory and co-design panels. During this phase, organisations in NSW and ACT will be recruited for the delivery of the pilot program.

Phase 3

January – July 2024



During this phase, 5 employer organisations will be engaged, and the educational program will be piloted across these organisations. The mentoring program will be delivered at the same time across these organisations. Evaluation at the end of this phase will guide refinements to the program moving forwards.

Phase 4

July 2024 –
June 2025



Roll out of program in Western Australia and Victoria

Phase 5

July 2025 – June 2026



During the final 12 months of the project, the program content and platforms will be packaged to ensure replicable delivery of program across all Australian states. Key partners and stakeholders in remaining states (QLD, SA, TAS, NT) will be identified to support roll out Australia-wide. During this time, the program will remain ongoing and expanding in NSW, ACT, WA and VIC.

This Recommendations Report speaks to the conclusion of Phase One, summarising the research that has been undertaken and its findings; outlining the needs of the target cohort; identifying gaps in current offerings; and outlining recommendations to guide the development of both the educational and mentoring curriculums.

Research

Methodology

This project applies the definition of disability used in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006): “Disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

The project also considers intersectionality theory to address some of the ways gender and disability intersect with other forms of difference to influence and compound discrimination in the lives of women and children.

The project itself was advised and informed by women with disability in its inception and from the point of funding. As part of Phase One of the project, an Advisory and Co-design panel of women with lived experience and subject matter expertise has been compiled to provide expert perspectives and guidance on project design, outcomes and direction.

The project began from a position of acknowledging that women with disability are ready and willing to take on leadership roles, and that the onus is on employer organisations to break down barriers preventing them from adopting and excelling in leadership positions. The focus of the research, therefore, was on understanding

the barriers presented to women with diverse disabilities by hiring and employer organisations.

In seeking to understand both the barriers and enablers to workplace participation and safety for women with disability, and inform the recommendations for the future direction of the project, a multi-method study was completed, comprising:

- An examination of policy and literature focusing on the documented and evidenced barriers to workplace leadership for women with disability in Australia (Refer Appendix 1).
- Quantitative and qualitative research about the experiences of women with disability accessing leadership roles and workplaces more generally. The research was based in Australia and involved a quantitative and qualitative survey and qualitative interviews with women with lived experience.
- Quantitative and qualitative research about the experiences of employers in employing and supporting women with disability in the workplace and in leadership roles. The research was based in Australia and involved a quantitative and qualitative survey and qualitative interviews with human resource representatives.

Critical to the co-design ethos of the project was listening to the lived experiences of women with disability. This was achieved

through a survey, which asked respondents to consider and answer 24 questions. To support analysis of the responses, the survey included demographic questions, including information on gender, age, disability, location and employment status. The survey was then divided into two sections, with the first section seeking to understand the respondent's experiences, concerns and beliefs relating to employment barriers, as well as their recommendations for priority areas for change. This section also explored the respondent's positive experiences of workplace leadership, participation and safety. The second section of the survey explored the respondent's understanding of and relationship with leadership, aiming to uncover the skills and competencies women with disability bring to the workplace, as well as any internal barriers, and therefore the areas in which mentoring may support.

In addition to the survey, individual interviews were scheduled with a number of women with disability to uncover some of the particular challenges and barriers in more detail. Some of these experiences are shared as case studies in this report.

In delivering a program to organisations that will support women with disability in leadership roles, it was also critical to understand the experiences of workplaces. A survey was therefore constructed that would support the project team in learning about the priorities of organisations in regard to diversity and inclusion; as well as some of the barriers experienced by organisations in implementing leadership and other programs. In addition to the survey, employer interviews were conducted to support in the

sharing of more detailed information relating to specific programs or challenges.

Alongside this research, a literature review was completed, which specifically addressed the questions of, 'What organisational **barriers** prevent women with disability from accessing leadership?' and 'What organisational **enablers** support women with disability to access leadership roles?'

Finally, a number of existing programs were examined across organisational diversity and inclusion as well as mentoring programs, in order to learn from best practice models and to supplement recommendations made during this phase of the project.

Research Constraints

The research is constrained by a number of assumptions. Those are:

- It was assumed that the people surveyed represented the target cohort – that is women with disability;
- It was assumed that the experiences shared by interviewees and survey respondents were truthful.

The research was also limited by the number of respondents to the research activities. While the survey for women with disability received over 140 responses, the survey for employer organisations elicited only six complete responses.

A further limitation of the project relates to the diversity of disability. Women with different types of disabilities face multiple and complex barriers to workplace participation

and leadership opportunities. What is true for one person and one disability is not the same for another person, and if two people have the same 'type' of disability, it is not the case that the barriers experienced are necessarily the same. Everyone's experience is unique. While the research and case studies used in this report endeavour to encompass a range of disabilities, the research will always be constrained by the representation of disabilities within the data.

The research was also limited in that, by considering women, girls, feminine identifying and non-binary people together, the experiences of non-binary and transgender people may not be captured or addressed effectively by the interview or survey questions.

Finally, as outlined in the Project Overview, the research is limited by the resources available to and scope of the project.

Research Findings

Survey Results Women with Lived Experience

Launched in April 2023, the survey contained 24 questions and was targeted at women with disability. The survey included demographic questions, including information on gender, age, disability, location and employment status. It was then divided into a further two sections, with the first section seeking to understand the respondent's experiences, concerns and beliefs relating to employment barriers, as well as their recommendations for priority

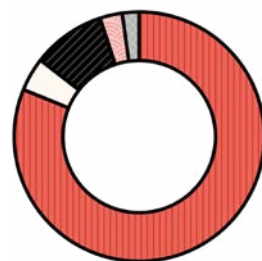
areas for change. This section also explored the respondent's positive experiences of workplace leadership, participation and safety.

The second section of the survey explored the respondent's understanding of and relationship with leadership, aiming to uncover the skills and competencies women with disability bring to the workplace, as well as any internal barriers, and therefore the areas in which mentoring may support.

Demographics

The survey was open from April 1 2023 until April 28 2023 and resulted in 142 complete responses. Of the respondents, 98% identified as having a disability and 81% identified as women.

How respondents identify



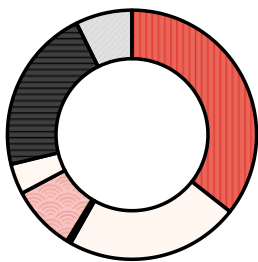
- 81% Women
 - 4% Man
 - 9% Non-binary
 - 3% I use a different term
 - 2% Prefer not to say
-

The largest demographic cohort was aged 35-44 (30%) followed by those aged 45-54 (23%). 3.5% identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

As outlined above, 98% of respondents identified as having a disability, one responder did not, and two responders did not disclose.

Of those who identified as having a disability, 62.5% identified as having a physical disability, 40% a psychosocial disability and 38% a neurological disability. 15.4% had a visual disability, 7.3% a hearing disability, 1.5% an intellectual disability and 13% specified a disability other than those categorised. Of those who selected 'other', disabilities specified included chronic health conditions and autism / neurodevelopmental disabilities, if they didn't personally attribute these to a category already available.

Types of disability



63% Physical
40% Psychosocial
1% Intellectual
15% Visual
7% Hearing
38% Neurological
13% Other

The majority (48%) of respondents did not have caring responsibilities at the time of survey completion. Of those who did have caring responsibilities, 17% were caring for their children and 23% for other family members, including elderly parents.

The majority (34%) of respondents were in full time employment (35+ hours per week) at the time of survey completion. 24% were employed part time and 15% self-employed. 14% were employed casually and 12% unemployed.

The majority (65%) of respondents were located in Urban, suburban, metropolitan or

major cities, 30% in regional towns and 5% in rural or remote areas.

Experiences in the workplace

47% of respondents believe women with disability are not treated equally in the workplace. While a further 34% believe women with disability are treated very unequally, 11% believe women with disability are treated close to equally and 5% very equally in the workplace. Of the seven respondents who stated that women with disability are treated very equally in the workplace, it should be noted that three were men, two were women, and two did not disclose their gender; all seven identified as having a disability.

Of the barriers identified to women with disability participating equally in the workplace, the survey showed that survey respondents were most concerned by:

1. The unconscious bias of hiring managers and employees (69% of respondents extremely concerned)
2. Limited opportunities for career progression and promotion (64% of respondents extremely concerned)
3. Failure to identify unique skills of women with disability (62% of respondents extremely concerned)
4. Failure to adopt an intersectional approach to workplace equality (58% of respondents extremely concerned)
5. Difficulty negotiating workplace adjustments and accommodations (57% of respondents extremely concerned)

6. Lack of flexible work arrangements (55% of respondents extremely concerned)
7. Lack of inclusive policies and practices in the workplace (52% of respondents extremely concerned)
8. Inadequate support for women with disability seeking and gaining employment (51% of respondents extremely concerned)
9. Negative attitudes and discrimination in the workplace from employers and others (50% of respondents extremely concerned)

Other areas of concern included:

- Standard interview process not meeting the needs of applicants with disability (47% of respondents extremely concerned)
- Problems relating to physical access of the workplace (47% of respondents extremely concerned)
- Limitations of the disability discrimination and anti-discrimination acts (47% of respondents extremely concerned)
- Unfair treatment during recruitment (43% of respondents extremely concerned)

Of the barriers identified to women with disability participating equally in the workplace, the survey showed that respondents were **least** concerned by following, although the percentages are still high:

1. Caring responsibilities (33% of respondents extremely concerned)

2. Access to assistive technology (37% of respondents extremely concerned)
3. Accessibility of information (38% of respondents extremely concerned)

Other barriers identified by survey respondents included:

- Inadequate sick leave
- A feeling of needing to work harder than others to prove value for employers due to needing adjustments
- Requirement for drivers' license
- Lack of remote work opportunities
- Lack of representation of disabled women in leadership roles
- 'Neurotypical' requirements of roles
- Mental load associated with educating those in the workplace about disability and accessibility
- Lack of education for women with disability around their rights in the workplace
- Lack of opportunity for people with complex disabilities
- Lack of support services in rural areas e.g., Taxis

In asking about previous experiences in the workplace, the majority of respondents (86%) had experienced a lack of disability awareness by an employer or workforce. 77% had experienced discrimination and negative attitudes and 65% had experienced difficulty negotiating reasonable adjustments and accommodations. A further 60% had

experience working for organisations with no reasonable adjustments policy in place.

“I started my own business because I could not find an inclusive workplace around my fluctuating disabilities. I HAD TO create it for myself.”

“I had to start my own business in order to have an inclusive safe and supportive work environment.”

“I had to be employed by family/ self-employed.”

Positively, 65% of respondents had experienced working in an inclusive, safe and supportive work environment. Enablers to an inclusive, safe and supportive work environment identified by respondents included:

- Working for oneself – owning the business / self employed
- Manager / CEO with disability
- Accommodating reasonable adjustments
- Regular and proactive review of reasonable adjustments
- Supportive leadership
- Accessible leadership (door always open)
- Managerial buy in to accessibility
- Respect for skills and contributions
- Flexibility
- Work from home or flexible work policies
- Access to employee assistance programs
- Strengths based attitudes

- Dedicated inclusion committees
- Representation of disability across the workforce
- Representation of disability in leadership positions
- Creating a culture where difference is not the exception
- Leadership disability awareness training
- Assistive technology
- Part time options
- A psychologically safe environment to bring inclusive policies to life
- Physical accessibility including accessible car parking

One survey respondent highlighted their position in senior leadership as an enabler to successful workplace participation:

“Honestly, the thing that makes my workplace so inclusive is the fact I am now in a senior leadership position that gives me more ability to assert my wishes with less fear of repercussion. We also have an amazing DEIB team that have lots of different workshops for building awareness around disability and inclusion. This certainly helps make people more aware. I’m also able to work from home 100% of the time which is so much more useful for me than attempting to navigate my way into an office environment.”

In assessing priorities for improving outcomes for women with disability in relation to workplace participation and leadership

opportunities, survey respondents felt the following were the most urgent:

- Addressing negative attitudes and discrimination in the workplace (87% of respondents considered this essential)
- Ensuring the recruitment process is inclusive (86% of respondents considered this essential)
- Provision of flexible work arrangements (87% of respondents considered this essential)
- Provision of reasonable adjustments (84% of respondents considered this essential)
- Implementation of accessibility standards in the workplace (80% of respondents considered this essential)
- Provision of supports to people with disability accessing, applying for, maintaining and returning to employment (79% of respondents considered this essential)
- Disability inclusion education and training programs for employers (73% of respondents considered this essential)
- Implementation of disability inclusion action plans (73% of respondents considered this essential)
- Provision of inclusive and accessible leadership programs in the workplace (69% of respondents considered this essential)

The lower end of priority areas identified were still considered essential by half the respondents:

1. Supporting organisations to implement affinity groups (41% of respondents considered this essential)
2. Education, awareness and support on self-employment opportunities (53% of respondents considered this essential)
3. Provision of networking opportunities for women with disability (55% of respondents considered this essential)

Other priorities identified by respondents included:

- More opportunities for women on boards
- Access to vocational training for people with disability
- Quotas, legislation and Affirmative action
- Career progression
- Removal of excess bureaucracy

The final section of the survey explored some of the skills or qualities the target audience considered essential to leadership and workforce participation.

Of those who completed the survey, 62% agreed that they actively pursued learning and professional development opportunities. However, only 31% felt their skills were appreciated in their workplace and just 13% felt they had opportunities to advance their career in their current role.

In discussing the skills respondents felt were important to leaders and those in decision making roles, the following were identified:

- Strategic thinking
- Innovative thinking
- Proactive
- Ability to learn
- Empathetic listening skills
- Effective communication skills
- Ability to implement plans, programs and change
- Ability to motivate and support others
- Self-awareness
- Subject matter expertise
- Delegation skills
- Respect for others
- Self-advocacy skills
- Access to mentors
- Strong moral compass
- Inclusive and valuing of diversity



Case Study – 'It's easier to say nothing'

Jane* has experienced a sensory hearing loss since birth, through which she experiences partial hearing loss across different ranges. "Particularly with people's voices gaps will be missing. Accents and background noise affect me." Since the age of 10, Jane has worn behind-the-ear hearing aids. In correlation with her hearing loss, Jane suffers severe anxiety, which she relates to her hearing impairment. Jane has experienced time as an inpatient for her mental health, and therefore also identifies as having a psychosocial disability.

Jane is currently employed at a State Government organisation, however, chooses not to disclose her disability to her colleagues. Because of this, Jane receives no support in the workplace to assist her with her.

Jane draws the distinction between 'imagined barriers' that she creates herself, and real barriers. Jane believes that, because she didn't receive appropriate support at a young age, she developed coping mechanisms, including hiding her disability, which she carries forward into her working life today. "I just don't let people know, which creates its own barriers," she says.

Another 'imagined' barrier is the internalised ableism experienced by Jane from an early age. Describing the complex relationship between psychology and disability, Jane says that "Rather than being given skills to manage my disability I need skills to be safe and brave." Jane believes that help with self-esteem and self-belief would help her in the workplace.

In terms of physical barriers in the workplace, Jane has benefited from both the COVID-19 pandemic, which has afforded her and many others to work from home; and the advancement in technology. "I don't think I would be able to work if I didn't have closed captions," Jane says. "I am dependent on closed captions for all of my meetings. Flexibility to work from home is what supports me in my leadership role."

The fact that Jane thrives in a remote working environment is in itself a barrier to workplace participation. Jane avoids the office and face to face meetings because she is unable to hear people clearly.

While Jane's preferred strategy to overcome barriers in the workplace is to not disclose her disability, she has experienced working in a smaller organisation, within the disability sector, where she was able to safely disclose her disability and receive support. 'I received a workplace assessment from an independent audiologist and funding for assistive technology in the workplace. The organisation knew a lot about the diverse types of disability and different organisations to contact for support. They led me, rather than me leading them – the role was switched – and I learned a lot.'

Now in a large organisation, Jane believes it is easy for employees to become a number and 'blend in with the crowd.' And, because her disability is largely hidden, it is easier not to disclose. 'It is such a tricky conversation to have about how the workplace support you. You have to keep reminding them. It's easier to say nothing.'

Jane believes that better inclusion of people with disability starts at the recruitment phase. “Reassuring and letting people know there will be no discrimination and won’t be disadvantaged right at the outset,” she says. Jane also believes employers need to be better informed about different types of disability and, when they are informed, promote themselves as inclusive and responsive. “Organisations are very visible in promoting their inclusion of First Nations and LGBTQIA+ communities,” she says. “When it comes to visibility of supporting people with disability it’s just not there.”

*to preserve anonymity, the name of the interviewee has been changed.

Case Study – ‘Locked Out’ of the Workplace

Sarah* was born with a complex congenital condition that required extensive reconstructive surgery. The first five years of Sarah’s life were spent in hospital and, at age 15, Sarah got extremely sick again. “Since then, I have been in and out of hospital, managed by 10-13 different teams.” Sarah experiences mobility limitations, fatigue, pain, and incontinence, as well as complex PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) as a result of medical interventions.

Sarah says that her disability has really prevented her from getting and holding down a job. “I have always been very academic and relied on my brain,” she says. “The struggle has been that I can be sick at a moment’s notice. While I don’t feel well almost all of the time, I can crash at a moment’s notice. This leads to specialist appointments which doesn’t fit in with certain workplaces.”

Sarah describes her ‘only real, normal job’ as taking place in 2017. In this role, she recalls having so many hospital admissions that it used up her annual leave and all her sick leave. “I had to go back to work immediately after surgery as I had used up all my annual leave in appointments,” she says. Sarah describes herself as being “locked out” of the workplace, even in part time roles which afford more time for appointments. “Because of how hospital schedules their appointments you just have to be there, and an appointment can take up the whole day. So, it’s been very challenging.”

Sarah faces other barriers to workplace participation. Because of her incontinence, Sarah requires access to the bathroom and frequent bathroom breaks. She needs accessible parking and, when it isn't available, relies on lifts from others. "I ended up having to get people to drive and drop me to work and then limiting as I couldn't leave if I got sick suddenly," she says, recalling her last place of work, which did not have accessible parking close by.

Sarah has also experienced discrimination in the workplace, missing out on opportunities in the workplace because of the perceptions of her employers. Sarah recalls that she was told by her employer that an opportunity was given to someone else because she wouldn't have been able to see it through.

To overcome the barriers to workplace participation, Sarah has explored working in her family business and, more recently, self-employment. "I ended up working for my family business where my family know I can meet the deliverables. I can be a high performer but be sick when I need to," she says. Expanding on what made this an enabling environment, Sarah believes it was down to trust. "There was trust that I would do my role and what I said I would do but would have the flexibility to do it on my terms, and leave when I needed to, rest when I needed to." Consequently, Sarah felt 'safe' in this role. "I felt very safe and secure and very motivated as I was able to get things done. I knew when I had to leave that I could still keep up and do things on my phone in hospital. They took away the barriers of time and instead judged me on performance."

Even in this situation, however, there were difficulties. "I wasn't able to take holidays or breaks from work as I would take time off work [for appointments]."

Today, Sarah has established her own consultancy, and works for herself, supporting others with lived experience. "The challenge there is that it's a consultancy," she says. "A stable income and financial security is a challenge. I have moved back to my parent's place."

Sarah believes that for more women with disability to be successful in leadership roles, organisations need to make a shift away from time keeping and instead focus on deliverables. She also advocates for organisations to have lived experience in designated roles. However, she worries that people with lived experience are missing out because they don't have qualifications. "Education and work experience are such huge barriers," says Sarah, who recently completed an MBA but who did not graduate from high school due to her disability and frequent hospital admissions.

Sarah relates to the experience of internalised ableism and the feeling of having to prove yourself and 'be everyone else'. 'It's so hard to identify ableism in other people when you feel like that yourself,' she says. To support women with disability Sarah believes women with disability would benefit from learning how to manage power imbalances; how to recognise misogyny; how to identify ableism; understanding what is and isn't acceptable and when you're being taken advantage of.

*to preserve anonymity, the name of the interviewee has been changed.

Survey Results – Employer Organisations

The employer survey was designed to understand the experiences of organisations in supporting women with disability; and the overarching intentions of employer organisations when it comes to disability inclusion in the workplace. The survey included 20 questions and was launched on April 1, 2023. Only six organisations completed the employer survey, which was left open for completion beyond the expected end date (April 28), and which allowed for anonymous responses.

Of the six organisations that completed the survey, 80% identified annual revenue as over \$3m and the remainder between \$500k-\$3m. 66% were located in urban, suburban and metropolitan city locations and 33% in regional towns.

80% of respondents stated that diversity, equity and inclusion was one of the organisation's stated values and / or priority areas and 60% stated that their organisation currently employs people who identify as having a disability. 60% stated that their organisation does not have a disability inclusion action plan.

None of the respondents identified their organisation as having programs or strategies in place to recruit diverse candidates, including women with disability; develop a pipeline of leaders, including women with disability; and to provide targeted development opportunities for diverse employees, including women with disability.

33% of respondents stated their organisation offers disability awareness, inclusion and access training; and 66% of respondents stated their organisation offers training and education relating to embracing differences in the workplace.

None of the organisations represented by respondents offered training and education programs on discrimination and regulatory compliance; overcoming unconscious bias; teaching leaders how to manager diverse populations and lead inclusively; or embedding inclusion practices.

“The company only talk about equal opportunity between men and women. They do not seem to have any awareness of disability or other factors which would be inclusive.”

The organisations represented by respondents highlighted the following as the most significant barriers to equal workplace participation for women with disability.

1. Accessibility of organisational information
2. Accessibility of physical workspaces
3. Accessibility of recruitment process
4. Lack of career progression pathways for employees with disability
5. Failure to adopt an intersectional approach to diversity
6. Failure to recognise unique capabilities of those with disability

All (100%) of organisations responding to the survey believed the provision of supports to people with disability accessing, applying for, maintaining and returning to employment was essential. This is at odds with the beliefs of women with lived experience, of whom only 50% believed this was essential.

The other priorities identified by respondents were:

1. Disability and inclusion education and training programs for the workforce
2. Disability discrimination education and training programs for people with disability
3. Implementation of a Disability Inclusion Action Plan

4. Provision of inclusive and accessible leadership programs in the workplace
5. Ensuring the recruitment process is inclusive for people with disability
6. Addressing negative attitudes and discrimination in the workplace

Other barriers identified by the respondents included:

- Finances
- Bullying
- Attitudes
- Inability to work from home and inaccessibility of workplace



Case Study – 'Saying the Right Thing'

Through interview, one anonymous organisation shared with the project team their own challenges in supporting people with disability in the workplace. Located in Victoria, the organisation employs more than 2,000 people and has an active commitment to inclusion, with a current Access and Inclusion Plan spanning 2021-2024. While specific data was not shared in relation to number of employees with disability, or representation in leadership roles, the organisation confirmed that they currently employ a number of people with disability, the majority of whom identify as having neuro-developmental and psychosocial disabilities.

One of the challenges identified by the employer was in supporting their human resources team to negotiate reasonable adjustments confidently and safely with employees with a disability to ensure positive outcomes for both the employee and employer.

The employer reported a lack of confidence on behalf of the human resources team, who were said to be nervous in engaging with people with disability and concerned about "saying the right thing."

The employer also reported a tension between performance management and reasonable adjustments; and an overall tendency for able-bodied employees to make assumptions about the adjustments required by people with certain types of disability.

Ultimately, the employer identified a need for training, education and resources that would support the human resources team in:

- Communicating confidently with employees with disability
- Understanding and implementing adjustments
- How to use safe and inclusive language in navigating complex adjustments and performance management concerns

Case Study – La Trobe University

In her presentation at the Disability Leadership Summit in June 2023, Jessica Vanderlelie, Deputy Vice Chancellor of Students at La Trobe University, shared some of the challenges La Trobe had faced in implementing its own longstanding Disability Inclusion Action Plan which, while good on paper, Jessica stated "did not extend support to staff and did not create an organisation that embedded inclusion." In challenging La Trobe to do things differently, La Trobe went on to identify some of the biggest challenges faced by staff with disability.

- "Getting around can be a struggle".
- "Nothing is simple"
- "It's all left up to the Accessibility and EDI teams".
- "Always having to ask can be exhausting".
- "I can't see myself in Leadership".
- "The form for reasonable adjustments isn't accessible".

In addressing the key barriers, La Trobe chose to adopt universal design and focus on getting the basics right. This meant:

- Realigning policies to meet flexibility post-COVID.
- Creating a central fund for workplace adjustments – the organisation uncovered that one of the biggest barriers to adjustments being approved was whether the adjustment was in budget and which budget it came from. Creating a central fund eliminated this as a barrier to approving workplace adjustments.
- Embedding training for all managers.
- Raising the profile of all staff and managers with disabilities.

Case Study – Services Australia

Michael Nelson, General Manager Workplace Relations Division shared Services Australia’s disability leadership program, which draws on an Inclusive Behaviour Model, developed over years’ worth of ongoing organisational commitment to diversity and inclusion. The approach adopted at Services Australia addresses four key pillars. These are:

1. Culture
2. Capability
3. Creativity
4. Connection

In driving a **culture** of inclusion, Services Australia appoints a number of Disability

Champions across the organisation.

As people with lived experience, the role of the disability champions is not only to improve representation and visibility of disability across the workplace, but also to influence others and understand the broader work environment from the perspective of a person with disability. In 2021 Services Australia undertook a deep dive into inclusion, and the Working Group discovered that bullying was more evident across people with disability. While Services Australia had policies in place, the deep dive discovered that lack of communication meant that staff were not connected with the resources. It was discovered that communication was essential to ensure staff knew where policies and other resources were located and how to use them.

In 2022, the organisation undertook disability inclusion action planning, which resulted in 14 clear actions. One of which was the implementation of the organisation’s Inclusive Behaviour Model, designed to promote inclusive behaviours in the workplace and therefore drive an inclusive culture.

The Inclusive Behaviour Model

Staff can demonstrate inclusiveness by practising the agency's seven inclusive behaviours.

These are grouped within three behaviour clusters:

- within myself
- within my team
- within my agency.

Inclusive behaviour is the collective ways in which staff work and conduct themselves in the workplace. It is the ways they recognise and embrace difference, respect, value and embrace the contributions of others, as well as how they support others to bring their 'authentic selves' to work.

The seven inclusive behaviours adopted by Services Australia are:

1. Respect and are open to different experiences and perspectives.
2. Consciously considers inclusion.
3. Recognises and challenges personal bias.
4. Demonstrates inclusive behaviours.
5. Contributes to inclusive relationships.
6. Promotes the value of inclusion and diversity.
7. Supports and fosters inclusion at the Agency



Finally, in addressing an inclusive culture, Services Australia agreed on a number of national days to celebrate and drive awareness of disability. These were National Autism Day and International Day of People with Disability.

In focusing on **Capability**, Services Australia focused on ensuring technology, tools and equipment were available to staff without time delays to support them in doing their job. Services Australia established a dedicated Accessibility Services desk, which provided support on systems, software and assistive technology used by employees with disability. In implementing this approach, Services Australia noted that tools and technology are not the only barrier, time can also be a barrier. For example, it can take a person with disability longer to learn a new platform or system than someone without a disability. Because of this, Services Australia adjusted their approach, to ensure time was seen as an investment.

Services Australia also implemented an educational Inclusion Curriculum, available to employees through the company intranet with curated content for the organisation. As well as self-paced courses, the curriculum includes fact sheets and activities. They also implemented a learning and leadership program, which focused on the mindsets, skills and behaviours that encourage inclusion.

In supporting capability, Services Australia also launched its Aurora Program, which provides support specifically to people with autism as they are onboarded into the agency. To date, the Aurora program has supported over 100 people with autism to secure or progress their employment with

the Agency, removing barriers and allowing people to demonstrate skills at recruitment stage, for example, other than through written recruitment. Each candidate who goes on to secure an 18-month placement is given an Individual Success Plan, and those involved with the Aurora program receive Autism Awareness training.

Turning to its pillar of creativity, Services Australia aims to harness diverse views, share knowledge and build best practice by hosting a series of focus groups that explore themes across the organisation and identify areas for improvement. By adopting this approach, the organisation has heard that employees are unsure how to work with those who have invisible disabilities; and that assistive technologies are not well understood.

Services Australia also launched a Tech Innovation Lab, that looks at emerging assistive technologies.

Finally, addressing the fourth pillar of Connection, Services Australia drives connection through a number of initiatives. National Disability Access Coordinators are appointed to ensure employees with disability and chronic medical conditions have a point of contact to support them with adjustments. The Agency has a Workplace Adjustments Passport that lets staff share information about their adjustment requirements without having to continually re-share. The Agency also hosts a Disability Inclusion Network social media channel on its internal Yammer site. A confidential channel that is open to people with and without disability, this forum supports employees in exchanging feedback and ideas.

Focus Group – Barriers to Employment for People with Disability

A series of two small focus groups conducted during the project research phase in partnership with City of Ryde Council supported PWDA in understanding and reporting on barriers to employment for people with lived experience of disability. The focus groups welcomed a total of nine people with a diverse range of disabilities, three of whom identified as members of the CALD community and one of whom identified as LGBTQIA+. The workshops asked the members to discuss both the barriers and enablers to inclusion of people with disability in the workplace. While this focus group did not touch on leadership, and comprised both men and women with disability, it presented consistent themes and poignant examples that supplement the project's findings.

Focus group participants noted that representation of people with disability in the workplace was a significant factor in 'feeling safe' in the workplace. The group talked collectively of examples in their own careers where they had come up against barriers. These can be broadly and collectively summarised as physical accessibility including technology; ableism; language barriers; financial barriers; lack of flexibility; and discrimination.

All participants agreed that enablers to participation in the workplace include funding; education for employers as well as education for employees around their rights; sufficient support; clarity over role

and deliverables; individual support plans or adjustment passports; social groups to support connection; psychological safety; accessibility in place including accessible technology.

One participant said, "It's important organisations understand disability is permanent. There will always be a gap. You can induct someone all your like, but they should not feel like they are expected to be an able-bodied person down the track."

Another participant with a hearing impairment shared how the smallest detail can make all the difference to a person with disability. "It is much harder when you have an invisible disability," they said. "We are on either side of the river and there is no bridge. If there is nothing to facilitate hearing aids in a meeting room, then a lack of technology becomes a barrier. One tiny thing missing makes all the difference."

A participant with MS pointed out the practicalities of disability. "Anywhere I go I have a four-hour window between using the toilet. Would the toilet be accessible? Would I get a break before or after so I could use the toilet?"

Literature Review

A literature review (reference Appendix 1) was undertaken in May 2023, taking into account materials spanning 2018-2023. Materials examined included academic journals as well as grey material including blogs, media articles and industry publications.

Within the workplace, the literature review considered gender bias and stereotypes

as a key barrier to workplace participation and leadership, referencing The Australian Human Rights Commission's Respect@ Work Report. Disturbingly, the report found that sexual harassment against people with disability was often connected to persistent discriminatory attitudes, stereotypes and marginalisation in work settings.

The report noted that attitudes of paternalism made workers with disability feel 'less equal at work', and that workplace power dynamics, hierarchies and unequal power relation in workplaces could increase the risk of sexual harassment and create barriers to reporting for people with disability.

The report highlighted the experience of women with disability in experiencing both sexism and ableism in their day to day lives, noting that women have lower chances of being hired; lower access to health care; and often have limited social, economic, and political opportunities.

In examining organisations and approaches to improving diversity in the workplace, the literature review focused on accessibility of the workplace, training programs and recruitment practices, noting that, while some barriers can be overcome by organisational policies and procedures on inclusion and diversity, simply adding them is not a guarantee that women with disability will advance in the workplace.

Finally, the literature review examined mentors as a method of overcoming barriers, referencing the Includeability and Disability Leadership Institute initiatives, whose outcomes are as yet unknown. As outlined in the review, these leadership programs come

at a significant cost, are not necessarily accessible nor are they cognizant of the particular structural barriers disabled women face on a daily basis. The Review therefore recommends there is a need for a "fit for purpose" leadership program with mentors for disabled women. Such a program must be consistent with the CRPD and CEDAW and acknowledge the double-edged sword of sexism and ableism that disabled women face on a daily basis.

The material examined in the review shows that disabled women face large systemic structural barriers including sexism, stereotypes, ableism as well as discrimination and prejudice. Such barriers require a long-term commitment from employers, government and all organisations, working authentically towards workplaces that mainstream disability.

Analysis & Themes

The research conducted as part of this project has identified a raft of barriers and challenges that women with disability face not only in the advancement of their careers and positions in the workplace, but in accessing the workplace in the first place. The barriers and challenges experienced by women more broadly, are compounded by the complex and nuanced barriers experienced due to disability.

Many of the barriers and challenges identified remain out of scope for the purposes of this project. As outlined in the project's literature review, Such barriers cannot be overcome by a small "one off" program, rather these barriers require a long term commitment from employers, government and all organisations, not by merely adding to HR processes a tick box of "inclusion", but by working authentically towards workplaces that mainstream disability – a workplace where the word "inclusion" isn't needed and opportunity of advancement is a given and not a grind due to prejudices and biases.

In using the research to identify common themes experienced by women with disability, both in relation to leadership and workplace participation, as well as their personal development, the following themes have been identified.

Recruitment

"Hiring managers need to be aware of neurodivergent people may not accurately represent themselves in application and interview processes. If a neurodivergent person demonstrates they are capable for the role with their current history, then this should be considered. Current hiring practices are based on confidence, not competence and put neurodivergent people at a disadvantage even though they are demonstrably capable."

"I am starting my own business because I got so sick of applying for jobs (even ones which specifically said they wanted "lived experience of disability"), getting short listed because I have excellent skills and experience, and then being cast aside when I shared what my disability is. There was so much discrimination in the selection process I lost hope and just stopped trying."

"The onus should not be on PWD to solve this issue. We have legislation but bias abounds. The root of the problem seems to be in the recruitment process, particularly in private enterprise."

A consistent theme in the research findings was in the recruitment of women with disability, both in the promotion of roles and in the recruitment and onboarding process. While resources are available to employers, including Job Access and Includability, which provides information to employers about employing people with disability, the impact of these initiatives, which focus on access and on the need for inclusive language, developing a disability inclusion action plan and having disability champions, is not translated into a positive experience for women with disability. As evidenced by Services Australia, some organisations are adapting their recruitment practices to specifically target certain cohorts, with the Aurora program experimenting with onboarding practices specifically adapted for people with neurodiversity.

Adjustments

“Federal and state/territory antidiscrimination legislation should be amended to include positive requirements to provide reasonable adjustments in the workplace and to prevent and appropriately respond to disability discrimination in the workplace.”

Both women with disability and employer organisations referenced Reasonable Adjustments – or a lack of Reasonable Adjustments – as a significant barrier to sustaining employment and therefore to accessing leadership roles. Many women had experienced working in workplaces with no Reasonable Adjustments policies, and

organisations themselves cited difficulties in understanding and negotiating reasonable adjustments with employees.

A lack of understanding of a person’s rights in relation to Reasonable Adjustments was evident in speaking with women with disability, some of whom were unaware that employer organisations are required by law to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace, and that failure to do so is discrimination. At the same time, employer organisations are unsure of what does and doesn’t constitute a reasonable adjustment and, within their own organisations, unsure of who would approve an adjustment and to what extent they can make an adjustment, either due to a lack of knowledge and understanding or due to a lack of policy and clarity.

Representation

“I think representation is very important. You should be able to see yourself on the other side of the counter, on the TV, at the vet or doctors, in the pool, or at the mechanics, not just hear about one amazing individual with no legs who is scaling Mt Kosciuszko.”

Through the course of the project, women with disability shared that they were lacking representation in the workplace in terms of role models. Similarly, women in senior roles were often lacking the safety to share and disclose their own disability. Organisations shared that they employed people with disability, however, many also shared that

the number of people with disability in their organisation is either unknown, or lower than the actual number due to people unwilling to disclose their status as a person with disability.

In seeking to improve representation in the workplace, Services Australia identified 'Disability Champions' – high profile leadership roles tasked with ensuring people with disability are prominent in the workplace. This is not a siloed approach – UNSW (University of New South Wales) also established its UNSW Diversity Champions in 2018 to help drive UNSW as an international exemplar in equity, diversity and inclusion.

Other organisations have chosen to adopt mentorship and scholarship programs specifically for people with disability, with Australian Institute of Company Directors' (AICD) government funded initiative supporting people with disability to undertake the Company Directors Course, the Foundations of Directorship or the Governance Foundations of Not-for-Profit Directors program at AICD.

Blind Citizens Australia also offers an Executive Leadership Program (ELP) designed to improve the skills and capacity of leaders who are blind and vision impaired through training, mentoring and support, and therefore increase the number of leaders who are blind or vision impaired across both the blindness and disability sectors.

Internal Ableism

'It's so hard to identify ableism in other people when you feel like that yourself,'

The project research was undertaken from a point of view that women with disability are willing and ready to lead. The project approach is focused on barriers that existing within workplaces and employer organisations, however, through the course of the project, many women shared their experiences of 'internal ableism'.

Internalised, or 'unconscious' ableism can be best defined as when a person with disability discriminates against themselves, holding the view that their disability is something to be ashamed of, something to hide, or by refusing accessibility and support.

Through interviews, women shared their experience of internal ableism, which is strongly related to the discrimination and barriers that they have experienced their whole lives.

There is no doubt that internal ableism plays a role in a person's willingness to share their disability openly with their employer, and in their own willingness or belief in themselves that they can advance in the workplace. This seems to be true regardless of the nature of the workplace. However, it is also true that women with disability can be supported in the workplace to identify and acknowledge internal ableism where it is evident.

Lack of Mainstream Opportunities

Through the course of our research, we spoke with many female leaders with disability. A common theme, however, was that these women had carved out a leadership role for themselves, starting and

leading their own businesses, for example, because of the many challenges and lack of opportunities open to them. Where women with disability had thrived in the workplace in leadership roles, this had typically been for a Disabled Person's Organisation (DPO), where disability was embraced and championed.



Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research, and in looking ahead to the second stage of the project, during which the educational and mentorship programs will be developed, the project team has made the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1

Participating organisations have an evidenced commitment to DE&I and already employ people with disability.

For any woman with disability to thrive in a leadership role, it is crucial that the employer organisation has a foundational understanding of and commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. A number of the challenges and barriers evidenced in this report cannot be tackled by this project alone, and any curriculum developed by the project cannot be expected to achieve sustainable leadership roles for women with disability without the organisation already recognising the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion. It is therefore recommended that organisations participating in the program have either an established diversity, equity and inclusion arm, or have a disability inclusion action plan in place, and already employ people with disability in their organisation.

Participating organisations need to ensure that their DE&I policies, procedures and

organisational processes are all reviewed regularly as it is important that inclusion and accessibility is embedded and integrated across the whole organisation for the Advancing Women project to be useful and successful.

Recommendation 2

The education and mentorship programs are delivered in parallel, adopting a ‘sponsorship’ model.

To support women with disability in sustaining a leadership role, it is important that they are both sponsored and supported from within the employer organisation. The project team recommends, therefore, that the mentorship arm of the project is reflective of a ‘sponsorship’ model, through which a person with disability receives ‘sponsorship’ from a senior peer within the organisation.

Workplace sponsorship programs match emerging talent with influential and supportive employees who can help them move ahead in their careers. For women with disability to be successful in their leadership role, it is crucial they have the endorsement of the employer organisation, which can be achieved through the adoption of a sponsorship model.

Recommendation 3

Mentees/participants being sponsored must have access to women with disability in positional leadership roles that involve decision making.

It is important that if women with disability aren't represented in decision making roles at the participating organisation, then mentees participating in the program have access to external women with disability in positional leadership for guidance and role modelling. This should sit alongside their sponsorship within the organisation.

Recommendation 4

Mentoring curriculum must address strategies to overcome 'internal ableism' experienced by women with disability.

The project research evidenced the number of women with disability that discriminate against themselves internally by identifying with internal ableism. To ensure women participating in the Advancing Women project can sustain and thrive in a leadership role, sponsors/mentors must be equipped with an understanding of ableism and internal ableism. It is therefore recommended that ableism and internal ableism are featured in any curriculum developed for the sponsors/mentors.

Recommendation 5

Educational curriculum must be developed and delivered by women with lived experience of disability and encompass experiences of a wide range of disabilities.

To ensure the authenticity of the project curriculum and training delivery, it is recommended that the educational and sponsorship/mentoring programs are developed and delivered by women with lived experience of disability.

Recommendation 6

Educational and learning curriculum for employers should address structural barriers including ableism, stereotypes, discrimination and prejudice.

While it is expected that participating organisations will have a foundational understanding of diversity, equity and inclusion, it is recommended that any educational content includes training on the structural barriers to leadership and workplace safety for women with disability, including ableism, stereotypes, discrimination and prejudice.

While further examination and improvement of recruitment practices is out of scope for this project, it is recommended that recruitment resources and practices are

covered in educational materials developed for employer organisations, including the portrayal of forward-thinking programs such as the Aurora program and the incorporation of existing resources such as IncludeAbility.

Recommendation 7

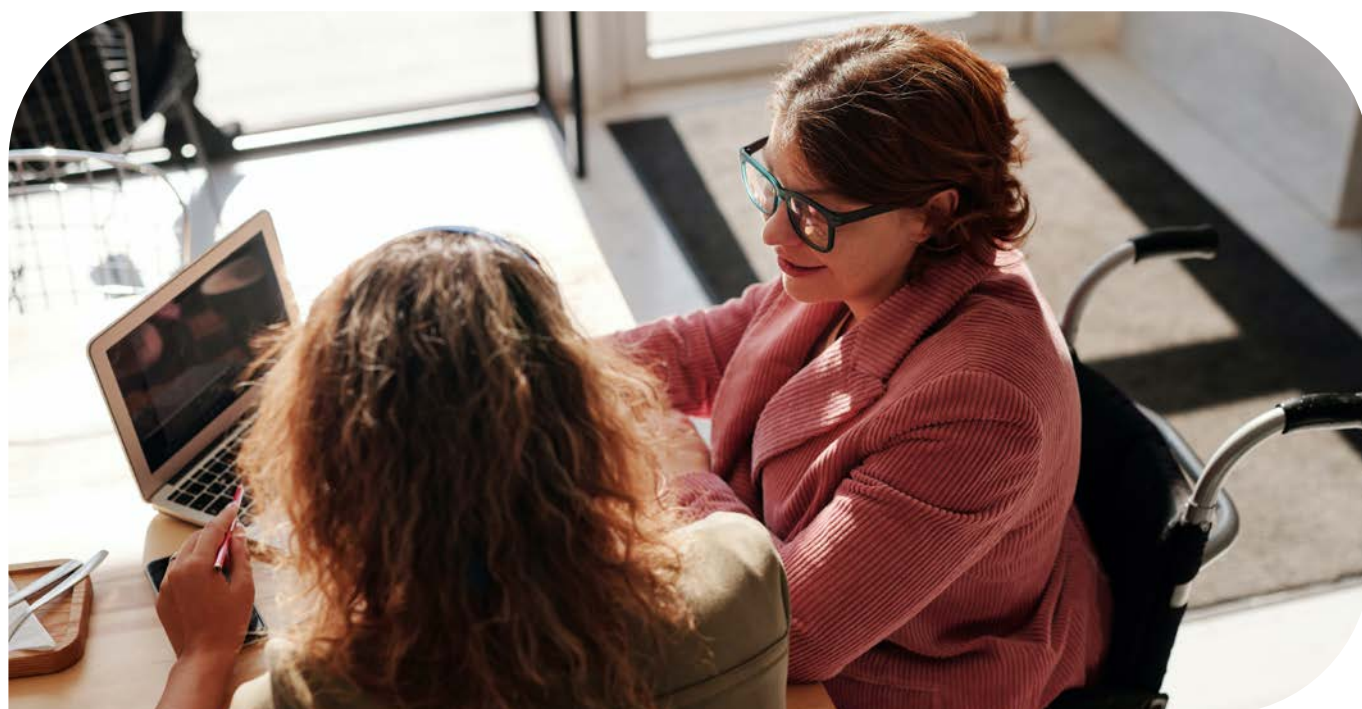
Through all elements of the program, the profile of women with disability in the workplace should be raised

To support participants in the program to be successful, it is important that women with disability feature in all aspects and elements of the program, including any design and video content that is developed. It is also important that employer organisations promote the role of women with disability in the workplace, to ensure participants in the program feel supported.

Recommendation 8

Establish a Community of Practice

As this project is new it is important to minimise isolation. Participants in the Mentoring stream need to feel supported, and have a group that understands their unique experiences, successes and challenges. A Community of Practice (CoP) should be established for all the mentors and sponsors involved in the program, along with a separate CoP to be established for all mentees involved. It is recommended that each CoP meet quarterly or a minimum of biannually to learn from each other and support each other throughout the project. It is also possible and workable for a singular CoP to be established.



Conclusion

The research conducted as part of this project has shed light on the numerous barriers and challenges faced by women with disabilities in the workplace. These barriers, compounded by the intersectionality of gender and disability, impede not only their access to employment but also their advancement in leadership roles. The identified themes in the research, including recruitment, adjustments, representation, internal ableism, and lack of mainstream opportunities, provide critical insights into the experiences of women with disabilities in the professional sphere.

It is evident from the research that the existing barriers cannot be overcome by one-off programs or token efforts of inclusion. Achieving lasting change requires a committed, long-term effort from employers, government entities, and all organizations. Instead of merely adding “inclusion” as a checkbox in HR processes, it demands authentic and continuous efforts towards creating workplaces that truly integrate disability. This integration should become so ingrained in the workplace culture that the term “inclusion” becomes redundant, and opportunities for advancement are available to everyone, devoid of prejudices and biases.

The themes identified in the research underscore, however, the need for targeted interventions to address the challenges faced by women with disabilities in the workplace. The recommendations presented offer a roadmap for advancing the participation and leadership of women with disabilities through

the next phases of this project. Crucially, participating organizations must demonstrate an evidenced commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, with existing employment of people with disabilities.

The mentorship and education programs proposed in parallel, adopting a sponsorship model, can help support women with disabilities in sustaining leadership roles. By equipping sponsors and mentors with an understanding of ableism and internal ableism, the curriculum can tackle one of the critical factors hindering progress.

The importance of authentic representation cannot be understated. The educational and mentorship programs should be developed and delivered by women with lived experience of disability to ensure credibility and relevance. Additionally, the educational curriculum for employers must address structural barriers, including ableism, stereotypes, discrimination, and prejudice.

Lastly, promoting the profile of women with disabilities in the workplace and incorporating forward-thinking programs, like the Aurora program, can contribute to fostering a supportive environment for program participants.

In conclusion, the research phase of the Advancing Women project has provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by women with disabilities in the workplace. By implementing the recommended strategies, we can take meaningful steps towards creating a more inclusive and

equitable environment, where all women, regardless of disability, can thrive and excel in leadership roles. The journey towards true equality and diversity will require collective efforts and unwavering commitment from all stakeholders, but the rewards of a more inclusive and diverse workforce will be well worth it.





Appendix

Appendix 1 – Literature Review

A Review of the Literature from National and International Academic, Government and Industry sources on approaches to diversity in leadership - focusing on representation of women with disability in leadership roles.

Introduction

This review aims to identify and examine the available literature covering the representation of women with disability in leadership roles. Specifically addressing the questions of, ‘What organisational **barriers** prevent women with disability from accessing leadership?’ and ‘What organisational **enablers** support women with disability to access leadership roles?’.

Women with disability, as citizens and rights holders have the same civil and human rights as all people, disabled or otherwise. Under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), disabled people have the right to gainful employment. Article

6 of the CRPD makes special mention on the right of women with disability to advancement and empowerment. The onus, therefore, is not on disabled woman but rather, it is on the systems and structures that impede advancement – this includes workplaces including in the private, public and not for profit sectors.

Key words: Women, Disability, Women and leadership, women with disability and leadership, Organisations and diversity, Diversity in practice.

Methodology

This Review has been undertaken with consideration of, and in reference to, Australia’s obligations under two International Human Rights Conventions.

The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (1979) – CEDAW

CEDAW, Article 1 – Discrimination against women states:

For the purposes of the present Convention, the term “discrimination against women” shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.¹

exercise and enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the present Convention.²

Both these Conventions technically underpin all legislation, policies, procedures, strategies, frameworks and, ultimately, societal attitudes towards all women in Australia - including women with disability.

The references for this review were selected based on an intersectional feminist approach (Morris 2007)³ which highlights social and economic power imbalances and the interconnectedness of marginalisation. This approach also acknowledges that women are not one homogenous group, nor are disabled people. Rather there is a large variety of experiences, circumstances and complexities that form a person to which women with disability are subject to equally – as are women without disability.

It should be noted that this Review is limited in scope due to the dearth of material pertaining to the subject area. Currency of material spans five years (2018-2023). Materials examined included academic journals where available, as well as grey material including blogs, media articles and industry publications. Literature was sourced from online databases including Google Scholar and JSTOR, and open source e-publications.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008) – CRPD.

CRPD, Article 6 – Women with disabilities states:

1. States Parties recognize that women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination, and in this regard shall take measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the

1 **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women New York, 18 December 1979**

2 **Article 6 – Women with disabilities**

3 Using Intersectional Feminist Frameworks in Research: A resource for embracing the complexities of women's lives, Morris, M., October 2007, Canadian Research Institute for Advancement of Women, ISBN: 978-1-894876-08-7

The International experience of barriers to women with disability and leadership

UN (United Nations) Women published a study in 2018 examining the experiences of disabled women in leadership roles. The study noted that: Women with disability are severely underrepresented in decision-making⁴. It also noted that while both women and men with disability are underrepresented, evidence from 19 countries in 2017 shows that only 2.3 per cent of women with disability compared to 2.8 per cent of men with disability held a position as a legislator, senior official or manager.

Women with disability were also underrepresented in national coordination mechanisms on disability matters: across 17 countries or areas from the Asia and Pacific region (which includes Australia) in 2017, Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (also known as Disabled Persons Organisations) included nearly twice as many men as women – representing 21% and 12 % of all mechanisms respectively.

In other types of organizations, men were similarly overrepresented – making up 43 % of all mechanism members, versus 24 % for women. Additionally, women with disability

are underrepresented in gender equality institutions: in 7 of those same 17 countries (Asia, Pacific), national machineries for gender equality included no women with disability among their membership, and in the remaining five countries, only 9 % of members were women with disability.

In Africa women with disability are severely marginalised not just because of their disability but also because of their gender – because the very idea of “leading” is considered an exclusively male domain.⁵ So much of the problem also lies around perceptions about what women with disability are capable of, including among the women themselves.

Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame of Uganda, and current Chair of the UNCRPD committee notes:

“Discrimination happens across all spheres of life, from those living in poverty to those who in positions of power, and in all countries. Girls and women with disability may face up to **ten times** more violence than those without disabilities. Disturbingly, the literacy rate for women with disability may be as low as **1%**.”⁶

Oforiwa Fefoame goes on to note that even on the UN CRPD Committee gender parity was not achieved until 2018, since then three chairs of the committee have been women (Theresa Degener, Rosemary Kayess and Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame).

4 Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2018). “Realization of the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities.”

5 Majiet, S., & Africa, A. (2015). **Women with disabilities in leadership: The challenges of patriarchy**. Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity, 29(2 (104)), 101–111.

6 **We cannot keep leaving women with disabilities behind in leadership**

In the US, there's a myth that women with disability don't get hired because **they don't apply** to high-level positions, according to Amanda Dodge from the blog Accessibility.com. This conveniently excuses hiring managers who mainly interview male and able-bodied candidates (unconscious bias). However, Dodge notes that studies show that women with disability continue to enter the workforce and are eagerly seeking employment.

In 2018 (the most recent year for this data) more than **108,000 women with disabilities** entered the workforce in the US. This is significant considering only 35.7 % of women with disability are part of the workforce, compared to 72.8 % of women without disability. It should be noted that the numbers are startlingly similar in Australia, according to WWDA (Women with Disabilities Australia) (2021).⁷

While it is a positive sign that women with disability are entering the workforce in the US, many still aren't able to advance into leadership positions.⁸

In an obituary for the Disability Rights Advocate Judy Heumann, Kylee Tyndall (2023) says, women with disability experience **the double bind of sexism and ableism** in their day to day lives. They have lower chances of being hired; lower access to health care; and often have limited social, economic, and political opportunities. Disabled women are also subject to and suffer from the same

impossible beauty standards all women are subtly coerced into obeying. Judy Heumann accomplished all she did for the disabled community because she understood intersectionality and how it applied to those in the disabled community – especially the intersectionality of sexism and ableism.⁹

The UK experience is similar to other countries according to the Scottish Independent Living blog on disabled women and leadership. It notes that, though it's often said, "You can't be what you can't see". This is especially accurate when it comes to women with disability. Society is structured in such a way that it forces people with disability to feel incapable, everything from opening a door, to moving about a city has been created with able-bodied people in mind. This societal barrier means that people with disability are often forced to exist in a world that is full of impossibilities. There needs to be more disabled women in leadership roles to show others that it is possible and to motivate young girls with disability.

However, the blog also notes there are many barriers, in the legal system, obstacles with infrastructure, social prejudice and gender-based discrimination that women with disability face when looking for employment. This ties into a broader perception of people with disabilities as less productive, lazy or unintelligent.¹⁰

7 **Women With Disabilities Australia Submission**

8 **Women With Disabilities Are Still Left Out of Leadership Roles**

9 **Female Leadership in the Disabled Community**

10 **Why more disabled women are needed in leadership positions**

The domestic experience of barriers to women with disability and leadership.

WWDA youth delegate to COSP (Conference of States Parties) 15 2022, Margherita Dall’Occo-Vaccaro noted in her blog (2022) on leadership, that representation of young disabled women as leaders in law was, and still is, incredibly limited. Women lawyers rarely speak about being disabled in the workplace, and women judges or politicians are not necessarily open about the difficulties of navigating these spaces as a disabled woman.

Additionally, Dall’Occo-Vaccaro notes women in law have been historically underrepresented more broadly. **The statistics may seem better now, but it doesn’t mean women are leading in law. The majority of partners at firms, of judges and of team leaders are still men.** The gender equality movement has long fought for women to be represented in these high places and in the courtroom. It’s worth noting that 20-30 years ago women weren’t even allowed to wear trousers in the office, and certainly not in the courtroom.¹¹

In their 2021 submission to the National Disability Employment Strategy (NDES), WWDA articulated the barriers to employment and hence advancement for women with disability very clearly stating:

“Improving the labour force participation of women and girls with disability can only be achieved with a greater understanding of, and urgent action to address, the underlying structural barriers standing in our way.

These structural barriers include but are not restricted to: poverty; gender bias and gender inequality; the intersection of gender and disability discrimination; lack of safe, accessible, and affordable housing; lack of accessible and affordable transport; the high incidence and prevalence of gender-based violence; non-optional costs of disability; inflexible work arrangements.

Poverty is a major structural barrier to employment for people with disability. It is virtually impossible to be ‘work ready’ when living in poverty”.¹²

Workplace discrimination is an ongoing issue for disabled people in Australia. In their 2016 report “Willing to Work” the Australian Human Rights Commission¹³ confirmed that people with disability experienced discrimination at high levels, and that discrimination on the basis of disability was a significant barrier to employment. The report also noted that labour force participation rates for people with disability in Australia were low.

¹¹ **Why it’s Important to See Disabled Women as Leaders in Law**

¹² **Women With Disabilities Australia Submission**

¹³ **Respect at Work: People with disability**

Organisations and barriers to inclusion and diversity in the workplace.

Gender Bias and Stereotypes

According to Mila Smart Semeshkina of Forbes (2023), one of the biggest barriers for women seeking leadership roles is the persistent and ongoing **gender bias** that exists in many organizations. Men are still often stereotypically seen as more competent and capable of leadership than women, regardless of whether they hold the same qualifications. Research from the University at Buffalo School of Management states:

“Men tend to be more assertive and dominant, whereas women tend to be more communal, cooperative and nurturing. Thus men presume to authoritatively participate and voice their opinions during group discussions, and thus be perceived by others as leaderlike.”

This conscious gender bias can make it more difficult for women to be considered for leadership roles and can also impact their ability to advance within their organizations. Semeshkina notes further that there is a distinct lack of role models for women in the corporate sector.¹⁴

American women’s advocacy organisation AAUW, compiled extensive data on women in leadership across multiple domains and concluded that despite women being better educated and **despite decades of investment in women’s leadership programs, progress in advancing women has stalled**. The organisation notes that there are just too many glass ceilings to shatter, gender bias, stereotypes and outright discrimination impede women’s capacity to lead and succeed.¹⁵

The Australian Human Rights Commission Respect@Work Report¹⁶ also highlighted a number of critical issues affecting disabled women at work. Disturbingly, the report found that **sexual harassment against people with disability was often connected to persistent discriminatory attitudes, stereotypes and marginalisation in work settings**. The report also found that women and girls with disability could be subject to people ignoring or stereotyping their sexuality.

Additionally, the report noted that attitudes of paternalism made workers with disability feel ‘less equal at work’, and **that workplace power dynamics, hierarchies and unequal power relation in workplaces could increase the risk of sexual harassment and create barriers to reporting for people with disability**. Namely because, workers with disability were reluctant to report sexual harassment because they thought they would not be taken seriously or there were assumptions made about their

14 Five Reasons Why We Don’t See More Women In Leadership Roles

15 Barriers & Bias: The Status of Women in Leadership

16 Respect at Work: People with disability

capacity. There was also a lack of access to information and advice that was appropriate for people with disability.

Organisations and approaches to improving diversity in the workplace.

As noted earlier, there are numerous structural and attitudinal barriers that impede disabled women's advancement in the workplace. These barriers are in some ways addressed by organisational policies and procedures on inclusion and diversity. However, simply adding said policies and procedures to an organisations human resources repertoire is no guarantee to the advancement of women with disability in workplaces. As outlined below there are strategies to improves advancement however, outcomes from these strategies are difficult to ascertain due to lack of data collated regarding these practices.

Accessibility

In the US many companies believe they do adequately in attracting disabled employees, however fewer than 27% of companies partner with disabled organisations to support improved job access opportunities for disabled people.¹⁷ **Accessibility** is key

according to Accessibility.com, because even if you can get your job listing in front of hundreds of people with disability, you might isolate them with an inaccessible and outdated application process. According to US employment lawyer **William Goren**, poor web experiences can frustrate users with hearing or vision impairments. They can also impact applicants that struggle to use a keyboard or mouse.

Additionally, complex navigation paths and CAPTCHA tests (the ones where you prove that you aren't a robot) can be difficult for **people with learning disabilities**. And, webpage timeouts or application countdowns can place unnecessary pressure on people who are trying to focus on the forms. Accessibility is more than ramps and lifts and increasingly digital accessibility is becoming more of an issue, as not all disabled people have digital access or digital literacy¹⁸.

Training

In Australia many organisations can seek accreditation for "disability confidence"¹⁹ from organisations such as the Australian Network on Disability (AND). The resources claim to provide the learning to ensure that workplaces are disability confident and inclusive. However, outside of extensive advertising and promotion, including an award ceremony, no outcomes measure appears to be available. Therefore, without this data it is difficult to ascertain whether

17 **How to Make Your Recruiting Process More Inclusive and Accessible**

18 **Case study: Digital inclusion and disability**

19 **Australian Network on Disability: Our learning solutions**

the training has any impact on workplaces at all, and more importantly, whether disabled people are being employed, staying employed and being advanced in employment. Diversity and inclusion modalities can very often be a profitable marketing tick box, but without published measures the authenticity of these modalities remains arbitrary. Any strategy requires monitoring and evaluation, otherwise outcomes cannot be assessed and if necessary redressed.

Recruiting Processes

The Australian Government has a dedicated agency to help employers employ disabled people, Job Access²⁰. This initiative has been in service for many years, the service provides information and audit tools to help employers attract and retain disabled workers – yet a search on disability and workplaces brings up Disability Employment Services (DES). These subsidised agencies provide “training” for disabled people and, more often than not are pathways to low paid or underpaid employment with limited to no opportunities for advancement. This was examined extensively by the Disability Royal Commission.²¹ It should also be noted that the Federal Job Access program does not appear to have publicly available published data on the services outcomes. Therefore, it cannot be ascertained what the uptake is

from employers outside of disability service providers.

The Australian Human Rights Commission has developed the “Includability”²² program which provides information to employers about employing disabled people. This is a very recent initiative and is aligned with the Australian Disability Strategy. The website has pointers on diversity and inclusion that specifically address disability inclusion. There is much emphasis on access and on the need for inclusive language, developing a disability inclusion action plan and having disability champions. At this stage there is no published data on current outcomes, however the program is in its nascency.

Mentors

As noted earlier, many disabled women say, “you can’t be what you can’t see” and so visibility is extremely important, as are mentors or champions. The IncludeAbility program at the human rights commission has champions, but as yet, outcomes are unknown.

Furthermore, “leadership” programs directed at disabled people including disabled women have become popular in recent times, including the Disability Leadership Institute²³ and various grant initiatives such as the “Lead” ILC (Information Linkages and Capacity) program at WWDA²⁴. For

20 **Job Access website**

21 **Employment Issues paper**

22 **Attracting and recruiting people with disability to your organisation**

23 **Disability Leadership Institute website**

24 **Women With Disabilities Australia WWDA LEAD**

women more broadly leadership programs and courses are being pushed as a means to adjusting gender imbalances in the workplace and the gender pay gap. Including the Women's Leadership Institute²⁵, the Global Institute for Women's leadership²⁶ and Chief Executive Women²⁷ and a raft of others.

All of these leadership programs come at a significant cost, are not necessarily accessible nor are they cognizant of the particular structural barriers disabled women face on a daily basis. There is clearly a need for a "fit for purpose" leadership program with mentors for disabled women. Such a program must be consistent with the CRPD and CEDAW and acknowledge the double-edged sword of sexism and ableism that disabled women face on a daily basis.

Summary

The material examined in this review shows clearly that disabled women face large systemic structural barriers including sexism, stereotypes, ableism and outright discrimination and prejudice. Such barriers cannot be overcome by a small "one off" program, rather these barriers require a long term commitment from employers, government and all organisations, not by merely adding to HR processes a tick box of "inclusion", but by working authentically towards workplaces that mainstream

disability – a workplace where the word "inclusion" isn't needed and opportunity of advancement is a given and not a grind due to prejudices and biases.

Equally, it is vital that outcomes data from leadership programs and diversity and inclusion practices are collected and published. How else can improvements be made unless we can see the evidence of what is working and what is not working.

And finally, the overall impediment of poverty must be clearly addressed. As noted by WWDA (2019), someone cannot be work ready if they cannot afford to clothe, feed, learn, transport or house themselves. Programs for advancement must be subsidised, internships must be paid and representation on diversity and inclusion panels must include remuneration. In order to advance women with disability, the disabling barriers must be first properly acknowledged and removed; anything else is merely a tokenistic tick box on the inclusion bandwagon.

25 **Women's Leadership Institute Australia website**

26 **ANU Global Institute For Women's Leadership**

27 **Chief Executive Women website**

Appendix 2 – Interview Protocol

Advancing Women with Disability in the Workplace

Before we begin, I want to thank you for your time and the generous sharing of your lived experience.

This interview is taking place as part of PWDA's Advancing Women project, which is seeking to improve leadership representation and workplace access and safety for women with disability across Australia.

I will not be recording the interview but I will be taking notes. The notes will be deidentified.

Any themes that you share with me during the course of this interview will be considered alongside the other research we have conducted, and will guide the recommendations of the project's needs assessment and gap analysis report.

The purpose of the report is to inform the development of an educational program for employers that will support organisations in onboarding women with disability and nurturing their careers. The report will also guide the development of a mentoring program for women with disability.

Can I please check that you are happy for me to use this discussion for the purpose outlined above?

Thank you.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

I wondered if you can start by telling me about your particular disability?

In what ways – if any – do you feel your disability has impacted your experiences in the workplace, both in terms of accessing work and accessing leadership opportunities.

Can you tell me about any barriers you have experienced in terms of accessing jobs or leadership positions in the past?

What are some of the strategies you have implemented in the past to overcome barriers to workplace participation and / or leadership?

Can you please tell me about any experiences you have had where an organisation has supported you to obtain a leadership position – what were the factors that led to this being a successful experience?

Based on your experience, what do you believe are the most important things that employers can do to make workplaces more accessible to women with disability?

Building a leadership pipeline depends on employers attracting skilled and talented people into the organisation and developing them. What can organisations do to attract people with disability and what can they do to develop them as future leaders?

If we accept that some barriers to obtaining leadership roles will still remain, what skills do you believe women with disability may need in order to overcome the barriers and ascend to leadership roles?

What accommodations, if any, would you benefit from to retain a leadership role?

Is there anything additional that you would like to share about your experiences in the workplace?

ENDS



Willing and ready to lead

Advancing Women
with Disability in the
Workplace



Appendix 3 – Expert Advisory Group Terms of Reference

Background

Funded as part of the *Women's Leadership and Development Program: Lead and Succeed* grant opportunity, People With Disability Australia's (PWDA) Advancing Women with Disability in the Workplace project (Advancing Women) aims to improve outcomes for women, girls, feminine-identifying and non-binary people with disability in Australia across both leadership representation and workforce participation and safety.

In fulfilling the overarching intended outcome of the Advancing Women project, the specific objectives of the four-year project are that:

1. The representation of women with disability in leadership is increased, with a focus on visible positions of leadership and those with authority and/or decision-making capacity.
2. Women's workforce participation is increased with a focus on addressing barriers including flexibility and culture.
3. Workplaces are safe and inclusive to support women with disability to gain, remain and succeed in employment.

Project Overview

People with Disability Australia is a national peak disability rights and advocacy organisation made up of and led by people with disability. Founded in 1981, PWDA represents the interests of people with all kinds of disability and, today, leads a number of national projects designed to improve outcomes for people with disability.

Recognising that women with disability are ready and willing to lead, this project will focus on the upskilling of employer organisations to empower and support women with disability to access and succeed within their work environment.

Delivered on behalf of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, this project will enable PWDA to partner with women with lived experience of disability as well as employer organisations across both regional and metropolitan Australia to determine the current barriers and enablers to leadership representation, workplace participation and safety.

The project will go on to deliver an educational program for employers, comprising a progressive series of online and face-to-face workshops and e-learning modules; alongside a Mentor Program for women with disability, employers, and key stakeholders to promote leadership, workforce participation and workplace safety for women with disability.

Project Approach

Project Deliverables

The Project will deliver a number of outputs:

1. A needs assessment and gap analysis outlining the current barriers and enablers to leadership representation, workforce participation and safety. This will be informed by a consultation period held between March and May 2023 comprising surveys and interviews with both women with lived experience of disability as well as employer organisations.
2. **A needs assessment identifying what women with disability need from a mentoring program** and a gap analysis outlining how these needs might be met and what organisations and mentors may need in order to deliver a sustainable and successful program.
3. **An educational program**, informed by the needs assessment and gap analysis, that will be delivered by educators with lived experience of disability to a minimum of 35 employer organisations across NSW, ACT, WA and VIC by the close of the project in June 2026, with a further 8 organisation champions identified in QLD, SA, TAS and NT by the close of the project.
4. **A mentoring program**, informed by the needs assessment and gap analysis, that will support a minimum of 35 mentors and mentees across NSW, ACT, WA and VIC by the close of the project in June 2026.

5. **A sustainable program package** that can continue and expand post closure of the project

Project Phases

The project will be delivered Australia wide and will conclude in June 2026. The project has been broken into a phased approach to ensure the delivery of sustainable outputs that meet the needs of both women with disability and employer organisations

Phase 1 – Research & Needs Assessment

Between March and June 2023, a needs assessment and gap analysis will be completed, outlining the current state for women with disability in leadership roles and outlining the barriers and enablers for women with disability to access and sustain decision making roles. The needs assessment will comprise two streams of research that will take place through March and April 2023:

- Research targeting women with lived experience of disability
- Research targeting employer organisations

The research will incorporate one on one interviews, surveys and focus groups with both sets of stakeholders. The results of the research will be published in June 2023 and will guide the delivery of the educational program and mentoring platform.

Phase 2 – Development of Education and Mentoring Programs

Between July and December 2023, work will begin on the co-design of the education and mentoring programs. During this time, recruitment will also commence to identify organisations wanting to take part in the program in NSW and ACT, as well as women with disability within those organisations wanting to participate in mentoring.

Phase 3 – Program Delivery

The project will be delivered across Australia commencing in January 2024 and taking a staged approach geographically. The programs will commence initially in NSW and ACT in 2024, before rolling out to other states from July 2024.

Project Governance

PWDA has overall responsibility for delivering on the project and reporting progress and outcomes to the Office for Women.

- The Project is being delivered and led by PWDA with an assigned Project Lead.
- An Expert Advisory Group will advise on the governance and strategic direction of the project.
- A Co-Design Advisory Panel will advise on and contribute to the co-design of project outputs.

Both the Expert Advisory Group and Co-Design Advisory Panel will act in an advisory role to the PWDA Project Lead.

Expert Advisory Group

The objectives of the Expert Advisory Group are to:

- Provide guidance and strategic advice across the separate phases of the project
- Provide guidance and advice relating to the project activities and outputs
- Identify gaps and opportunities for the project, its activities and outputs
- Provide subject matter expertise relating to leadership, disability and / or workplace equality
- Oversee the governance and strategic direction of the project
- Assist in improving the outcomes for women with disability in leadership representation, workplace participation and safety by actively supporting, endorsing and promoting the project, acting as advocates for its intent and outcomes

Membership

The Expert Advisory Group will be co-ordinated by the PWDA Project Lead and may have up to 10 members. Members are selected based on their expression of interest, skills and area(s) of expertise. Non salaried members of the Group will be entitled to remuneration for their time and expertise and reimbursement of travel expenses for attendance at Advisory Group meetings.

The Expert Advisory Group comprises women with subject matter expertise across

disability, leadership and / or mentoring and is intended to ensure representation across Australia.

Members are expected to have a range of experience and expertise including:

- Lived experience as a women, feminine identifying or non-binary person with disability
- Knowledge and experience delivering workplace diversity, equity and inclusion programs
- Knowledge and experience delivering mentoring programs
- Knowledge and experience in the co-design of innovative programs that support women with disability
- Knowledge and experience working with stakeholder groups including women with disability, human resource representatives, C-suite and senior leadership teams.

Guiding Principles

All members of the Expert Advisory Group are expected to uphold the values of honesty and integrity. The following principles will be upheld by the Expert Advisory Group

- A human rights approach – PWDA's work is grounded in a human rights framework. The work undertaken by this project will uphold the purpose of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all personal with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.

- Co-design – As a disability representative organisation (DRO), PWDA acknowledges that the project’s success is dependent on the successful inclusion of the lived experience of women with disability at all stages of the project.

- Minutes will be taken during the meeting and circulated to attendees at the close of the meeting, noting actions and responsibilities.
- Meetings will adhere to a do-no-harm model to promote a safe and empowering space for project engagement.

Procedures

Scheduling of Meetings

- It is expected that the Expert Advisory Group meet bi-monthly, with a maximum of six meetings per annum.
- Meetings will be held online using Zoom or Microsoft Teams depending on the preference of the group and accessibility requirements.
- The first meeting will be held in April 2023 and following meetings will be held bi-monthly.
- Proposed dates and times for each meeting will be circulated to the group and agreed by the group in advance. Calendar invitations will be sent to members by the PWDA Project Lead
- The PWDA Project lead will distribute an agenda to Group members 5 working days prior to the meeting.
- Each meeting will be 90 minutes in duration.
- Unless otherwise agreed by the members, meeting times will be 1pm-2.30pm.

Member Duties

The duties of the members include but are not limited to:

- Attendance at all Expert Advisory Group meetings
- Active participation in the overall business of the Expert Advisory Group
- Maintain open and effective communication and liaison with other members of the Group as required.

Remuneration

Members of the Expert Advisory Group will be paid \$100 per hour for their participation in meetings and / or consultations.

Confidentiality

1. Expert Advisory Group members are required to exercise confidentiality and are expected to comply with PWDA’s Privacy Policy and procedures for the storage, disclosure, and distribution of confidential, sensitive, commercial, or political information.
2. Expert Advisory Group members must not disclose or use confidential information without PWDA’s approval. All members

must ensure that confidential information, in any form (e.g., paper or electronic format) is not accessed by unauthorised persons.

Conflicts of Interest

Expert Advisory Group members have a responsibility to declare any conflict or potential conflict between their business, community or professional interests, and their roles as members of the Reference Group.

More information

For more information or if you require this document in an alternate format, please contact Lizzy Fowler, Director of Strategic Projects by email at lizzyf@pwd.org.au or by phone on 0490 120 366.

Appendix 4 – Employer Survey

Advancing Women with Disability in the Workplace

This survey is designed for employers. If you are contributing as an individual with lived experience of disability, please [click here](#) to complete the survey.

The Advancing Women project is seeking to learn about your organisational experiences of supporting women with disability in the workplace. By contributing to this research, you will be supporting the Advancing Women project in raising awareness of and addressing the barriers and enablers to workplace participation for women with disability.

The results of this survey will inform the Needs Assessment and Gap Analysis Report, which will be published in June 2023 as part of the Advancing Women with Disability in the Workplace project.

Your responses will be considered along with other feedback we receive as part of the consultation phase of the project.

Please note, throughout this research, we will refer to ‘women with disability’. The Advancing Women project recognises the term women to refer to women, girls, feminine-identifying and non-binary people with disability.

The survey will take approximately XX minutes to complete. Your responses can be submitted anonymously. You will have the opportunity at the end of the survey to submit your organisation’s contact details should you wish your organisation to take part in a one-to-one interview for this research. Your information will not be shared, and you can [click here](#) to view People With Disability Australia’s Privacy Policy.

If you have any questions relating to this research, or require the survey in an alternate format, please email lizzyf@pwd.org.au or call 0490 120 366.

For more information on the Advancing Women project, [please click here](#).

What is the name of your organisation?

Please note organisation names will not be published

[Free text single line]

Which of the following best describes your type of organisation?

- National
- State
- Non government, non profit
- Non government, for profit
- Academic institution
- Other (please specify)

Which of the following best describes the core business of your organisation?

- Health and caring
- Education
- Public Policy
- Research
- Other (please specify)

Which of the following best describes the location of your core business?

- Urban, suburban, metropolitan or major city
- Regional town
- Rural or remote area
- Prefer not to say

Where does your organisation operate? Please select all that apply

- Australian Capital Territory (ACT)
- New South Wales (NSW)
- Northern Territory (NT)
- Queensland (QLD)
- South Australia (SA)
- Tasmania (TAS)
- Victoria (VIC)
- Western Australia (WA)
- Overseas (please specify)

How large is your organisation by annual revenue?

- Less than \$500k
- \$500k - \$3m
- Over \$3m
- Prefer not to say

Is diversity, equity and inclusion one of your organisation's stated values and / or priority areas?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Does your workplace currently employ people who identify as having a disability?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Does your workplace currently have a Disability Inclusion Action Plan?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Thinking about your organisation's programs, please select all those that apply.

My organisation has programs or strategies in place to:

- Recruit diverse candidates, including women with disability

- Develop a pipeline of diverse leaders, including women with disability
- Provide targeted development opportunities for diverse employees, including women with disability

Please provide any comments relating to the success and adoption of these strategies

[Free text box multiple lines]

Thinking about your organisation’s training and education, please select all those that apply.

My organisation offers training programs that focus on

- Disability awareness, access and inclusion
- Non-discrimination and regulatory compliance
- Embracing differences in the workplace
- Overcoming unconscious bias
- Teaching leaders how to manage diverse populations and lead inclusively
- Embedding inclusion practices in service offerings

Please provide any comments relating to the success and adoption of this training

[Free text box multiple lines]

Through previous research and consultations, the following issues have been identified as relevant to women with disability being able to participate equally in the workplace. To what extent do you agree with the following statements.

(Select rating from: Strongly agree, disagree, agree, strongly agree or unsure)

- Employees with disability experience negative attitudes and discrimination in the workplace
- Hiring managers bring unconscious bias to interviews
- Employees with disability are supported to accommodate their responsibilities as carers
- Employees with disability are supported to access flexible work arrangements
- Organisational information is accessible to those with disability and is provided in a number of accessible formats as standard
- Employees with disability have access to assistive technology needed in the workplace (e.g., JAWS screen reader)
- The workspaces we operate in are accessible to those with physical and sensory disabilities
- Our organisation has inclusive policies and practices, for example Reasonable Adjustments / Accommodations policy
- Employees with disability are treated and considered equally at interview.

- Consideration is given to alternate interview methods more inclusive to applicants with disability
- Employees with disability are provided with equal opportunities for promotion
- Our organisation takes an intersectional approach to diversity
- Our organisation recognises the unique capabilities of those with disability

Has your organisation ever adopted or considered adopting any strategies or approaches to disability inclusion in the past? If so, please provide details and outcomes achieved.

[Free text box multiple lines]

Has your organisation ever adopted or considered adopting a program specifically targeting the inclusion of women with disability? If so, please provide details and outcomes achieved.

[Free text box multiple lines]

To what extent do you believe the following will improve outcomes for women with disability in relation to workplace participation and leadership opportunities. Please rate each in terms of their importance.

(Select rating from: Unimportant, Low importance, important essential or unsure)

- Disability and inclusion education and training programs for employers
- Disability discrimination education and training programs for people with disability
- Implementation of Disability Inclusion Action Plans in the workplace
- Provision of inclusive and accessible leadership programs in the workplace
- Ensuring the recruitment process is inclusive for people with disability
- Addressing negative attitudes and discrimination in the workplace
- Provision of reasonable adjustments and other policies in the workplace
- Implementation of accessibility standards in the workplace to support inclusive access to information, spaces and resources
- Provision of flexible work arrangements
- Provision of supports to people with disability accessing, applying for, maintaining and returning to employment
- Access to vocational training for people with disability

- Education, awareness and support on self-employment opportunities
- Provision of networking opportunities for women with disability and hiring managers
- Provision of mentoring opportunities connecting women with disability with women in leadership roles
- Supporting organisations to implement affinity groups

What are your organisation’s top three priorities in improving outcomes for women with disability in the workplace and improving representation of women with disability in leadership roles.

These can be drawn from the lists on the previous questions, or can be your own ideas.

Priority 1

[free text multiple lines]

Priority 2

[free text multiple lines]

Priority 3

[free text multiple lines]

What are the top three barriers to adopting the above approaches / priorities within your organisation?

Barrier 1

[free text multiple lines]

Barrier 2

[free text multiple lines]

Barrier 3

[free text multiple lines]

Please use the space below to contribute any other information you’d like considered as part of the Advancing Women project.

As a reminder, we are specifically looking at the barriers and enablers for women with disability to participate equally in the workplace and access leadership roles.

[free text multiple lines]

Thank you for contributing to this research. If you’d like to take part in a follow up one-on-one interview, please complete the following information.

I would like to be contacted to take part in a follow up one on one interview [checkbox]

Name [free text single line]

Email [free text single line]

Phone [free text single line]

Accessibility Requirements [free text multiple lines]

Complete Survey

Direct to **Advancing Women project**

Appendix 5 – Women with Disability Survey

Advancing Women with Disability in the Workplace

As a woman with disability, the Advancing Women project is seeking to hear about your experiences of employment, leadership, safety and participation in the workplace. By contributing to this research, you will be supporting the Advancing Women project in raising awareness of and addressing the barriers and enablers to workplace participation for women with disability. Your contributions matter - anyone can share their experiences, and we encourage you to answer the survey questions in your own voice.

Please note, this survey uses binary language such as 'women' in many places. We acknowledge that there are people whose experiences are not captured by the use of binary language, and we use the term 'women with disabilities' on the understanding that this is inclusive of women, girls, feminine identifying and non-binary people with disabilities in Australia.

The results of this survey will inform the Needs Assessment and Gap Analysis Report, which will be published in June 2023 as part of the Advancing Women with Disability in the Workplace project.

Your responses will be considered along with other feedback we receive as part of the consultation phase of the project.

The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Your responses can be submitted anonymously. You will have the opportunity at the end of the survey to submit your contact details should you wish to take part in a one-to-one interview for this research. Your information will not be shared, and you can **click here to view People With Disability Australia's Privacy Policy**.

If you have any questions relating to this research, or require the survey in an alternate format, please email lizzyf@pwd.org.au or call 0490 120 366.

For more information on the Advancing Women project, **please click here**.

What is your gender?

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary
- I use a different term
- Prefer not to say

How old are you?

- 18 to 24
- 25 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 54
- 55 to 64
- 65 to 74
- 75 to 84
- 85 and older
- Prefer not to say

Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?

- No
- Yes, Aboriginal
- Yes, Torres Strait Islander
- Yes, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- Prefer not to say

Do you identify as a person with disability?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Do you have any caring responsibilities?

- Yes, for my children
- Yes, for other family members
- Yes, for friends

- No
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

What is your current employment status?

- Self-employed
- Full-time employment (35+ hours per week)
- Part-time employment
- Casual employment
- On leave from work (e.g., parental leave, long service leave, workers' compensation)
- Student
- Home duties
- Unpaid carer
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

Where do you live?

- Urban, suburban, metropolitan or major city
- Regional town
- Rural or remote area
- Prefer not to say

How equally do you think women with disability are treated in the workplace?

(Select rating from: Very equally, Close to equally, Not very equally, Very unequally or Unsure)

- How equally do you think women with disability are treated in the workplace?

Through previous research and consultations, the following issues have been identified as relevant to women with disability being able to participate equally in the workplace. To what extent are you concerned about these issues?

(Select rating from: Not at all concerned, Slightly concerned, Somewhat concerned, Moderately concerned, Extremely concerned or Unsure)

- Negative attitudes and discrimination in the workplace from employers and others
- Unconscious bias of hiring managers and employees
- Caring responsibilities
- Lack of flexible working arrangements
- Accessibility of information
- Limited access to assistive technology needed in the workplace (e.g., JAWS screen reader)
- Problems relating to physical access of the workplace
- Lack of inclusive policies and practices in the workplace

- Difficulty negotiating reasonable adjustments/accommodations
- Unfair treatment during interview process
- Standard interview process not meeting needs of applicant with disability
- Inadequate support for women with disability seeking and gaining employment (e.g., where to find suitable roles, how to apply and prepare for interviews)
- Limited opportunities for career progression and promotion
- Failure to adopt an intersectional approach to workplace equality
- Failure to identify unique skills of women with disability
- Limitations of the Disability Discrimination and Anti-Discrimination Acts
- Other (please specify)

Which of the following have you experienced in the workplace? Select all that apply.

[Multiple answer check box]

- Discrimination and negative attitudes
- Lack of reasonable adjustments policy
- Lack of disability awareness by employer and workforce
- Difficulty identifying suitable roles
- Difficulty negotiating reasonable adjustments / accommodations
- Difficulty accessing information due to lack of accessible documentation

- Difficulty accessing the workplace due to physical inaccessibility of workplace
- Difficulty participating due to failure to provide assistive technology
- Difficulty sustaining employment
- Other (please specify)

Have you ever experienced, or do you currently enjoy working in an inclusive, safe and supportive work environment? If so, please provide details, outlining what made/makes the work experience inclusive.

[free text multiple lines]

To what extent do you believe the following will improve outcomes for women with disability in relation to workplace participation and leadership opportunities. Please rate each in terms of their importance.

(Select rating from: Unimportant, Low importance, important essential or unsure)

- Disability and inclusion education and training programs for employers
- Disability discrimination education and training programs for people with disability
- Implementation of Disability Inclusion Action Plans in the workplace
- Provision of inclusive and accessible leadership programs in the workplace
- Ensuring the recruitment process is

inclusive for people with disability

- Addressing negative attitudes and discrimination in the workplace
- Provision of reasonable adjustments and other policies in the workplace
- Implementation of accessibility standards in the workplace to support inclusive access to information, spaces and resources
- Provision of flexible work arrangements
- Provision of supports to people with disability accessing, applying for, maintaining and returning to employment
- Access to vocational training for people with disability
- Education, awareness and support on self-employment opportunities
- Provision of networking opportunities for women with disability and hiring managers
- Provision of mentoring opportunities connecting women with disability with women in leadership roles
- Supporting organisations to implement affinity groups
- Other (please specify)

What are your top three priorities in improving outcomes for women with disability in the workplace and improving representation of women with disability in leadership roles.

These can be drawn from the lists on the previous questions or can be your own ideas.

Priority 1

[free text multiple lines]

Priority 2

[free text multiple lines]

Priority 3

[free text multiple lines]

To what extent do you agree with the following statements

(Select rating from: Strongly agree, disagree, agree, strongly agree or unsure)

- I actively pursue learning and professional growth opportunities
- I think strategically about my career
- I have a professional development plan that supports my growth
- I am aware of my strengths and weaknesses, values and motivation
- My skills are appreciated in my workplace
- I have opportunities to advance my career in my current role

Please use the space below to outline the skills you believe are important to leaders and those in decision making roles?

[free text multiple lines]

Please use the space below to contribute any other information you'd like considered as part of the Advancing Women project.

[free text multiple lines]

Thank you for contributing to this research. If you'd like to take part in a follow up one-on-one interview, please complete the following information.

I would like to be contacted to take part in a follow up one on one interview [checkbox]

Name [free text single line]

Email [free text single line]

Phone [free text single line]

Accessibility Requirements [free text multiple lines]

Complete Survey

Direct to **Advancing Women project**



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Appendix 6 - Co-design Panel Terms of Reference

Background

Funded as part of the *Women's Leadership and Development Program: Lead and Succeed* grant opportunity, People with Disability Australia's Advancing Women with Disability in the Workplace project (Advancing Women) aims to improve outcomes for women, girls, feminine-identifying and non-binary people with disability in Australia across both leadership representation and workforce participation and safety.

In fulfilling the overarching intended outcome of the Advancing Women project, the specific objectives of the four-year project are that:

1. The representation of women with disability in leadership is increased, with a focus on visible positions of leadership and those with authority and/or decision-making capacity.
2. Women's workforce participation is increased with a focus on addressing barriers including flexibility and culture.
3. Workplaces are safe and inclusive to support women with disability to gain, remain and succeed in employment.

Project Overview

People with Disability Australia (PWDA) is a national peak disability rights and advocacy organisation made up of and led by people with disability. Founded in 1981, PWDA represents the interests of people with all kinds of disability and, today, leads a number of national projects designed to improve outcomes for people with disability.

Recognising that women with disability are ready and willing to lead, this project will focus on the upskilling of employer organisations to empower and support women with disability to access and succeed within their work environment.

Delivered on behalf of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, this project will enable PWDA to partner with women with lived experience of disability as well as employer organisations across both regional and metropolitan Australia to determine the current barriers and enablers to leadership representation, workplace participation and safety.

The project will go on to deliver an educational program for employers, comprising a progressive series of online and face-to-face workshops and e-learning modules; alongside a Mentor Program for women with disability, employers, and key stakeholders to promote leadership, workforce participation and workplace safety for women with disability.

Project Approach

Project Deliverables

The Project will deliver a number of outputs:

- 1. A needs assessment and gap analysis outlining the current barriers and enablers to leadership representation, workforce participation and safety.**
This will be informed by a consultation period held between March and May 2023 comprising surveys and interviews with both women with lived experience of disability as well as employer organisations.
- 2. A needs assessment identifying what women with disability need from a mentoring program** and a gap analysis outlining how these needs might be met and what organisations and mentors may need in order to deliver a sustainable and successful program.
- 3. An educational program**, informed by the needs assessment and gap analysis, that will be delivered by educators with lived experience of disability to a minimum of 35 employer organisations across NSW, ACT, WA and VIC by the close of the project in June 2026, with a further 8 organisation champions identified in QLD, SA, TAS and NT by the close of the project.
- 4. A mentoring program**, informed by the needs assessment and gap analysis, that will support a minimum of 35 mentors and mentees across NSW, ACT, WA and VIC by the close of the project in June 2026.

5. **A sustainable program package** that can continue and expand post closure of the project

Project Phases

The project will be delivered Australia wide and will conclude in June 2026. The project has been broken into a phased approach to ensure the delivery of sustainable outputs that meet the needs of both women with disability and employer organisations

Phase 1 – Research & Needs Assessment

Between March and June 2023, a needs assessment and gap analysis will be completed, outlining the current state for women with disability in leadership roles and outlining the barriers and enablers for women with disability to access and sustain decision making roles. The needs assessment will comprise two streams of research that will take place through March and April 2023:

- Research targeting women with lived experience of disability
- Research targeting employer organisations

The research will incorporate one on one interviews, surveys and focus groups with both sets of stakeholders. The results of the research will be published in June 2023 and will guide the delivery of the educational program and mentoring platform.

Phase 2 – Development of Education and Mentoring Programs

Between July and December 2023, work will begin on the co-design of the education and mentoring programs. During this time, recruitment will also commence to identify organisations wanting to take part in the program in NSW, as well as women with disability wanting to participate in mentoring.

Phase 3 – Program Delivery

The project will be delivered across Australia commencing in January 2024 and taking a staged approach geographically. The programs will commence initially in NSW and ACT in 2024, before rolling out to other states from July 2024.

Project Governance

PWDA has overall responsibility for delivering on the project and reporting progress and outcomes to the Office for Women.

- The Project is being delivered and led by PWDA with an assigned Project Lead.
- An Expert Advisory Group will advise on the governance and strategic direction of the project.
- A Co-Design Advisory Panel will advise on and contribute to the co-design of project outputs.

Both the Expert Advisory Group and Co-Design Advisory Panel will act in an advisory role to the PWDA Project Lead.

Co-Design Advisory Panel

The objectives of the Co-Design Advisory Panel are to:

- Ensure project deliverables and outputs are led by women, feminine identifying and non-binary people with disability.
- Ensure the perspectives of the disability community are represented at all stages of the project.
- Advise on the way in which co-design is implemented and evaluated throughout the duration of the project.
- Provide unique insights from a broad range of experience and expertise to ensure all deliverables and outputs are relevant, accessible and sustainable in that they meet the needs of those for whom they were designed.
- Review all outputs developed by the project and advise on their relevance and accessibility.
- Assist in improving the outcomes for women with disability in leadership representation, workplace participation and safety by actively supporting, endorsing and promoting the project, acting as advocates for its intent and outcomes.

Membership

The Co-Design Advisory Panel will be coordinated by the PWDA Project Lead and may have up to fifteen (15) members. Members are selected based on their

expression of interest, skills and area(s) of expertise. Non salaried members of the Panel will be entitled to remuneration for their time.

The Co-Design Advisory Panel comprises women with lived experience as a woman, feminine identifying or non-binary person with disability. As well as lived experience of disability, Co-Design Advisory Panel members will have a variety of experience and expertise including:

- Knowledge and experience in the co-design of innovative programs that support women with disability
- Experience delivering or developing educational and training content relating to disability confidence and inclusion
- Demonstrated experience in the production of content that reflects the rights of persons with disability
- Experience and knowledge of an intersectional approach to diversity, equity and inclusion
- Knowledge and experience working with stakeholder groups including women with disability, educators and employers

It is expected that members of the Co-design Advisory Panel outline their area of expertise and/or interest and the areas they would like to specifically contribute.

Guiding Principles

All members of the Co-design Advisory Panel are expected to uphold the values of honesty and integrity. The following principles will be upheld by the Co-design Advisory Panel

- **A human rights approach** – PWDA’s work is grounded in a human rights framework. The work undertaken by this project will uphold the purpose of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all personal with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.
- **Co-design** – As a disability representative organisation (DRO), PWDA acknowledges that the project’s success is dependent on the successful inclusion of the lived experience of women with disability at all stages of the project.

Procedures

Consultation and Meetings

Rather than attending regular group meetings, it is intended that the Co-design Advisory Panel will be engaged in a consultative manner, adopting an asynchronous approach to communication. Not all members of the panel will be engaged at the same time and members of the panel will be engaged according to their own engagement preferences. The timing for engagement will depend on the phase of the project and the project outputs being developed or required for review.

Where group meetings are scheduled, they will be held online using Zoom or Microsoft Teams depending on the preference of the group and accessibility requirements.

Proposed dates and times for the meetings will be circulated to the group ahead of time by the PWDA Project Lead and any accessibility requirements accommodated. Where meetings are required, they will be limited to 90 minutes in duration. Minutes will be taken during the meeting and circulated to attendees at the close of the meeting, noting actions and responsibilities. Meetings will adhere to a do-no-harm model to promote a safe and empowering space for project engagement. No more than four group meetings are planned per year.

Member Duties

The duties of the members include but are not limited to:

- Participation in consultations as required
- Attendance at group meetings as required
- Maintain open and effective communication and liaison with other members of the Group as required.

Remuneration

Co-design Advisory Panel members will be remunerated \$50 per hour for their contributions to consultations and attendance at meetings.

Confidentiality

1. Co-design Advisory Panel members are required to exercise confidentiality and are expected to comply with PWDA’s Privacy Policy and procedures for the storage, disclosure, and distribution of

confidential, sensitive, commercial, or political information.

2. Co-design Advisory Panel members must not disclose or use confidential information without PWDA's approval. All members must ensure that confidential information, in any form (e.g., paper or electronic format) is not accessed by unauthorised persons.

Conflicts of Interest

Co-design Advisory Panel members have a responsibility to declare any conflict or potential conflict between their business, community or professional interests, and their roles as members of the Reference Group.

More information

For more information or if you require this document in an alternate format, please contact Lizzy Fowler, Director of Strategic Projects by email at lizzyf@pwd.org.au or by phone on 0490 120 366.



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Appendix 7 – Project Charter

Background & Objectives

Funded as part of the *Women's Leadership and Development Program: Lead and Succeed* grant opportunity, People With Disability Australia's Advancing Women with Disability in the Workplace project (Advancing Women) aims to improve outcomes for women, girls, feminine-identifying and non-binary people with disability in Australia across both leadership representation and workforce participation and safety.

In fulfilling the overarching intended outcome of the Advancing Women project, the specific objectives of the four-year project are that:

Project Objectives

1. The representation of women with disability in leadership is increased, with a focus on visible positions of leadership and those with authority and/or decision-making capacity.
2. Women's workforce participation is increased with a focus on addressing barriers including flexibility and culture.
3. Workplaces are safe and inclusive to support women with disability to gain, remain and succeed in employment.

Project Overview

People with Disability Australia (PWDA) is a national peak disability rights and advocacy organisation made up of and led by people

with disability. Founded in 1981, PWDA represents the interests of people with all kinds of disability and, today, leads a number of national projects designed to improve outcomes for people with disability.

Recognising that women with disability are ready and willing to lead, this project will focus on the upskilling of employer organisations to empower and support women with disability to access and succeed within their work environment.

Delivered on behalf of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, this project will enable PWDA to partner with women with lived experience of disability as well as employer organisations across both regional and metropolitan Australia to determine the current barriers and enablers to leadership representation, workplace participation and safety.

The project will go on to deliver an educational program for employers, comprising a progressive series of online and face-to-face workshops and e-learning modules; alongside a Mentor Program for women with disability, employers, and key stakeholders to promote leadership, workforce participation and workplace safety for women with disability.

Project Scope

The project is specifically focused on increasing the number of women with disability in leadership and decision-making roles across organisations in Australia.

While the project is operating in an environment that presents multiple systemic

barriers to inclusion, including gender stereotypes, ableism, discrimination and prejudice, it is out of the scope of the project to address or attempt to resolve these barriers.

Similarly, while the definition of leadership is broad and could, for example, be applied to self-employment, personal influencers and community leadership, this project is focused on the advancement of women with disability in *positional* leadership.

Project Stakeholders

Kannika Phompson
Office for Women
Funding body

Lizzy Fowler
PWDA
Project Management

Karina Noble
PWDA
Project Delivery

Project Approach

Project Deliverables

The Project will deliver a number of outputs:

- 1. A needs assessment and gap analysis** that outlines the current barriers and enablers to leadership representation, workforce participation and safety and the requirements for both an educational and mentoring program. This will be informed by a consultation period held between March and May 2023 comprising surveys

and interviews with both women with lived experience of disability as well as employer organisations.

- 2. An educational program**, informed by the needs assessment and gap analysis, that will be delivered by educators with lived experience of disability to a minimum of 35 employer organisations across NSW, ACT, WA and VIC by the close of the project in June 2026, with a further 8 organisation champions identified in QLD, SA, TAS and NT by the close of the project.
- 3. A mentoring program**, informed by the needs assessment and gap analysis, that will support a minimum of 35 mentors and mentees across across NSW, ACT, WA and VIC by the close of the project in June 2026.
- 4. A sustainable program package** that can continue and expand post closure of the project

Project Phases

The project will be delivered Australia wide and will conclude in June 2026. The project has been broken into a phased approach to ensure the delivery of sustainable outputs that meet the needs of both women with disability and employer organisations

Phase 1 – Research & Needs Assessment

Between March and June 2023, a needs assessment and gap analysis will be completed, outlining the current state for women with disability in leadership roles and outlining the barriers and enablers for women

with disability to access and sustain decision making roles. The needs assessment will comprise two streams of research that will take place through March and April 2023:

- Research targeting women with lived experience of disability
- Research targeting employer organisations

The research will incorporate one on one interviews, surveys and focus groups with both sets of stakeholders. The results of the research will be published in June 2023 and will guide the delivery of the educational program and mentoring platform.

Phase 2 – Development of Education and Mentoring Programs

Between July and December 2023, work will begin on the co-design of the education and mentoring programs. During this time, recruitment will also commence to identify organisations wanting to take part in the program in NSW, as well as women with disability wanting to participate in mentoring.

Phase 3 – Program Delivery

The project will be delivered across Australia commencing in January 2024 and taking a staged approach geographically. The programs will commence initially in NSW and ACT in 2024, before rolling out to other states from July 2024.

Activity Workplan

Detailed activities aligned to each of the project phases are documented in the Project's Activity Workplan.

Project Governance

PWDA has overall responsibility for delivering on the project and reporting progress and outcomes to the Office for Women.

- The Project is being delivered and led by PWDA with an assigned Project Lead.
- An Expert Advisory Group will advise on (Steer) the governance and strategic direction of the project.
- A Co-Design Advisory Panel will advise on and contribute to the co-design of project outputs.

Both the Expert Advisory Group and Co-Design Advisory Panel will act in an advisory role to the PWDA Project Lead.

Meeting Structures and Cadence

- The Project Lead will meet with the Project Director weekly for supervision.
- The Project Lead will meet with the Expert Advisory Panel quarterly.
- The Project Lead will meet with the co-design panel as required.
- The Project Team will meet with the Office for Women quarterly and in line with project milestones.

Project Reporting

Project Reporting is required in line with milestones as defined by The Office for Women. These are:

Report	Due
Financial Acquittal	July 31 2023
Activity Workplan Report	July 31 2023
Activity Workplan Report	January 5 2024
Statement of Compliance Report	January 5 2024
Activity Workplan Report	July 31 2024
Financial Acquittal Report	July 31 2024
Activity Workplan Report	January 6 2025
Activity Workplan report	July 31 2025
Financial Acquittal Report	July 31 2025
Activity Workplan Report	January 5 2026
Activity Workplan Report	July 31 2026
Financial Acquittal Report	July 31 2026
Final Report	September 30 2026

As agreed with the Office for Women, project reporting will comprise completion of the Activity Workplan, with annotations against agreed deliverables.

Project Risks

The project risks are outlined in the Activity Workplan. These are:

Risk	How the risk will be managed
<p>Poor uptake of employers and industry enrolling in workshop and training and low interest from industry to be mentors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotional marketing activities have been appropriately budgeted for. • Building of strong partnerships with key stakeholders
<p>Geographic expansion limited to key cities or states</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A phased geographic expansion has been proposed, allowing the content and program delivery to be piloted in one region prior to expanding out across wider Australia. This will support in the sustainable expansion of the project and in allowing time to adjust program activities and outputs based on the feedback and evaluation of the first phase. It is hoped that, by adopting this approach, the role out across other states will be successful. • The phased approach also allows for focus on regional and remote areas, to ensure adjustments to the program can be made to support success for women in these areas.
<p>COVID-19 restrictions impact delivery of the Activity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While face to face training is critical to the delivery of this program, eLearning and other remote learning methods will be adopted to support in the ongoing delivery of the program through the COVID-19 pandemic. • PWDA has a COVID-19 Policy and Practices in place to ensure the safe delivery of services.
<p>Budget under/ overspends</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget reflects scope of project. • Budget is fully considered and includes known likelihoods and relevant contingencies. • Necessary assurances are in place from lending sources, including in-kind, prior to commencement of project. • Specific activities and budget allocation will undergo ongoing review and any concerns will be discussed with the Office for Women (OFW).



More information

For more information or if you require this document in an alternate format, please contact Lizzy Fowler, Director of Strategic Projects by email at lizzyf@pwd.org.au or by phone on 0490 120 366.