

April 2022

Disability Council NSW 2021 Employment Forum Report

1. Executive summary

The Disability Council NSW (the 'Council') is a statutory body that provides the Minister for Disability Services with advice on matters that affect people with disability in NSW, as well as their families and carers.

The Council is committed to removing barriers for people with disability and creating a more accessible and inclusive community. One of the four focus areas for the Council in 2021 was employment.

In NSW there are over 1.3 million people with disability. Negative attitudes, physical barriers and difficulties accessing necessary supports still limit the opportunities of people with disability to find work, study, socialise and be included in community life.

On 18 November 2021, the Council hosted a forum with key stakeholders to identify enablers to employment for people with disability and report the findings to relevant government agencies. Chis Lamb, Deputy Commissioner, Public Service Commission provided a short welcome, followed by six presentations focused on recruitment, retention and career progression.

The forum generated considerable interest and discussion about all aspects of the career pathway. The key themes are outlined below.

Workplace adjustments

The issue that generated most discussion centred on workplace adjustments. Employees with disability, including mental health conditions, may require workplace adjustments to perform and thrive in their role at work. A workplace adjustment is a change to a work process, procedure or environment that allows a person with disability to:

- perform to the best of their ability
- work productively
- work in a safe environment
- feel included in the workplace
- increase their engagement and motivation to improve performance.¹

Employers have a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments. To promote

¹ Public Service Commission website - <https://www.psc.nsw.gov.au/culture-and-inclusion/disability-employment/making-the-workplace-accessible/workplace-adjustments>

employment for people with disability, it is essential that employers are aware of their obligations and that employees know their rights. Employees should be made to feel comfortable disclosing information in the knowledge that their information will remain private.

Workplace adjustment passports are now being trialled in some organisations. The passport documents a person's workplace requirements so that they do not need to re-tell their story whenever they change roles or organisations. While workplace adjustment passports are in their infancy, where they are in use, forum participants indicated that they were very successful.

Recommendation 1: The NSW Government, through the Public Service Commission, commits to the development and universal adoption of a Workplace Adjustment Passport across the public sector.

Recruitment of people with disability

Participants raised a range of issues about the recruitment of people with disability. Feedback indicated that inappropriate and discriminatory questions might be asked during the recruitment process, and there is the potential for unconscious bias. These issues may result in applicants not feeling comfortable disclosing their disability or act as a deterrent to applying in the first instance.

Recommendation 2: In consultation with DENConnect, which represents the Disability Employee Networks of each NSW Government agency, the NSW Government, through the Public Service Commission, develops mandatory training on accessible and inclusive recruitment practices for all people involved in the recruitment process.

Disability Employee Networks

The third most frequently raised issue was the Disability Employee Network (DEN). The DEN was launched in December 2020 and provides a safe space for employees with disability and an opportunity to connect.

Discussion about DENs was extremely positive with participants indicating they are essential, effective and add value to human resources teams.

Recommendation 3: Each NSW Government agency establishes a Disability Employee Network.

Manager Training and Accountability

Anecdotal evidence suggests, there is a general lack of awareness of people with disability among staff

Recommendation 4: Mandatory training be delivered to the entire NSW public sector, through the Public Service Commission, with targeted training for hiring managers and recruiters.

Disability Champions

Recommendation 5: Each NSW Government agency should identify internal disability champions in their organisations who can provide information and advice on recruitment matters.

Safe Spaces

It is essential that there is a commitment to ensuring employees feel comfortable disclosing information and requesting workplace adjustments.

Recommendation 6: Through training, policies and workplace culture, each NSW Government agency ensures that employees with disability feel comfortable disclosing their information and requesting workplace adjustments, in line with workplace health and safety requirements mandated by the NSW Government.

Universal Design

To enable people with disability to actively engage in employment and have equitable access to workplaces, universal design principles should be adopted.

Recommendation 7: The NSW Government encourages universal design principles in workplaces to promote accessibility for all employees.

2. Participants

The forum was attended by approximately 50 people from the following organisations/agencies:

Ministerial Councils

- Disability Council NSW
- NSW Carers Advisory Council

NSW government agencies

- Disability Employee Network – Department of Education
- Public Service Commission
- Transport for NSW
- Department of Communities and Justice (Disability Council NSW Secretariat)

Disability Employee Networks

- Disability Employee Network - Department of Communities and Justice
- Disability Employee Network - Department of Customer Service
- Disability Employee Network - Transport for NSW
- Disability Employee Network - Ministry of Health

Disability organisations and advocacy groups

- Gillian Barre Association
- NCOSS
- IDEAS
- People with Disability Australia
- Summer Foundation
- Autism Advisory and Support Service
- Spinal Cord Injuries Australia
- Blind Citizens Australia
- NSW Council for Intellectual Disability
- Amputees NSW
- Vision Australia
- Physical Disability Council of NSW

- Australian Network on Disability
- Mission Australia
- Aurora Coordination
- Australian Network for Universal Design
- COORDINARE

3. Presentations

Welcome

Presenter: Chris Lamb, Deputy Commissioner, Public Service Commission

Key points:

- The Public Service Commission (PSC) is the central government agency responsible for workforce management.
- The PSC supports government agencies to meet the World Class Public Service Premier's Priority, which seeks to 'Drive public sector diversity by 2025 through:
 - having 50% of senior leadership roles held by women
 - increasing the number of Aboriginal people in senior leadership roles
 - **ensuring 5.6% of government sector roles are held by people with a disability.**
- Currently, 2.5% of public sectors employees are people with disability.
- The PSC is responsible for sector-wide talent pools. Approximately 10% of the Grade 7/8 talent pool are people with disability.
- The PSC also looks after the disability internship program.
- The PSC seeks to create a safe environment for people to disclose their disability.

A. Recruitment

1. School to Work Program

Presenter: Sandy Edgar, Career Learning Advisor, Department of Education

Purpose of presentation: To provide an overview of the School to Work Program and discuss initiatives that currently exist and/or opportunities to support young people with disability to transition into the workforce.

The School to Work Program is for all students in NSW public schools with a secondary enrolment and actively supports their informed, planned and quality transitions through school and particularly from school for each student.

The program has four key action areas to enhance students' post-school transitions.

1. Exploring career futures
2. Planning transition pathways
3. Building connections and networks
4. Strengthening student outcomes through vocational learning

Key points raised

- The School to Work Program provides funding annually to schools for school to work initiatives.
- Schools are required to report annually to assist with future planning. The results are shared with industry and the community.

- The Department of Education is currently running a pilot program where schools are asked to consider how students can obtain additional work experience.
- Education has developed the [Myfuture](#) website containing information and resources.
- Targeted professional learning was delivered to improve career opportunities for students with disability.
- Launch Your Career series is delivered across NSW to schools.
- Targeted work experience programs are also being delivered.

2. Role of the Disability Employee Network

Presenter: Ann-Marie Mahony, DEN Chair, Dept. of Planning, Industry & Environment

Key points raised

- The DEN was launched in December 2020.
- The DEN provides a safe space for employees with disability and an opportunity to connect.
- Ann-Marie believes the Premier's Priority target should be higher as it does not reflect the percentage of people in society with disability.
- There is a need to break down barriers for people with disability in the employment space and build trust.
- Ann-Marie recommends involving DEN members on recruitment panels.
- A Workplace Adjustments passport system is being successfully implemented at DPIE.

B. Retention

3. Public Service Commission

Presenter: Emilie Priday, Public Service Commission

Purpose of presentation: To provide an overview of the initiatives with a particular focus on examples of best practices to promote the retention of employees with disability.

Background

From April 2019, the NSW Public Service Commission (PSC) has led the work to deliver the *Jobs for People with Disability* program to meet Premier's Priority 14, focusing on three key areas:

Recruitment and retention

- An information hub, including a Hiring Manager's Toolkit and information about workplace adjustments.
- An information page on public sector recruitment for people with disability attached to [IworkforNSW](#).
- A Tailored Talent pilot program to match people with autism into STEM roles in NSW government agencies, resulting in 14 offers of employment to date. The Tailored Talent program is a finalist in the Premier's Awards for Public Service for the category, 'A stronger economy'.
- Guidance on sharing information about disability in workforce profile data.

Leadership, awareness and culture change

- The Age of Inclusion strategic communications campaign, launched in July 2020, incorporates videos, posters, digital and social media collateral, and a dedicated resource hub.
- EmployABILITY, a monthly newsletter to promote and celebrate good practice and drive traffic to the disability employment information hub.
- A program to deliver disability-inclusive leadership training to 24 Executive Directors and pilot disability inclusion studies in three agencies.
- Forums for employees with disability and their managers, including supporting the establishment of DENConnect, an online forum for and by employees with disability. The DCJ Secretary has become the Executive Sponsor of DENConnect.

Accessible workspaces, systems and tools

- Guidance on accessible office design in partnership with Property & Development NSW will be launched in 2021/22.
- Plain English guidance on applying Accessible Procurement standard AS EN 301 549 and an excel spreadsheet of assistive technologies and their vendors.

Key points raised

- The PSC plays a role in bringing together good practice and collaborating with the sector.
- While data indicates that 2.5% of the public sector workforce are people with disability, the Public Matter Employee Survey indicates 4.6% of the workforce are people with disability.
- Data indicates that bullying, sexual harassment and discrimination are higher for people with disability.
- The PSC has developed a manager e-learning course and accessible office design framework.
- The PSC is partnering with disability employment service providers to promote employment opportunities for people with disability.

4. Role of the Disability Employee Network

Presenter: Jacqueline Duncan, DEN Chair, Department of Communities & Justice

Key points raised

- Employees and managers must be supported to understand disability and promote flexibility.
- Recruitment of people with disability is important, as is the retention of current and future workforce.
- Agencies need to have the right disability inclusion culture that meets the needs of people with disability.
- Timely workplace adjustments are essential.
- 'One size fits all' doesn't work. Equity does not mean equality.
- Acknowledging intersectionality is important, and working with other networks within DCJ has been beneficial.
- DENs have a key role in recruiting more people with disability and ensuring agencies have the right cultures, practices and managers to promote retention.

C. Career Progression

5. IncludeAbility

Presenter: Dr Ben Gauntlett, Disability Discrimination Commissioner

Purpose of presentation: To provide an overview of IncludeAbility and provide insights into what more could be done to promote opportunities for career progression for people with disability.

Background

IncludeAbility is an initiative of the Australian Human Rights Commission (the Commission) developed to increase meaningful employment opportunities for people with disability and to close the gap in workforce participation between people with disability and people without disability.

Key points raised

- Always remember you are dealing with individuals, people with disability are diverse.
- Conversations can be had over a period to create a safe space and build trust.
- The IncludeAbility initiative has 16 ambassadors.
- A dedicated website and resources have been developed to support the program.
- Senior managers need to communicate with people with disability often.
- Leadership buy-in is essential.
- Co-design solutions are also critical.

6. Role of the DENConnect

Presenter: Kathryn Tidd, DEN Chair, Department of Customer Service

Key points raised

- COVID has been particularly challenging for people with disability as there has been a lack of clear and consistent information.
- The Disability Royal Commission reported significant failings for people with disability.
- DENConnect (online disability employee network) was created in response to these issues.
- DENConnect fortnightly to enable people with disability to connect with their peers.
- Each government agency is represented.
- Co-design charter which defines their purpose.
- Representations have been made regarding sick leave with the support of the Disability Council.
- In 2022 a NSW Government Day of People with Disability event is being arranged.

D. General discussion

- There needs to be more volunteer opportunities / more lived experience opportunities when people are transitioning to work.
- Career progression is a major barrier.
- Greater awareness needed.
- Top-down approach is needed.
- People need to be mindful of language.
- There needs to be a change regarding the jobs on offer, many targeted jobs are traditional. How can jobs change / be offered for people with disability.
- There are lower expectations for people with disability e.g., it is assumed they can't fulfil more senior roles.
- Increased awareness of programs available for different sectors is needed.