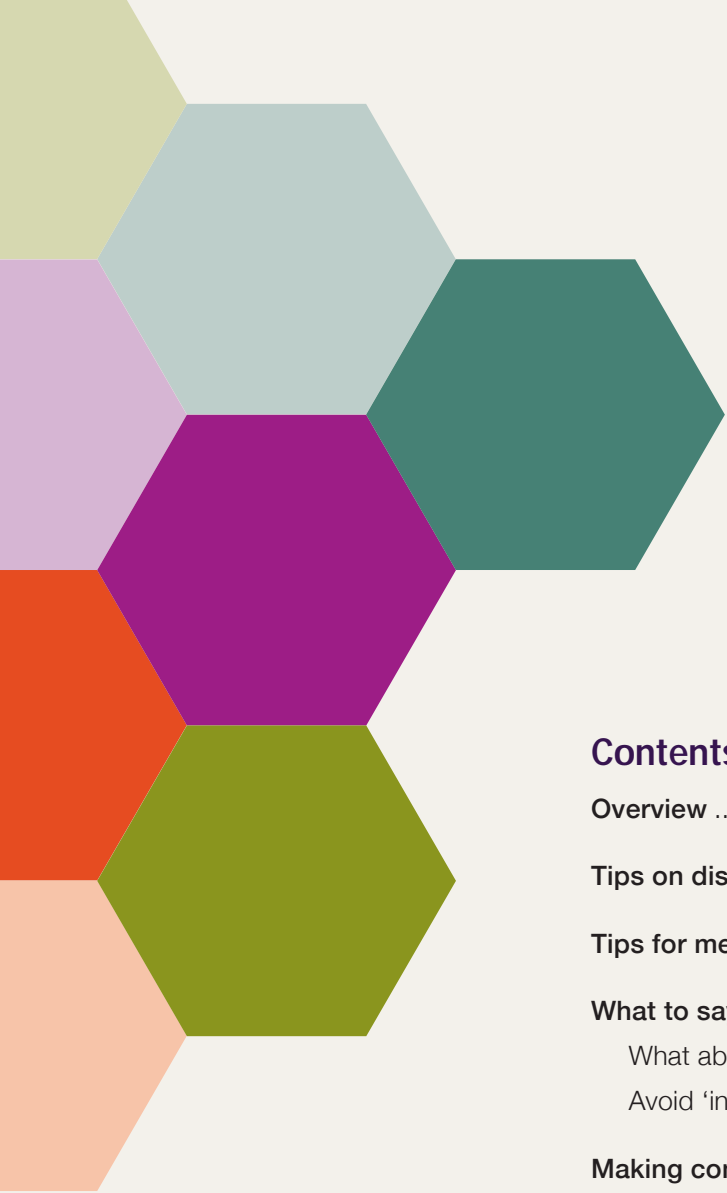


HOW TO BE DISABILITY INCLUSIVE



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For more information and resources, visit the DARU website at www.daru.org.au

Overview

Approximately 4.3 million Australians – one in five people – have a disability.¹

As a society, we are starting to see a shift in thinking at a policy level on how we can support people with disability to participate in an ordinary Australian life. This commitment is demonstrated with the ratification of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD)², introduction of the *National Disability Insurance Scheme* and, in Victoria, with the *Absolutely Everyone: State Disability Plan 2017–2020*.

However there are still barriers that have yet to be addressed and are found at all levels: in government policy, societal attitudes, and in communications and the built environment.

Every Australian has a role to play in creating positive change and breaking down barriers.

This paper is a guide to disability inclusion and how to ensure we can all live and work in an accessible world.

Note: the tips and examples provided in this resource are for guidance only. This does not replace professional advice from experts of specific disabilities and is to be used as a general guide to raise awareness in workplace settings. For more information on specific disabilities, always seek expert advice.

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers

2 DARU, Rights Under the United Nations on the Rights of People with Disability, <http://www.daru.org.au/>

Imagine yourself...

Blind or low vision

Imagine you walk into a meeting room with the blackout blinds closed and only bits of sunlight breaking up the black. The room is clearly full of people and you know this because you can just make out the shadows of people sitting around, and you can hear them all talking about how its Roberts 30th birthday and a scramble of voices are chattering about how he got a new car for his birthday. Someone notices you and calls out “Hey Jan, have a seat” but you don’t know where the seats are, who is in the room and if there’s even birthday cake!

What would you need to make this work for you?

Tips on disability etiquette

Disability etiquette is a set of guidelines that assist your interaction with people with disability when:

- Meeting for the first time.
- Writing about them.
- Providing assistance.
- Simply enjoying their company.

Of course you should show courtesy to everyone you meet, but some additional considerations will make your meeting with a person with disability more comfortable. Remember that everyone is different and will have individual preferences. It's a good idea to ask the person what works for them and respect their wishes.

Here are some tips compiled by the Australian Network of Disability³:

- Avoid asking personal questions about someone's disability.
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take for a person to do or say something.
- Be polite and patient when offering assistance, and wait until your offer is accepted. Listen or ask for specific instructions. Be prepared for your offer to be refused.
- Relax. Anyone can make mistakes. Offer an apology if you feel you've caused embarrassment. Keep a sense of humour and be willing to communicate.
- Use a normal tone of voice when welcoming a person with disability. Do not raise your voice unless you are asked to.
- Shake hands even if the person has limited hand use or wears an artificial limb. A left-hand shake is acceptable. If the person cannot shake hands, acknowledge them with a smile and a spoken greeting.
- When planning a meeting or other event, think about specific accommodations a person with disability might need. If a barrier cannot be avoided, let the person know ahead of time.

Everyone is different and will have individual preferences. It's a good idea to ask the person what works for them and respect their wishes.

- Look and speak directly to the person with disability, not just to the people accompanying them, including interpreters.
- Don't patronise or talk down to people with disability. Treat people with respect and dignity.
- Be patient and give your undivided attention, especially with someone who speaks slowly or with great effort.
- Never pretend to understand what a person is saying if you don't. Ask the person to repeat or rephrase, or offer them a pen and paper.
- If requested to by the individual, offer your elbow or shoulder to a person who is blind or has low vision, to guide rather than propel them.
- It is okay to use common expressions like "see you soon" or "I'd better be running along".

³ Australian Network of Disability, *Disability Etiquette Guide*, <https://www.and.org.au/pages/etiquette.html>

Tips for mental illness

At times, people with mental illness may have difficulty dealing with the tasks and interactions of daily life. Their condition may interfere with their ability to feel, think or relate to others.

One of the main obstacles they face is the attitudes that people have about them.

Because mental illness is not visible, chances are you will not even realise that the person has a mental health condition. To be proactive in making sure your environment is comfortable for people with mental health conditions, ensure that you are approachable, have a good understanding and attitude about mental health issues, and have plenty of time to listen when someone is talking. It also helps to support and promote mental health initiatives such as RUOK day and to start conversations about mental illness.

Keep in mind:

- Stress can affect a person's ability to function. Try to keep the pressure of any given situation to a minimum.
- People with mental illness may have different ways of coping with their disability. Some may have trouble picking up on social cues, others may be overly sensitive. One person may be very hyperactive, while someone else may appear lethargic.
- Treat each person as an individual. Ask what will make them most comfortable and respect their needs to the maximum extent possible.



➤ Because it is a non-visible disability, chances are you will not even realise that the person has a mental health condition.

What to say or write

When referring to people with disability either in person or in writing, make sure the language is positive and sensitive. The *Disability Access Bench Book*, published by the Judicial College of Victoria,⁴ suggests the following:

Outdated
'disabled person', 'handicapped'
'the disabled'

Preferred
'Person with disabilities'
'person living with disability'
'person with lived experience of disability'
'people with disabilities'

Outdated
'Non-disabled', 'able-bodied'

Preferred
'Person without disability'

Outdated
A person confined to a wheelchair

Preferred
A person who uses a wheelchair
or wheelchair user

Outdated
'suffering from...', 'struck down by'
'afflicted by/with...', 'mental health problem'

Preferred
'Michael experiences depression'
'Philippa developed Multiple Sclerosis'
'Jarrod has autism'

⁴ Judicial College of Victoria, *Disability Access Benchbook*, 1.5, Definitions and Terminology, <http://www.judicialcollege.vic.edu.au/eManuals/DABB/index.htm#59210.htm>

Imagine yourself...

Acquired Brain Injury

Imagine you have had no sleep for three nights, have a bad headache and are walking on a very uneven surface following a map to get to a very remote part of a loud shopping centre. At the same time as doing this, you are trying to have a conversation with your child, and remember a very long shopping list.

What would you need to make this work for you?

Imagine yourself...

Deaf person

Imagine that you walk into a community centre for a community information night about the impending bushfires. The room is full of people speaking a foreign language. You only know a little of this language, but they are speaking so quickly and fluently that you have no idea what they are saying. They look at you and ask you a question but you don't know what the question is. You only know that they are standing there waiting for an answer. You indicate that you can't understand them and they sigh and brush you off, telling you not to worry about it.

What would you need to make this work for you?

What about Deaf people?

There's another layer of consideration when referring to a person who is deaf.

The usual protocol among deaf people is:

- If you refer to someone as a 'Deaf' person, they use Auslan (Australian Sign language) and self identify as being a part of the Deaf community.
- Lower case 'deaf' refers to the adjective, and all people that are deaf.
- Some people prefer to be referred to as 'hard of hearing' (rather than 'hearing impaired' which implies a negative loss of function) as they do not identify with the Deaf community.

Avoid 'inspiration porn'

Referring to people with disability as 'brave', 'courageous', or 'inspirational', just because they have a disability is disempowering and patronising.

This type of language is known as 'inspiration porn'. A person with disability should not be used to make people without disability feel better about themselves.

The term hit the mainstream via prominent Victorian disability activist Stella Young who explained:

"Inspiration porn is an image of a person with a disability, often a kid, doing something completely ordinary – like playing, or talking, or running, or drawing a picture, or hitting a tennis ball – carrying a caption like 'your excuse is invalid' or 'before you quit, try'"⁵

Stella also addresses this in her iconic TEDx Talk: I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much.⁶

It is wonderful to celebrate achievements of people with disability, just as you would people without disability, but not just because they have a disability.

⁵ Stella Young, 'We're not here for your inspiration', *The Drum*, 3 July 2012, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-07-03/young-inspiration-porn/4107006>

⁶ TEDx, Stella Young, *I'm not your inspiration thank you very much*, 9 June 2014, https://www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much

Making contact

Communication with people with disability can be challenging if the person's disability affects their ability to use spoken language. Examples include deafness, some types of Autism and other intellectual disability.

Here are general tips from the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations⁷ to help ensure you have a positive interaction.

Communicating with people with physical disabilities

- Remember that a person's personal space can include their wheelchair and crutches. Do not touch or push a person's wheelchair or move their crutches or walking stick without their permission.
- When speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair, try to find something to sit on in order to be at eye level with them.

Communicating with people who are blind or have low vision

When meeting people with little or no vision:

- Always address them by name and introduce yourself by name.
- Speak clearly and in a normal voice. There is no need to raise your voice.
- Remember that visual cues and facial expressions will most likely be missed. Make sure you verbalise any thoughts or feelings.
- If accompanied by a guide dog, do not pat or feed it, or distract it in any way. When in harness, the dog is working.
- Say something when you enter or leave a room that indicates your presence or that you are leaving. This ensures that the person who has a vision impairment will not be embarrassed by speaking to an empty space.

⁷ Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, *Communication with People with Disability* Factsheet, <http://www.afdo.org.au/5675.aspx>

Imagine yourself...

Wheelchair User

Imagine you are in a wheelchair – you are currently around 3 foot tall and have to go everywhere in your chair with wheels. Close your eyes and imagine yourself in a doorway of a building, reaching for food or drinks on a standard sized table, in a crowded room with people twice as tall as you are, and wheeling down a rocky footpath or at your local park.

What would you need to make this work for you?

Imagine yourself...

Intellectual Disability

Imagine you enter into a business meeting with serious looking people in suits around the table. The chairperson says, “welcome to the convention of biotechnical engineering where we will analyse the mechanics of the biometrical data from the cyclonic activity occurring in the infrastructure within the antidisestablishmentarianism group that monitors bioenvironmental activity”. Then they look at you for acknowledgement that you understand what it’s about.

What would you need to make this work for you?

Communicating with people who are hard of hearing/deaf

- Some deaf people use Auslan (Australian Sign Language). If Auslan is the preferred language, arrange for an Auslan interpreter to be present.
- Gain the person’s attention before speaking. Try a gentle tap on the shoulder, a wave or some other visual signal to gain attention.
- Face the person directly and maintain eye contact.
- Make sure your mouth is visible. Remember not to cover your mouth with your hand or any other object as you talk.
- Look directly at the person while speaking and speak evenly, not too fast or slow.
- Don’t exaggerate your mouth movements, as this will make it more difficult to lip-read.
- Use short sentences.
- Keep your volume up and natural. Don’t shout.

Communicating with people with an intellectual disability

- Before talking, ensure you have the person’s attention. Try using their name or eye contact to make sure you have their attention.
- Keep your questions simple and your answers easy to understand.
- Remember that your body language is important, as people with an intellectual disability often rely on visual cues.
- Be prepared to use visual information or to receive visual information from people with an intellectual disability.
- Be specific and direct. Avoid talking using abstracts, acronyms, metaphors or puns.

Including everyone

Social events

Work-related social events are an important part of developing a healthy work environment. Just like any other employee, employees with disability should be included in these events. Ask yourselves:

- Can people with different accessibility needs enter via the same entrance? (ie: can someone with a cane or a wheelchair and an able-bodied person all enter the same way?)
- Is there accessible parking on the premises or nearby?
- Is there an accessible toilet that is easy to get to?
- Is the space quiet enough to carry a conversation?
- Are the tables set up (or can be changed) so that everyone can see each other?
- Is the space uncluttered?

Don't assume that a person cannot or does not want to be involved simply because they have disability. Adjustments can almost always be made so that everyone can be included. Keep access requirements top of mind when organising these events.

Consultations and engagements

Don't overlook people with disability for your consultations and other stakeholder engagements.

There are a number of practical things you can do to ensure that your event or meeting is accessible for people with disabilities. Here are some helpful tips:

- Make sure that accessibility is a key factor when you are choosing a venue – rule out venues that are accessible only by stairs, and make sure toilets are also accessible.
Ask about any accessibility needs when you are inviting people to be a part of your consultation or event, and to discuss their requirements with them. Many disabilities are invisible, so it is important to ask all attendees this question.
- Keep in mind that if you need to book support or attendant care workers, Auslan Interpreters or captioners, often there are waiting lists of up to 3 weeks or more. Book as soon as you know they are required (or book immediately, and cancel a week beforehand if they are not requested).
- Make allowances in your budget for costs relating to inclusion (such as Auslan Interpreters, Live Captioning, attendant carers).
When sending out invitations for your event, include a line to state *"if you have any access needs, please advise us on xxxx by xxx"*. Treat everyone as an individual. Don't assume that any two people's needs are the same.
- Give plenty of notice for your event to allow people time to book support needs.

- If you are using a hearing loop, ensure that it is fully charged before the event. A hearing loop is a device that a hard of hearing person wears around their neck to amplify the voices of people speaking in meetings, presentations and other situations involving speech.
- Try to keep to time during meetings: organised supports (such as Auslan interpreters, live captioning and attendant carers) often have to leave on time.
- Begin your event or meeting with a roll call so that people who are blind or have low vision know who is in the room.
- Take breaks: allow extra time if necessary to make sure everyone has ample time for their needs.
- If providing refreshments, ensure that food is accessible to people in wheelchairs.
- If you have a hard of hearing or deaf person in the meeting or consultation, ensure that they can see you and don't slouch or talk while covering your mouth in any way. The hard of hearing or deaf person needs to lipread you.
- When consulting with people who are blind or have low vision, it is important to remember that they may need hand outs and other materials provided in formats other than print. These formats may include large print (standard is 18pt), Braille, audio or electronic. Electronic means a text based file format such as .doc, .docx, .txt or .rtf which is easily read by screen reading software. Avoid PDF files.

Imagine yourself...

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Imagine that all your senses are ten times more heightened than they are now – everything is very bright or very noisy, the smells are very pungent and it physically hurts when anything touches you. All while trying to remember a list of ten things that need to be done.

What might you need to feel comfortable?

Note: the Autism Spectrum is very different in different people. It is very important to ask how you can make a person with Autism comfortable.



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