

# EMPLOYER MOBILISATION RESEARCH

**Understanding behaviours, attitudes and intentions of employers in Australia towards recruiting, supporting and accommodating people with health conditions or disabilities**

**December 2018**

- Workforce participation for working age Australians with a temporary or permanent physical or mental health conditions has remained the same since 2003
- Employers play an important role in improving work participation rates for people with a health condition or disability yet may not have the resources, capability or willingness to provide good work
- This study was undertaken to better understand the barriers for employers with the aim of supporting employers to provide work opportunities for people with a health condition and retaining in the workforce

The research involved a survey of 2,457 people involving in hiring and management of staff and/or development of staff policies and initiatives, which revealed 6 key employer segments. This was followed by a further 35 in-depth interviews to gain rich insight within each segment on their experiences, practices and perceptions of organisational openness, confidence and capacity to support people with a health condition of disability

Sample breakdown: Private sector, n=1,441; Public sector, n=1,096. 1-19 employees, n=639; 20-199 employees, n=552; 200+ employees, n=1,230. ANZSIC division, min 36 in each

Fieldwork was conducted in May-June 2018

This research report was prepared by Whereto Research

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**For more information and the full research report visit [www.comcare.gov.au/collaborativepartnership](http://www.comcare.gov.au/collaborativepartnership)**

# KEY FINDINGS—AT A GLANCE

AMONG EMPLOYERS WHO WERE SURVEYED

50%

are not confident in their businesses **ability to support** people with a physical or psychological disability or health condition

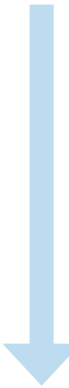
53%

believe their **workplace culture** is not supportive of people with a physical or psychological disability or health condition

36%

believe their workplace has **low capacity** to accommodate people with a physical or psychological disability or health condition

## KEY BARRIERS TO RECRUITING, SUPPORTING AND ADJUSTING FOR PEOPLE WITH A HEALTH CONDITION OR DISABILITY



**Fear of the unknown**

Less than half of employers have ever managed processes for recruiting, accommodating or managing return to work of a person with a health condition or disability.

**Low levels of confidence**

23% employers believe that employees with a health condition or disability cannot complete the task or perform as efficiently as other colleagues.

**Lack of leadership**

Only 27% of employers agree that leadership in their organisation has a strong voice about inclusion of people with different abilities.

**Liability and compliance mindset**

14% of employers are concerned with the risk of injury in the workplace and more likely to do what is required to comply with the Work Health Safety and Fair Work law.


**Lack of skills and resources**

The top ranked barriers (% top 3 rank) to hiring someone with a health condition are the additional support required (36%), the lack of skill required to manage the process (34%) and the cost of modifying the workplace (32%).

**Disability focus**


Employers who are resistant to the idea of hiring someone with a permanent health condition tend to see the disability rather than the individual as a whole.

## THERE ARE MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE EMPLOYER CAPABILITY, CAPACITY AND OPENNESS




**Develop strong policies and procedures**

Go beyond the legislated requirements for return to work or standard work and health safety procedures




**Optimise risk**

Make the most of employees' different abilities and find roles where the health condition can become an advantage




**Adaptive nature**

Willingness to accommodate and adapt to the unique needs of colleagues




**Seeing the person as a whole**

Consider all employees as a package of characteristics—not focus on health condition or disability to make assumptions about abilities and productivity



**Organised and prepared**

Seize the opportunity to recruit staff that offer a good fit for the organisation, skills to complete required tasks and the right attitude



**Manage quality of work life**

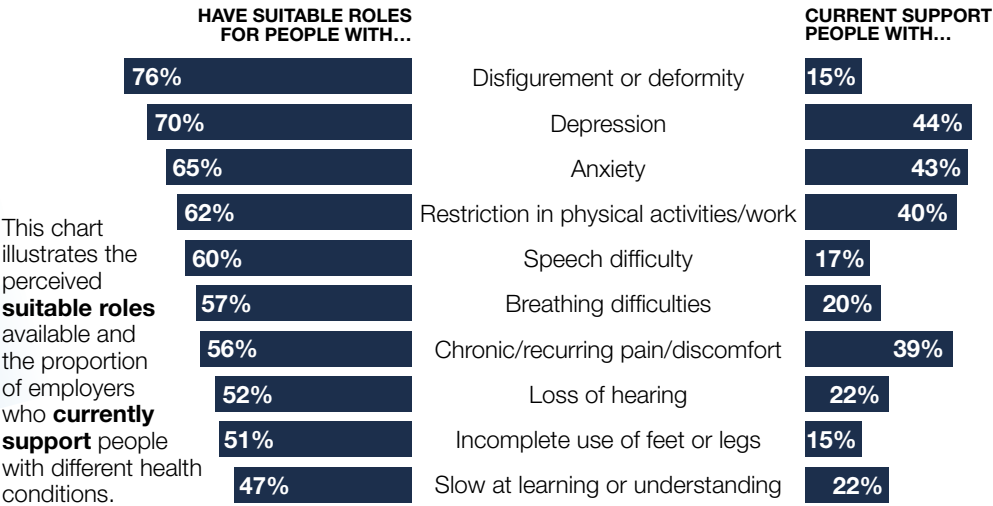
A focus on total work health of employees. Provide facilities and opportunities to ensure employees can lead a happy, healthy life both at and outside of work

## ALTHOUGH MANY HAVE SUITABLE ROLES, A LOW PROPORTION OF EMPLOYERS CURRENTLY SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH HEALTH CONDITIONS

Most businesses feel that the loss of sight would be the most difficult to accommodate

Three-quarters of employers have suitable roles for people with disfigurement or deformity—only 15% currently support







44% of Employers support and have current roles for people with depression—43% for anxiety



## KEY FINDINGS—SEGMENTS

The quantitative analysis revealed six employer segments that differ in their openness to employing people with serious health conditions and disability, their capacity to support someone with serious health conditions or disability and the supportiveness of their culture, among a range of other firm characteristics.

The segmentation is best understood as a 'stages of change' model that indicates a path to greater engagement from **'Not A Priority'** to **'Flexible Leader'**

	Key characteristics	Barriers	Opportunities to progress
 <b>4%</b>	<p><b>Flexibility Leaders</b> are significantly more likely to feel accommodating, eager hopeful, optimistic and unfazed</p> <p>They practice strategic flexibility in structuring the workplace and roles, and see the whole person when hiring</p>	<p>Some positions do not allow much flexibility</p> <p>Limited financial means to invest in workplace reconfiguration</p>	<p>Build on experience and encourage/help them tackle issues</p> <p>Encourage the formalisation of policies</p>
 <b>18%</b>	<p><b>Stumble Before Run</b> are more likely to have had experience with hiring people with disability, but encountered issues or hurdles while doing so</p> <p>They are passive when it comes to recruiting and supporting people with disability and health conditions, despite having suitable roles</p>	<p>Physical incapability—rough worksites, no lifts</p> <p>Fear of the unknown</p> <p>Have experience at organisational—not necessarily at individual—level</p> <p>Tend to see the disability rather than the person</p>	<p>Build on experience and encourage/help them tackle issues</p> <p>Encourage the formalisation of policies</p>
 <b>8%</b>	<p><b>Building Momentum</b> have had difficulty filling positions, which has increased willingness to look outside the box to find and keep the right people</p> <p>They are open to supporting people with health conditions and disabilities, but expect employees to fit into the company</p>	<p>Limited ability to adapt the environment or work process to suit individual employees</p> <p>Environmental constraints</p> <p>Concerns that people with pre-existing injuries are a liability</p> <p>Lack support of senior management</p>	<p>Help build capacity</p> <p>Encourage development of formal policies and initiatives</p> <p>Model and share success stories</p>
 <b>12%</b>	<p><b>Starting The Path</b> are interested and alert to the idea of change and acknowledge their organisations are resistant to change</p>	<p>No suitable jobs</p> <p>Lack of leadership and resourcing</p> <p>Physical incapability</p> <p>Fear of the unknown</p>	<p>Inform about available supports</p> <p>Link to services and like-minded businesses</p>
 <b>17%</b>	<p><b>Curious and Looking For Direction</b> are more likely to suggest their company's aim is 'compliance'</p> <p>They have little insight or interest in pursuing available support</p>	<p>'Red tape' hurdles with worksite compliance</p> <p>Risk management relating to both hiring and injury</p> <p>Physical incapability</p>	<p>Sell benefits and provide incentives to spark engagement</p> <p>Share case studies of similar organisations</p>
 <b>41%</b>	<p><b>Not A Priority</b> feel it is important that they accommodate temporary physical (39%) and psychological (34%) conditions. This proportion decreased for permanent conditions (22%, 17%)</p>	<p>Belief that people with a disability or health condition pose a risk</p> <p>Lack of support from management</p> <p>Lack of flexibility and budget to modify workplace; A focus on 'bare minimum' compliance</p>	<p>Need direct support and encouragement to begin journey</p> <p>Provide templated policies and procedures</p> <p>Use of compliance/regulations to enforce engagement</p>

\*weighted proportion of businesses in the Australian business population



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