



Centre for Inclusive Employment & Disability Employment Australia

Lunch & Learn Session | Wednesday, 15 October 2025

Workplace Modifications

Speaker: Georgia Miller | National Manager, JobAccess

Host: Sally Karandrews (DEA)

SALLY KARANDREWS: Good afternoon everyone and welcome to our second lunch and learn. I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians on the land on which I am joining you from, and that is the Wurundjeri land. My name is Sally, I am the policy manager here at Disability Employment Australia and it is my pleasure to be your host for these lunch and learn sessions. They are a partnership between Disability Employment Australia and the Centre for Inclusive Employment and aim to give providers and frontline staff members and managers practical steps and advice and resources that you can use as we move into the start of the Inclusive Employment Australia contract. Today I am joined by Georgia Miller. Georgia joins us from Job Access. She is an occupational therapist who has been working in rehab and disability employment for more than 15 years now. She's been with the Job Access program for a large part of that time and has transferred across with the Job Access program to its new home at GenU earlier this year. Georgia has a lot of experience both in clinical practice, but also in leadership roles, and she's here today to talk with us about the Job Access program and the Employment Assistance Fund and how that can benefit people with disability and employers as we place people into work. So I will hand over to Georgia now and then there will be some time at the end of the session to answer some of your questions, so if you have any, pop them in the chat and we will get to them at the end of the presentation. Thanks Georgia.

GEORGIA MILLER: Thank you Sally. I am just going to share my presentation. I will just minimise that. So Kaya everyone, that means hello in

Whadjuk Noongar. I would like to acknowledge the Whadjuk Noongar people as the Traditional Custodians on the land from which I am based on. I honour the strength and wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and recognise the importance of inclusion, access and opportunity for all. Thank you for coming together today, there is much we can learn from each other. Thank you to the Centre for Inclusive Employment and Disability Employment Australia for hosting Job Access today. I am delighted to be here to share information about the program, but particularly about workplace adjustments and the Employment Assistance Fund, which I am going to refer to during this presentation as the EAF.

Delivered by GenU on behalf of the Department of Social Services, Job Access is the National hub for workplace and employment information for people with disability, employers and service providers. Job Access can help people with disability with financial support and access to services to support them in the workplace. We manage a telephone advice line delivered by a team of frontline professionals, providing free confidential and expert advice. They can answer your questions on matters related to disability employment or direct you to other employment services. Our teams also provide advice on, and can help you organise workplace adjustments and modifications through the EAF. Our employer engagement service is the National disability recruitment coordinator team and they work alongside larger employers to increase their disability confidence. They do this through free and tailored partnership agreements.

What are workplace adjustments? Some of you might know what workplace adjustment are, however to benefit everyone, let me start by defining the term. Workplace adjustments or reasonable adjustments are administrative, environmental or procedural changes that enable people with disability to have equitable employment opportunities and work effectively and comfortably. Not all people with disability require workplace adjustments, however, knowing how to offer and provide adjustments can help employers attract, employ and retain people from a wider pool. I want to highlight that at Job Access we have moved away from the term "reasonable adjustment" to "workplace adjustment". Reasonable adjustment is the legal term used in the Disability Discrimination Act. It refers to changes which must be made unless they cause unjustifiable harm to the employer. Workplace adjustment is a more practical inclusive term used in workplace settings, rather than the legal

threshold of what's reasonable. We also use it as its plain language. Workplace adjustment is easier to understand for both employers and employees especially those unfamiliar with legal jargon. It shifts the focus from legal compliance to creating inclusive and supportive work environments and also the broader application, it encourages adjustments not just for people with disability, but also for carers, older workers and others who may benefit from flexible or supportive arrangements.

Job Access undertook National research in 2023 to gauge awareness about workplace adjustments among employers and people with disabilities. The survey revealed that 60% of respondents said they were not familiar with the concept of workplace adjustments. It is worth noting that this is a 10% improvement in awareness since the last survey in 2021, however the fact that 6 out of 10 Australians are still unaware of workplace adjustment presents a notable challenge. Some of you may know that workplace adjustments can be one of the most effective tools to help people with disability to gain and retain employment. 59% of respondents with disability were not aware of workplace adjustments. This lack of awareness can have a detrimental impact on their decisions regarding employment and career aspirations, their absence from the talent pool means employers also miss out on their potential. Also only 2 in 5 saw workplace adjustments as something that is easy to organise.

We also found that 40% estimated that the cost of adjustments would be significant, 30% admitted that discussing workplace adjustments fell outside their comfort zone and while nearly 60% were unsure or did not know how to arrange workplace adjustments to support employees with disability.

Lastly, we found that adjustments that work positively impact people by maintaining employment, increasing productivity and job satisfaction and job sustainability.

So, our expert team of Allied Health professionals who work within the EAF provide holistic and tailored advice on workplace adjustments to employers and people with disability from that first point of contact. We also support employers and employees and service providers to access funding for adjustments through the fund, which can help remove cost as a barrier to

hiring a person with a disability in the role.

Making adjustments has clear and wide-ranging business benefits. It can help by increasing the work performance of employees with disability, by providing them with the right tools to do their job, increases retention of productive and committed staff who also may acquire a disability during their employment, increase staff capabilities, as some adjustments can enable employees to perform tasks they were unable to before changes were put into place. It also increased access to buildings and rooms. It can, by other people and customers potentially broaden an employee's customer base to include people with disability, and becoming part of day-to-day work practices for all employees by integrating workplace adjustments into business processes rather than being an afterthought. Consider here the impact of COVID-19 and how many businesses moved to remote and flexible working arrangements for employees. Adjustments can be made to our physical environment, workplace practices, policies and training resources to help improve accessibility and inclusion. So, a physical adjustment refers to any change made to the structure, surroundings, furniture and fittings within a workplace to remove barriers and improve access for people with disability.

Most physical changes needed to improve access are minor such as moving desks or installing some brighter lights. Very occasionally a more significant adjustment might be required, such as installing a ramp, an automatic door opener or a visual fire alarm. The recruitment process can be a workplace adjustment, this can include: making all recruitment materials available or accessible in alternative formats, such as PDs, application forms and questionnaires; removing medical tests or aptitude tests that are unrelated to essential job requirements; providing alternative formats to test papers for example in audio or large print versions; allowing candidates to present their answers, using an alternative method, for example, verbally rather than in writing; allowing candidates additional time to complete exams or selection tests, particularly for individuals with dyslexia or other learning difficulties; organising the interview in an accessible venue, and providing an interpreter for example, for a candidate who communicates using sign language. EAF can fund the use of an Auslan Interpreter to participate in an interview equitably. The job design process can be a workplace adjustment. This can include flexibility with work hours, job sharing, more than one person does the job. It can be an option if employees want to work part-time but the job available

needs to be worked on a full-time basis. Job carving, allocating some duties to another employee, and job creation for a person with more significant disability. Training development is another adjustment. This could include introducing a workplace buddy or a mentor system, allowing external support workers from specialist employment or disability services on site for orientation and learning assistance, extending the training time or probation for workers with cognitive impairment or a learning disability, arranging general or specific disability awareness training for co-workers, supervisors and managers.

Making adjustments in the workplace isn't costly or complicated. At Job Access we work with a National panel of assessors who conduct the workplace assessments and advise on workplace modifications and support at no cost to anybody. So the National panel of assessors also start their new contract on the 1st of November, and they are all accredited Allied Health professionals, lots of OTs are on the panel and they help us as our advisors at Job Access be the eyes and the ears in the workplaces and we work collaboratively with the assessors and employers with coming up with the best solution for the clients' needs. So the EAF can also cover more than just physical changes to the workplace. It can also provide funding for Auslan Interpreting as I mentioned job interviews and related activities, such as site visits, completion of tests and information sessions for people who are deaf or have a hearing impairment. This could include generic disability awareness training, deafness awareness training and mental health awareness training. The fund also provides at the moment \$1,682.77 for each eligible employee to conduct training at the workplace and the training is conducted by a reputable person who specialises in disability awareness. The training seeks to increase awareness, reduce stigma, improve attitudes as well as increase the confidence of employees and co-workers to assist someone in seeking help. The other thing we fund as well is specialist support, one-on-one support. Again it is that \$1,682 per year to employers for each eligible employee to access specialist services. This support is directed at enabling a specialist to work with the employee and the employer to establish and provide a practical plan, or workplace-based intervention aimed to meet any workplace goals to overcome barriers. We support a lot of people with neurodivergent conditions and that might be that they are at work but they are having some barriers, so that might be in relation to communication, management style or time management, particular tasks they might be struggling with. We get a professional, normally an Allied Health professional who works with them and their employer to overcome that barrier at work as well. This funding is available that once per year, but in the

future you might have the funding once but in three years' time there might be a new barrier at work due to functional capacity, new management style et cetera and you can apply for funding again if there is a new barrier at work, so it is always there if someone needs it.

Applications for workplace modifications can be made by you as a service provider for your participants. In order to be eligible for funding to make any workplace modifications and adjustments there are certain criteria that applicants need to meet. So having an offer of employment, be working at least 8 hours/week and earning an hourly income at least equivalent to the National minimum wage, or working under 8 hours/week due to capacity, but building towards that 8 hours/week. Our EAF guidelines are changing on the 1st of November to accommodate the new changes along with Inclusive Employment Australia around that 0 to 8 capacity for work. The other criteria is to be an Australian citizen or a permanent resident and have an ongoing disability that has lasted or lasts at least two years and the disability must limit, restrict or impair someone's ability to work. To do this you submit an application online on our Job Access website. We will assess the application and let you know of the outcome. If the application is successful we'd advise if a workplace assessment is required. If an assessment is not required your organisation can purchase the modifications or adjustments and have the costs reimbursed by Job Access. So we work as a reimbursement scheme. If a workplace assessment is needed, we will arrange a specialist, one of those National panel of assessors at no cost to you to assess what workplace changes may be required, the assessable visit and look at the workplace, identify any barriers that may exist and talk with you, the employer and the employee to find solutions to make that workplace more accessible and flexible.

Then your organisation can purchase the modifications and again have those reimbursed by Job Access. Some helpful tips when making an application, completing all parts of the application and providing all required supporting documentation. So please don't put an application on if you don't have all that ready to go, because it just delays the process for the individual. Don't purchase anything until the application has been approved, we issue an approval letter out in writing. But remember we are here to help. Your Job Access adviser will manage the process and answer any inquiries you may have. Detailed guidelines on the EAF are available online at the Job Access website.

So to help support some examples of funding under the EAF I will now share two recent real life scenarios the team have worked with. These applications were submitted by service providers on behalf of their participants. Case study 1, a doctor working in a large public hospital working three days a week. They had Ehlers-Danlos syndrome and postural Orthostatic Tachycardia syndrome. The functional impacts of those conditions for her were reduced mobility, muscular fatigue, reduced cognitive endurance and pain. Job Access referred this application out for a work site assessment with the MPA with the recommendations made to the physical environment at work and also some equipment. So some of the recommendations included: removing some overhead cupboards into clinical consulting rooms, so some height adjustable desks could be put underneath them; two height adjustable desks, two ergonomic chairs with some arm supports were recommended as she needed those as at times she had to work a neck brace when she was at work; two foot rests and a surgeon stool. All those items were funded by the hospital. Their onsite team removed those overhead cupboards, sit to stand desks are standard equipment that would benefit any member, regardless of disability. The two particular chairs that - the chair that she needed times two weren't much more than a standard ergonomic chair, so the hospital was happy to fund those and the standard stool. What we at Job Access supported the application with, was we funded three pairs of custom-made dynamic movement orthotic leggings which assist with support and postural alignment at work and some cooling vests to assist with ventilation issues at work. These were made for the environment as well, so we had to get them custom made and we funded multiple as well, so to help manage the cleaning and sterilisation as well.

The next case study, another application, we worked with a service provider on was a reception and customer service officer for a small business. He worked full-time. They had retinal damage which resulted in significant vision loss and the functional impacts at work for them were difficulty accessing screen-based information, accessing print text, note-taking, using corded headphones and pouring a hot drink. With a staff of 8 in total this was the small business owner's first experience of employing a person with a disability. They funded - we sent this one for a work site assessment as well and the assessor made some recommendations. One of them was a mono wireless headset with a boom microphone which helped with minimising getting tangled in the cords and the headset, so we eliminated that and it helped him to hear environmental sounds because he was stationed at the front reception, so they

also needed to hear when people were talking to them. For this case Job Access funded Fusion Magnifier Reader with 10 hours of assisted tech training. This magnified the screen and gives speech direction and helps with navigation on the screen. We funded an OrCam Reader which read items for him. For him he was sorting mail and deliveries at the reception desk, so he used this to read the mail. A funded larger monitor to help with that screen magnification, and an Explore 12 with a stand. He was writing notes, but he did have trouble reading his own writing, so this Explore helped him to do that. Lastly we funded a liquid level indicator that he could attach to his coffee cup to avoid any burns when he was making his coffee at work.

Hopefully these two case studies highlight how a combination of expert advice and target workplace adjustments, some are simple and low cost, while others funded through Job Access can empower people with disability to maintain employment. The employers also gain confidence through the process and the employees were able to continue performing their role safely and effectively. Following on from those two impacts of workplace adjustments, between 2006 and 2024 Job Access has managed over 65,000 applications for workplace modifications and adjustments, and each one has made a difference. Feedback from employers and employees who received workplace modifications through the fund tell us that 91% of employees were still employed three months after receiving workplace adjustments funded by Job Access, 91% of employees indicated they were more productive after the implementation of workplace adjustments and 100% indicated that Job Access provided the outcome that it was intended to. The impact of workplace adjustments doesn't just stop there. In 2023 Job Access conducted further research with a two year follow-up survey. The survey was sent to individuals who had previously received funding to gain insight into their current employment situation, their economic and social circumstances, as well as their perspectives about the medium term impact of the fund. The survey outlined that the vast majority of recipients remain employed two years after the initial assistance was received and the majority remained with their original employer. The majority of fund recipients felt their job was sustainable two years after that initial assistance was received and work was perceived to add value to the lives of EAF participants by providing a sense of being valued and self-confidence. Further data around this study can be found on our Job Access website.

As we approach the end of the presentation I wanted to highlight a template we have created for you to use with your participants and employers to support workplace adjustments at work. The workplace adjustment passport was created to help employers and employees with disability record and carry workplace adjustment requirements across different roles, managers and career activities within an organisation. It is designed to support a timely implementation of adjustments helping employees be productive, aiding employees to meet their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act and also includes links to resources like flexible work policies, adjustment templates, job customisation guides, and career progression information and document adjustments throughout the employee lifecycle, so it is customisable to suit different organisations and employee needs. The link to the template is on our Job Access website and also will be shared with you all. That's it for the presentation. Thank you so much for listening.

SALLY KARANDREWS: Thanks Georgia. Questions if anyone has any, feel free to pop them in the chat so we can get to those. But a couple that we have already had come through, Georgia, could you talk a little bit more about what support might be available to direct managers who might have an employee with a disability on their team through the Job Access program?

GEORGIA MILLER: Sure. Ringing our 1800 number they could get advice over the phone from a professional advisor, and then from that conversation the advisor might be understanding that there is some barriers at work that would lend itself to putting an application on for their staff member, then that supervisor could put an application on, and then we could delve a little bit further into what some solutions can be to those barriers. So that first point of call would be phoning our 1800 number and depending what the level of barrier is, then it might be putting an application on as well.

SALLY KARANDREWS: Awesome. Work experience is something that is commonly used as a stepping stone toward employment. Is there anything within Job Access that could support people taking on work experience placements?

GEORGIA MILLER: Yeah, so it is great with the changes, the 0 to 8 capacity,

so doing work experience is a stepping stone into desensitising into work and to obtain employment. We will be funding those scenarios and we'd be looking at it on a case by case basis, but there is definitely now room finally within the if under to support the adjustments needed and modification to support people on work experience.

SALLY KARANDREWS: Excellent. You touched on working from home and how that's created some flexibility and also some great opportunities for people with disability. What about workplace mods for those of us who are working from home, do they apply to the home office set-up as well?

GEORGIA MILLER: They do. So it is just like anything to do, so regardless of disability you need the standard tools of the trade, you need your desk, your chair, your laptop and your headphones to do your job at home. So anything above and beyond that's disability-specific, yes, we would fund at home. Sometimes if the person works full-time from home we can fund something there, but they also might go into the office three times a week and need some things in the office too. We do this on a case by case basis, but on top of what's already been provided by them or their employer as standard tools of the trade first.

SALLY KARANDREWS: Awesome. In terms of applications when is the best time to make one and could you give an idea of how long the process is once an application has been made?

GEORGIA MILLER: Sure. So the best time is I guess as soon as you know that there is a barrier that needs to be addressed. So especially before someone starts their job or their work experience. Once you know, we do like, if there is a need to go to the physical work environment that is always helpful, but sometimes we don't need to go, depending on what - there might already be a solution at play, the team who support the Employment Assistance Fund, all have Allied Health backgrounds themselves and they have got good ideas and solutions to lots of different barriers at work, so we might be able to bypass actually going into the physical work location before someone starts a job if they have had an adjustment before as well, that always helps. So as soon as possible for the assessment for the application on, please, and then the second

part to that is how long it takes is dependent. As I mentioned if you put an application on and you have all your eligibility, at the moment I am pretty sure we are five business days out from contacting someone on putting in an application. If you have all your eligibility your application would be reviewed and straight to an advisor who would make an initial phone call, and from there it would be how long is a piece of string? If you don't need a workplace assessment and we can get some quotes and we can fund straight away, or it might be that we've got to arrange that workplace assessment. The National panel of assessors who do our assessments in the workplaces, they have 10 business days from the day that we refer out to them to do an assessment to do the assessment and submit their report. So that's quite a quick turnaround for an assessment and report and at Job Access when reports come in they are a priority task for the team, so we review reports within 24 hours of receiving them and we can say, yep, that sounds great, or hey, we need some more information, hey do we need to consider X, Y and Z, or we might need an equipment trial. If you have all your eligibility we can move it forward for you.

SALLY KARANDREWS: In terms of a bit of a wrap-around support, can Job Access assist with things like orientation mobility training to get familiar with the workplace, or even travel training for those who might be using public transport to learn how to get to and from work?

GEORGIA MILLER: We definitely do orientation mobility training. When you are coming from say from your car, like you park your car into the work car park and you need orientation mobility from there we can definitely do that and for that travel piece as well we can also do that too.

SALLY KARANDREWS: Fantastic. I think that's all that we have in terms of work from home job - I guess the question - I will let I answer this whether the Employment Assistance Fund could fund the cost of things such as home Internet and electricity bills, and for how long?

GEORGIA MILLER: Yeah, so no we don't fund on those items, no.

SALLY KARANDREWS: Yeah. Although they are potentially depending on individual circumstances can be a tax deduction.

GEORGIA MILLER: Yes, yep.

SALLY KARANDREWS: Cool. Well, Georgia, thank you for your time today sharing about Job Access and the Employment Assistance Fund and how we can use that to support jobseekers as they move into the workforce and develop their careers. Thank you for sharing those resources with us and I believe that there are more resources coming out from Job Access on a pretty regular basis, so definitely encourage people to keep across the Job Access socials and their website and newsletter. There is always a lot happening in that space. So thanks Georgia, and thanks again to Liv and Hanif who have been putting everything behind the scenes today. We will be back next Wednesday at 12.30 Australian Eastern Daylight Time and that will be around leading from the middle, so some practical tips for new managers. Thanks so much for coming everyone and have a lovely rest of the day.

(End)