



Australian Government



Jobs and Skills Australia

# Employer attitudes toward disability inclusion in the Australian Workforce

Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey

March 2026

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## **JSA's forthcoming co-designed labour market and skills multi-year research programs for people with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**

Co-design is important because it shifts research from being “about” people to being “for and with” them, which increases the likelihood of achieving better outcomes for those key groups of people. Co-design ensures insights are more accurate, relevant, and trusted, as well as focused on the important decisions, initiatives, and policy reforms that will make impact. This is especially true for people who are more likely to face compounding barriers but also unique opportunities in the jobs and skills system, like people with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This is why JSA is establishing advisory panels for our two forthcoming dedicated multi-year research programs on people with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. JSA will co-design the research programs with our advisory panels to ensure our insights are informed by lived experience and reflect community perspectives, expectations, and values.

Both research programs and advisory panels are currently being established in the Inclusive Participation part of our work plan. While that is being progressed, JSA has responded to strong early demand for foundational insights on this cohort through two papers focused on leveraging existing data and filling immediate information gaps as a preface to the people with disability research program:

- Employer attitudes toward disability inclusion in the Australian Workforce
- Employment and disability in Australia

The population of people with disability in these early insights papers therefore reflect what is available in existing surveys (e.g. how individuals respond in the ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, and how employers respond in JSA's Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey). An expanded approach to people with disability, including the priorities for the research program, will be in focus for JSA and the advisory panel in 2026-2027 and will leverage the [National Disability Data Asset](#) and [National Disability Research Partnership Agenda](#) to fill evidence gaps.

For more information or to stay in touch on developments on this or the research program on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, please email us at: [InclusiveParticipation@jobsandskills.gov.au](mailto:InclusiveParticipation@jobsandskills.gov.au)

# Persons with disability

## Introduction

To better understand the barriers and opportunities in employing people with disability, Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) introduced a dedicated module within the Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey (REOS). The module collected employer perspectives on recruitment practices, workplace adjustments, and the use of government support programs to inform policies that improve employment outcomes for job seekers with disability.

Disability was defined broadly to include long-term physical, mental, cognitive, intellectual, or sensory impairments. Between May 2025 and September 2025, more than 2,200 employers across Australia responded to targeted questions about their experiences hiring and supporting staff with disability. The module explored topics including benefits and challenges, the types of workplace modifications, and the extent to which government programs were accessed to support inclusive employment.

The module also explored employer attitudes towards future hiring, identifying perceived barriers such as cost, workplace suitability, and lack of awareness or confidence. These insights offer a valuable evidence base for shaping inclusive employment strategies and improving support for both employers and job seekers.

This report presents key findings from the disability module, highlighting employer perspectives, common practices, and opportunities for strengthening disability-inclusive recruitment across Australian workplaces.

## Labour market outcomes for persons with disability<sup>1</sup>

Australia's labour market is changing rapidly, driven by shifts in population, innovative and emerging technologies, and changing social attitudes. A key part of this shift is the growing recognition that employment needs to be more inclusive, with a strong focus on improving labour market outcomes for people with disability.

Despite progress, people with disability in Australia continue to experience significantly lower labour force participation compared to those without disability. In 2022, only 60.5% of people with disability aged 15-64 were in the labour force, compared to 84.9% of those without disability. For those with severe or profound disability, participation drops to just 37.2%. This gap reflects a range of structural and attitudinal barriers, including limited access to inclusive education and training, workplace discrimination, and inadequate support services.

Employment outcomes for people with disability are often characterised by underemployment and job insecurity. They are more likely to work part-time, earn lower wages, and be employed in roles with limited career progression. In 2022, the unemployment rate for people with disability was approximately twice that of people without disability. Individuals with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities face greater disadvantage, with significantly lower employment rates and higher levels of discrimination in recruitment and retention practices.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All figures are sourced from: ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2022 (SDAC 2022).

<sup>2</sup> JobAccess, Understanding Workplace Attitudes Toward Disability, December 2023.

Education attainment is intricately linked to employment outcomes. While the gap has narrowed slightly, people with disability are less likely to complete secondary or tertiary education, limiting access to skilled employment. For example, according to SDAC 2022 only 46% of Australians with disability aged 20 and over had completed Year 12 equivalent, compared to 73% of those without disability. These educational disparities, though improving, continue to contribute to lower employment rates and reinforce cycles of disadvantage, particularly for younger cohorts entering the workforce.<sup>3</sup>

Policy responses have aimed to address these disparities, most notably through the transition from the Disability Employment Services (DES) program to Inclusive Employment Australia, commencing on 1 November 2025. This reform seeks to improve service delivery, employer engagement, and data collection to better support people with disability in securing and maintaining employment. However, success will depend on addressing both structural barriers and employer attitudes, which continue to shape opportunities for people with disability.<sup>4</sup>

## Key Findings

- Of employers surveyed, 29% reported that they had staff with disability working for them. From these employers, 35% reported employing a person with disability in the last 12 months.
- Among employers who had not hired a person with disability, 59% said they would be open to doing so. Another 32% reported being hesitant, most commonly because the job was not seen as suitable (58%), concerns about the nature of the disability (27%), and safety considerations (22%). A further 9% said they were unsure<sup>5</sup> about whether they would hire a person with disability.
- Four out of five (82%) employers who hired a person with disability in the last 12 months, did not access any government subsidies or incentives. A small proportion used programs such as Workforce Australia wage subsidies (4%) or the Disability Employment Services (DES) wage subsidies (5%).
- For the 20% of employers who made workplace adjustments,<sup>6</sup> many were made available to all staff (68% of employers), while 32% of employers who made adjustments reported that they were tailored specifically for the individual with disability, ensuring their needs were met. Agreed flexible working arrangements, job redesign and workstation modifications were the most common cited adjustments.
- Over one-third (34%) of employers who had staff with disability working for them reported that workplace adjustments had not been necessary.
- Employers who hired people with disability reported a range of benefits, including enhanced diversity, access to a broader talent pool, and positive impacts on workplace culture. At the same time, some employers identified challenges such as

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission. (2021). Disability and employment in Australia: Factsheet.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Social Services. (2025). Development of Inclusive Employment Australia.

<sup>5</sup> Hesitant refers to employers who are reluctant to hire a person with disability due to specific concerns, such as job suitability or safety. Unsure refers to employers who do not yet have a formed view and lack sufficient information to decide either way.

<sup>6</sup> 20% of all surveyed employers, regardless of having a person with disability in their workplace or hiring a person with disability over the last 12 month.

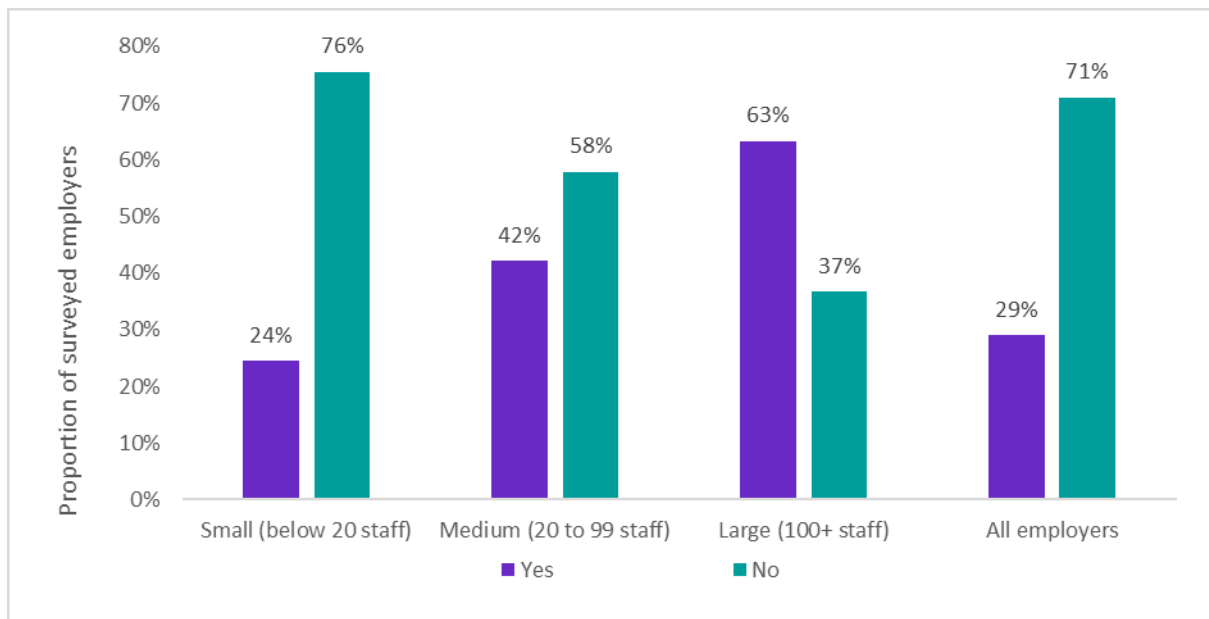
concerns about productivity, lack of necessary skills, and difficulties with workplace adjustments. These findings highlight both the opportunities and the persistent barriers to achieving disability inclusive employment.

## Survey Findings

### Who responded to the survey

Of the employers that participated in the survey, 29% reported having a person with disability in their business. Large businesses were more likely to report having a person with disability (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Businesses with a person with disability, by business size**



Source: *Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey, Persons with Disability 2025*

This proportion also varied by industry. Employers in Accommodation and Food Services were the most likely to report having a person with disability, followed by those in Health Care and Social Assistance and Retail Trade. These industries often involve customer facing roles and diverse staffing needs, which may contribute to greater representation. In contrast, lower representation was reported by industries such as Construction and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services, where physical demands, specialised qualifications, or workplace environments could be perceived as barriers (Figure 2).

Geographic differences were also evident. Among employers who reported having a person with disability in their workplace, 58% were located in Capital Cities, compared to 42% in Rest of State areas. This disparity may reflect differences in access to support services, recruitment networks, and awareness of inclusive employment practices. It also highlights the need for targeted outreach and support in regional and remote areas to improve representation and remove barriers to employment for people with disability.

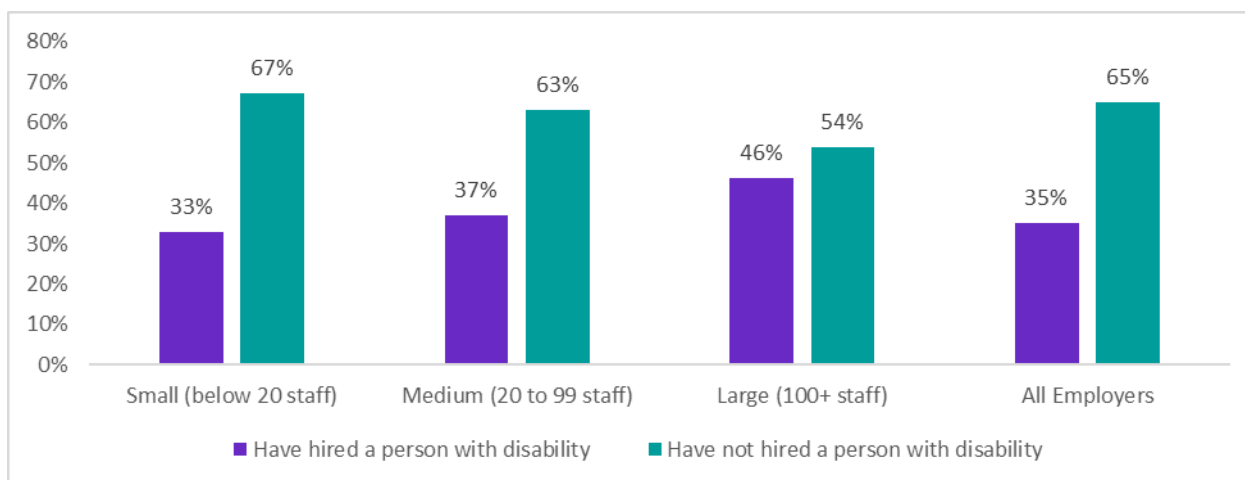
**Figure 2. Businesses with persons with disability, by selected industry division**



Source: Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey, Persons with Disability 2025

Figure 3 shows that among employers who reported having a person with disability in their business, 35% had hired at least one person with disability in the last 12 months. This proportion was highest among large businesses (46%), followed by medium (37%) and small businesses (33%).

**Figure 3. Businesses that have hired at least one person with disability in the last 12 months, by business size**



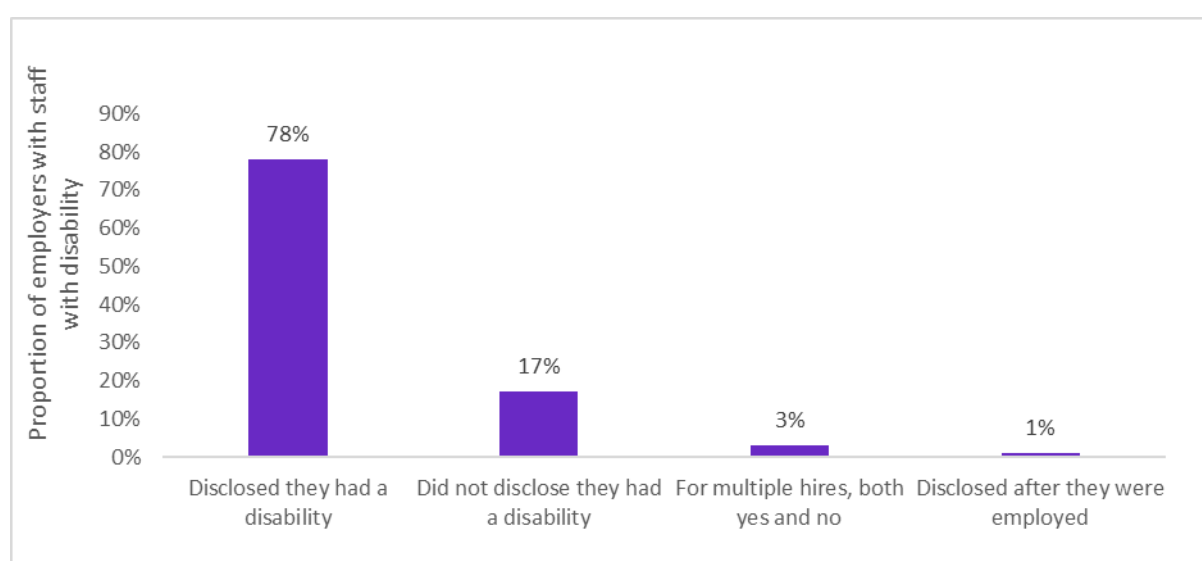
Source: Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey, Persons with Disability 2025

## Disclosure of the disability

Disclosure of the disability remains a key consideration in understanding workplace inclusion and support needs. Among employers who had hired a person with disability, 78% reported that the individual disclosed their disability either during recruitment or after commencing employment. Disclosure can enable access to workplace adjustments and support services and may contribute to more informed and inclusive management practices.

However, 17% of employers indicated that the person did not disclose their disability, and a further 3% were for multiple hires. A small proportion of employees disclosed their disability after being employed, suggesting that timing and context influence disclosure decisions. These findings highlight the importance of fostering a workplace culture that encourages openness and trust, while ensuring support mechanisms are available regardless of disclosure status.

**Figure 4: Employers with staff with disability and whether their staff disclosed their disability**

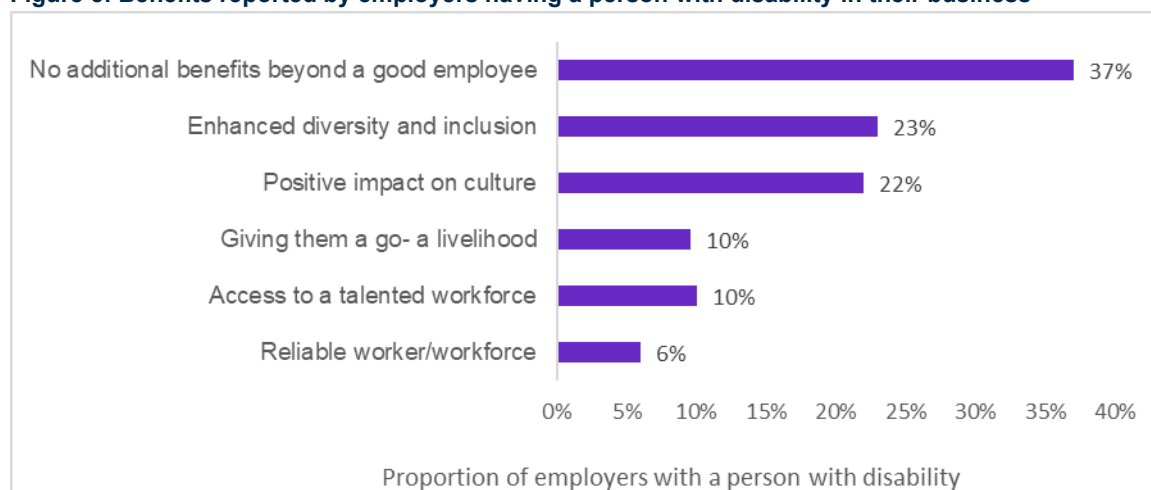


Source: *Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey, Persons with Disability 2025*

## Benefits of hiring people with disability

Employing people with disability provides tangible benefits to organisations and creates a more inclusive and resilient workforce. Employers who have successfully recruited and retained people with disability often report improvements in diversity and inclusion (23%), positive workplace culture (22%), and social impact through supporting individual's livelihoods (10%). Other advantages include access to a skilled and capable talent pool (10%) and a reputation for reliability among workers with disability (6%). These benefits are often supported by enabling factors such as internal policies and strategic partnerships with external organisations. It is worth noting, however, that 37% of employers reported no additional benefits from hiring a person with disability beyond being a good employee, highlighting the need for targeted support and increased awareness to fully realise the potential of inclusive employment practices.

**Figure 5: Benefits reported by employers having a person with disability in their business**



Note: The sum of percentages is greater than 100% due to multiple responses being allowed.

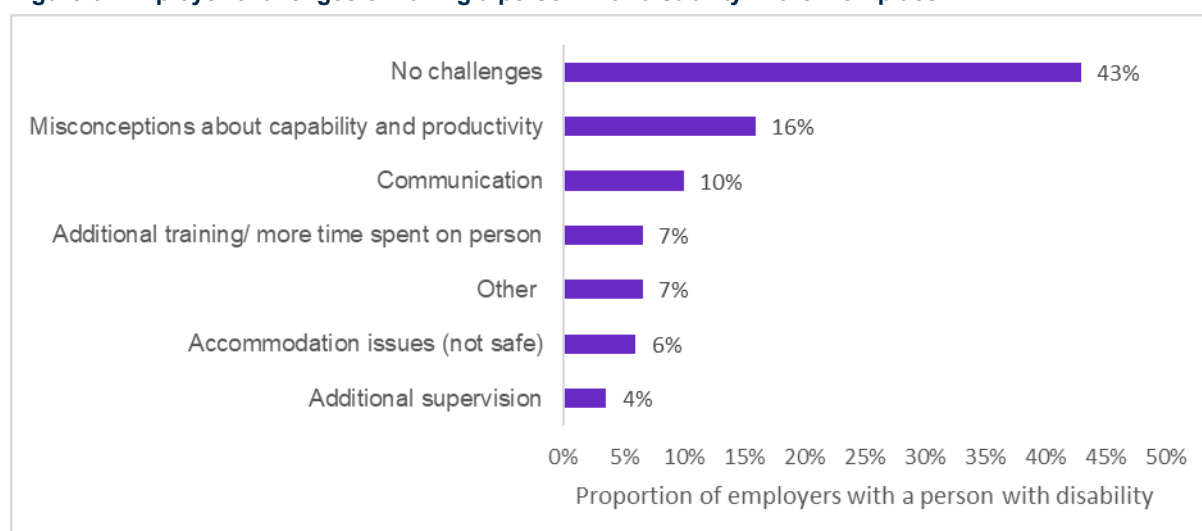
Source: Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey, Persons with Disability 2025

## Challenges in hiring persons with disability

Many employers who have a person with disability employed in their business report that they face no challenges in their business when hiring people with disability (43%). However, some employers identified a range of barriers that hinder their ability to recruit people with disability. These barriers are both structural and attitudinal, often reflecting a lack of information or confidence in navigating inclusive employment practices.

Commonly cited barriers include misconceptions about capability, including assumptions about productivity, reliability, and workplace fit (16%). Communication challenges were also noted, including hearing impairments, speech difficulties, or cognitive differences (10%). Some employers believe additional training or time investment is required (7%), while others point to the complexity of making reasonable adjustments to existing work environments (6%). These findings highlight the need for targeted education, support, and system-level reform to foster more inclusive recruitment practices.

**Figure 6: Employer challenges of having a person with disability in the workplace.**



Note: Totals do not sum to 100% due to small sample size; only categories with larger samples are shown. Respondents could select multiple responses.

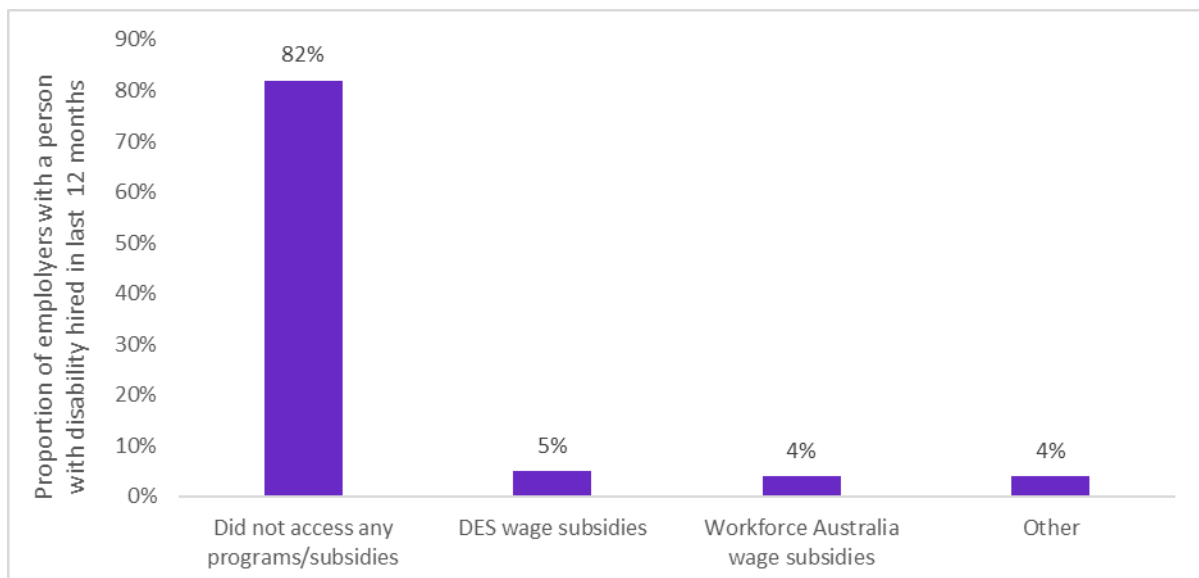
Source: Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey, Persons with Disability 2025

## Accessing support programs or incentives when recruiting a person with disability

Despite the availability of government programs and financial incentives designed to support inclusive employment, employer awareness and uptake remains limited. Four out of five employers (82%) who hired a person with disability in the 12 months prior to the survey did not access any formal support programs or wage subsidies. This may reflect a range of factors, including limited awareness, uncertainty about eligibility, perceived complexity, or the fact that some employers already have inclusive practices in place.

Only a small proportion of employers reported accessing either Workforce Australia wage subsidies (5%), or Disability Employment Services (DES) wage subsidies (4%). These programs are targeted to specific cohorts and designed to offset initial employment costs and provide tailored support. Accordingly, low utilisation in the REOS survey does not automatically indicate a failure of program design. Further investigation of how these supports are accessed by eligible employers<sup>7</sup> could assist in targeting communications for the schemes.

**Figure 7: Employer access of programs or subsidies when recruiting a person with disability.**



*Note: Totals do not sum to 100% due to small sample size; only categories with larger sample size are shown. Excluded categories: Disability Employment Services post placement support; Disability Australian Apprentice Wage Support (DAAWS), and not eligible.*

*Source: Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey, Persons with Disability 2025*

<sup>7</sup> Eligible employers include businesses with a valid ABN that are creating a new ongoing job and have not previously received a wage subsidy for the same position. They must not be receiving other government wage subsidies for that role, must not have recently retrenched staff, and the position cannot be commission-based, subcontracted, self-employment, filled by an immediate family member, or filled by someone employed in the past two years. The job seeker must be registered with a Disability Employment Service or Inclusive Employment Australia provider, and the wage subsidy agreement must be approved within 28 days of commencement.

## Workplace adjustments for people with disability

Workplace adjustments can play a critical role in enabling employees with disability to perform their roles effectively and safely. Over one third of employers (34%) who had people with disability in their business reported making no workplace adjustments after recruitment, often citing that no adjustments were needed. Among those who made adjustments, the most common was the implementation of flexible working arrangements (17%), followed by job redesign and modification of workstations (both 15%). These adjustments often require minimal cost but can significantly improve accessibility and productivity. Other reported adjustments included additional supervision or support (12%), access to additional training (7%), and diversity training for staff (5%).

Notably, of all the employers who made workplace adjustments, 68% noted that the adjustments were made available to all their staff, reflecting a broader shift towards inclusive practices that benefit the entire workforce. At the same time, 32% reported that the adjustments were tailored specifically for the individuals with disability, ensuring their needs were met. The range and frequency of adjustments suggest that while many employers are willing to accommodate individual needs, there remains scope to increase awareness and uptake of reasonable adjustments.

**Figure 8: Workplace adjustments reported by employers with a person with disability.**



*Note: The sum of percentages are greater than 100% due to multiple responses being allowed.*

*Source: Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey, Persons with Disability 2025*

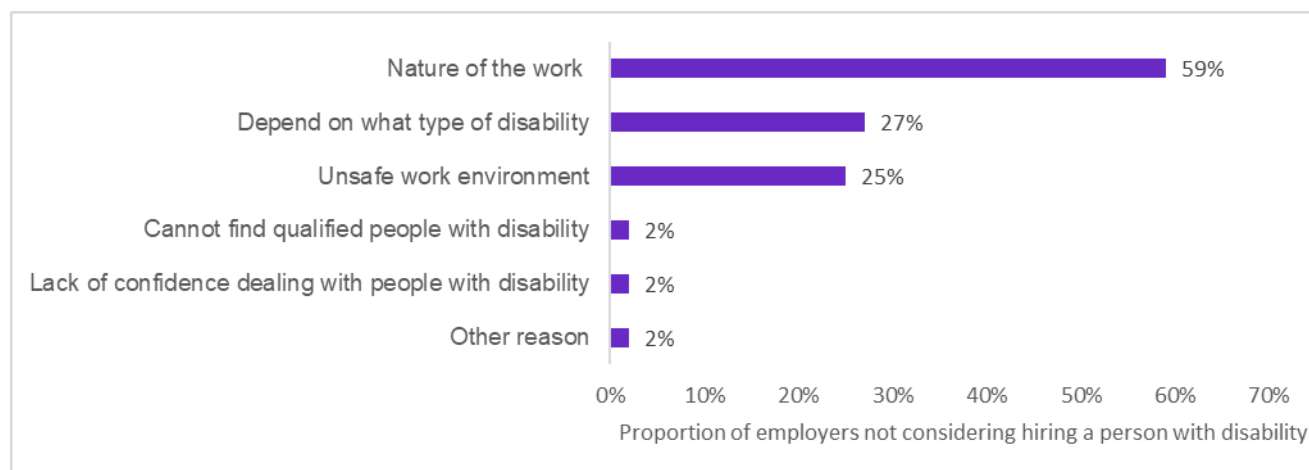
## Barriers to considering employment of people with disability

While many employers recognise the value of inclusive hiring, a notable proportion remain hesitant. Of the employers who do not have a person with disability in their business, almost a third (32%) stated that they would not consider hiring one. The most common reason was the nature of the work itself (59%), with employers indicating that certain roles involve physical demands, high risk environments, or specialised tasks that are unsuitable for people with disability.

Other concerns included conditional consideration depending on the type or severity of the disability (27%), and safety concerns within their work environments (25%). A smaller proportion of employers reported a lack of confidence in interacting with or managing employees with disability, pointing to challenges related to employer capability and experience around inclusive practices.

These findings suggest that employer attitudes continue to be shaped by perceptions of risk, misconceptions about capability and productivity, job suitability and limited exposure to inclusive employment practices.<sup>8</sup> Greater visibility of practical guidance and examples of inclusive employment in different settings may help improve understanding and broaden opportunities for people with disability across a wider range of industries and roles.

**Figure 9: Reasons employers do not consider hiring a person with disability.**



*Note: The sum of the percentages are greater than 100% due to multiple responses being allowed.*

*Source: Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey, Persons with Disability 2025*

<sup>8</sup> Antonopoulos, C. R., Sugden, N., & Saliba, A. (2024). Workplace inclusion: Exploring employer perceptions of hiring employees with disability. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 34(4)

# Conclusion: Key insights from the survey and implications

The findings from the REOS disability module provide a detailed snapshot of employer attitudes, practices, and barriers related to the employment of people with disability across Australia. While many employers report openness to inclusive hiring, particularly in customer facing sectors and larger businesses, gaps remain in awareness, confidence, and use of available supports. The data also show significant variations across industries and regions, highlighting the need for responses that reflect the diversity of the labour market rather than a single uniform approach.

Taken together, these findings highlight several considerations for government, industry and service providers.

First, the low reported use of support programs and wage subsidies highlights the importance of understanding how existing arrangements operate in practice. Some employers who hired a person with disability did so without accessing formal supports, which may reflect program targeting, eligibility settings, employer choice or limited awareness. Further engagement with program owners may help clarify how these supports are promoted and targeted, noting that wage subsidies are designed for specific cohorts rather than universal uptake.<sup>9</sup>

Second, the data point to ongoing attitudinal and structural barriers, including misconceptions about capability and productivity and concerns about job suitability. Elements of inclusive recruitment practice, such as accessible job advertisements and flexible interview formats, are already supported through existing frameworks<sup>10</sup> and may help reduce these barriers.

Third, variation in inclusive employment practices across industries and geographic regions suggests that experiences and constraints differ across the labour market. Lower representation of employees with disability in some sectors, or outside capital cities, underscores the role of job design, local labour market conditions and employer capability in shaping outcomes. Leveraging this data will enable both government and industry to development effective and responsive interventions.

Finally, the findings reinforce the ongoing role of intermediaries, such as Disability Employment Services providers, in supporting employers and jobseekers. Evidence from the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model<sup>11</sup> demonstrates that individualised job matching and integrated support can improve outcomes, highlighting the importance of collaboration between government, providers and industry bodies within existing policy and

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<sup>9</sup> Department of Social Services. (2021). Disability Employment Strategy: Employ My Ability.

<sup>10</sup> For example, the Australian Government's *Inclusive Recruitment Toolkit*, which provides practical guidance on designing accessible job ads and reducing barriers in the selection process, and Diversity Australia's *Inclusive Recruitment Tools*, which outline evidence-based approaches for accessible communication and flexible, bias-aware interviewing (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (2023). *Inclusive recruitment tool kit*. Australian Government <https://www.dewr.gov.au/career-revive/resources/inclusive-recruitment-toolkit>.)

<sup>11</sup> Everyone Can Work. *Individualised placement and support (IPS) for people with intellectual disability*. <https://www.everyonecanwork.org.au/resources/evidence/15-individualised-placement-and-support-ips-for-people-with-intellectual-disability/>

service delivery frameworks. Taken together, the REOS disability module points to strong employer goodwill alongside persistent variation in awareness, confidence and engagement with supports. Rather than prescribing specific actions, the evidence highlights the value of improving clarity, strengthening engagement and better understanding how current frameworks operate across different labour market contexts to support more inclusive employment outcomes for people with disability.

# Methodology notes

## REOS

The Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey (REOS) is an ongoing survey of employers across Australia. Approximately 800 employers are surveyed each month, with data published on the Jobs and Skills Australia website. While the data are indicative of recruitment activity, they may be subject to seasonal factors and other volatility and should therefore be used with caution. The survey is targeted towards employers with five or more employees and excludes many government organisations. Further information is available in the REOS methodology paper.

Data from the REOS are published monthly in the Recruitment Insights Report which is published on the 3rd Tuesday of the month. Spotlights are also produced in most months.

## Additional modules

From May 2025 to September 2025, a set of temporary questions was added to the REOS and collected responses from 2,221 employers on their experiences and attitudes toward employing people with disability. The module explored a range of topics including perceived benefits and challenges, considerations when hiring, access to support program and incentives, and workplace adjustments. The questions focused on the following:

- Whether the business had any persons with disability in the workplace and whether employers hired a person with disability in the last 12 months
- Whether the person disclosed their disability to the employer
- What the benefits and challenges of having a person with disability in the workplace
- What adjustments, if any, were made to the workplace
- What concerns employers had in considering employing a person with disability
- Awareness and access to programs and incentives to support the hiring of a person with disability in the workplace.

The sample was not adjusted to target businesses or regions that may be more likely to attract greater proportions of people with disability, nor was it adjusted to be representative of the disability population distribution.

The survey relied on the respondent knowing whether they had staff that had a disability or not. Some caution needs to be applied interpreting the findings as the sample is likely to be biased towards people with disability as some of the recruitment processes by employers may not have asked the disability of the applicant.

There were 79 respondents (3% of the total asked) who were unsure of whether they had a person with disability in their business and consequently were not asked any follow-up questions. Many businesses conduct large recruitment rounds and recruiters would not be able to identify the background characteristics of all job applicants.

The survey is conducted by an in-house call centre by well-trained interviewers. The survey module was tested and adjusted before the final set of questions were put into the field. Furthermore, the module is based on a short set of questions following on from the core

Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey. In depth questioning is not possible due to respondent burden considerations.

## Technical notes

The REOS is a telephone administered survey with the business owner or other person in the business responsible for recruitment. All figures presented in this report have been weighted by location and workplace size, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits (June 2018 to June 2022) publication. The weighted figures are intended to create nationally representative results by correcting for the oversampling of smaller regions compared with larger regions.

Data collected in the survey have been coded and reported according to the following ABS classifications:

- Industry is defined by the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC), 2006, Version 2.0.
- Occupation is defined by the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO), 2022.

Data in this release should be referenced as: Jobs and Skills Australia, Employers' attitudes toward disability inclusion in the Australian Workforce, March 2026.

For more information, email: [reos@jobsandskills.gov.au](mailto:reos@jobsandskills.gov.au)