



Official

Workplace adjustments: Myth-busting guide for managers

Workplace adjustments are a normal part of good people management

Workplace adjustments help remove barriers that may affect people's ability to participate fully at work and perform the key requirements of their role.

Despite this, misconceptions remain common, often making it harder for employees to seek support and for managers to respond confidently and effectively.

This guide addresses common myths and provides practical information to support conversations about workplace adjustments. It is designed to help managers and human resources practitioners create inclusive, productive and accessible workplaces.

For a practical list of common workplace adjustments, see the *Common list of workplace adjustments*.

Manager responsibilities and legal obligations

Workplace adjustments are not only good practice – they are also an important legal and leadership responsibility.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth), employers must consider and provide reasonable workplace adjustments for people with disability, unless doing so would cause unjustifiable hardship.

Supporting an employee's evolving adjustment needs is also a standard part of being a responsive manager under the Integrated Leadership System. Like other aspects of people management, workplace adjustments should be reviewed and adapted as a person's role, circumstances, health needs, or working environment change.

As a manager, your responsibilities include:

- Considering workplace adjustment requests fairly and in a timely manner.
- Working collaboratively with people to identify practical solutions.
- Focusing on workplace barriers and support needs rather than medical diagnoses.
- Maintaining privacy and confidentiality.



- Exploring alternative options where a requested adjustment is not feasible.
- Regularly reviewing adjustments to ensure they remain effective.
- Supporting people to perform the inherent requirements of their role and participate fully in the workplace.

Failing to consider reasonable adjustments may expose an organisation to legal and workplace relations risks, including potential discrimination claims.

Myth: Workplace adjustments are expensive and difficult to implement

Reality

Most workplace adjustments are simple, practical and free or low cost.

Research from JobAccess shows that many adjustments cost nothing to implement and most cost less than \$1,000. Common adjustments include flexible work arrangements, changes to work schedules and minor modifications to the work environment.

Why it matters

In the APS, workplace adjustments are part of normal operations. Most agencies have established processes and funding arrangements to support them.

Where specialised support is required, agencies may also be able to access assistance through the JobAccess Employment Assistance Fund (EAF).

Examples

- Flexible work hours
- Hybrid or remote working arrangements
- Relocating a workstation
- Ergonomic equipment
- Assistive technology

Remember

Most workplace adjustments are simpler and less expensive than many people assume.



Myth: Employees must disclose their disability to receive workplace adjustments

Reality

Employees are not legally required to disclose a disability or diagnosis to request adjustments.

The focus should be on understanding the barriers the employee is experiencing and identifying practical solutions that support them to perform the inherent requirements of their role.

Why it matters

Many people are reluctant to seek support. The Australian Disability Network found 56% of employees hesitate to ask for adjustments due to fear of stigma and being treated differently.

Remember

Focus on workplace needs and solutions, not medical details.

Myth: Workplace adjustments are only for people with disability

Reality

Workplace adjustments can support anyone experiencing barriers at work.

While often associated with disability, adjustments may also help people experiencing temporary injuries, health conditions, caring responsibilities or other circumstances that affect how they work.

Examples

Adjustments may support employees experiencing:

- Neurodivergence, such as ADHD or autism
- Mental health conditions
- Chronic illness
- Temporary injuries
- Pregnancy or breastfeeding



- Menopause
- Caring responsibilities
- Cultural or religious obligations
- Family and domestic violence

Why it matters

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)* defines disability broadly and includes physical, intellectual, psychosocial, sensory, neurological and learning disabilities as well as diseases, illnesses and medical conditions.

The definition also covers conditions that are current, past, future or assumed.

Remember

Workplace adjustments are about removing barriers and enabling participation, not just responding to permanent disability.

Myth: Managers don't need to be involved – HR handles adjustments

Reality

Managers play an important role in identifying, discussing and implementing workplace adjustments.

While HR provides advice, guidance and processes, managers are usually best placed to understand job requirements, workplace barriers and practical solutions.

Why it matters

Workplace adjustments are both a legal consideration and a leadership responsibility.

The Australian Disability Network found that 76% of Australians believe it is a manager's role to make the workplace inclusive and accessible. Managers often have the greatest influence on whether adjustments are successful.

Remember

HR supports the process, but managers are responsible for creating an inclusive and accessible workplace.



Myth: Workplace adjustments are only relevant during recruitment or onboarding

Reality

People can request adjustments at any stage of employment.

Support needs may arise or change due to injury, illness, disability, caring responsibilities, life circumstances or workplace changes.

Why it matters

Around 80% of Australians with disability acquire it during their working life.

Support needs can change as roles, health circumstances, technology and life circumstances change. Supporting an employee's evolving adjustment needs is a standard part of being a responsive manager under the Integrated Leadership System.

Ongoing conversations help ensure workplace support remains relevant and effective as circumstances evolve.

Remember

Workplace adjustments are not a one-off conversation.

Myth: Workplace adjustments are only for permanent conditions

Reality

Workplace adjustments can support both temporary and ongoing conditions and circumstances.

People recovering from surgery, managing a short-term illness or returning to work after an injury may benefit from temporary adjustments.

Examples

- Phased return to work arrangements
- Temporary flexible hours
- Adjusted duties during recovery
- Additional rest breaks



Remember

Temporary support can be just as important and effective as long-term support.

Myth: Workplace adjustments give employees an unfair advantage

Reality

Adjustments do not provide an unfair advantage. They help remove barriers that may prevent someone from participating on the same basis as others.

The Australian Disability Network found that 96% of employers said adjustments support fair and equal participation.

Why it matters

The aim is equity, not preferential treatment.

Workplace adjustments provide people with the support they need to perform the inherent requirements of their role and contribute effectively.

Remember

Workplace adjustments create fair access, not special treatment.

Myth: If one person gets an adjustment, everyone will want one

Reality

Adjustments are tailored to individual circumstances and workplace barriers.

They are not discretionary benefits or personal preferences.

Clear communication about inclusion helps employees understand why adjustments are necessary and appropriate.

Why it matters

People have different needs and treating everyone exactly the same does not always produce equitable outcomes.

The Australian Disability Network reports that 89% of employers see improved engagement and retention after providing adjustments.



Remember

Fairness means responding to individual needs, not treating every employee identically.

Myth: If an employee doesn't know what adjustment they need, they probably don't need one

Reality

People may not know what support options are available or what adjustments could help.

Identifying effective adjustments is a shared process involving the employee, their manager and where appropriate, HR or specialist advisors. JobAccess can also be used to find guidance about support.

Why it matters

Managers should not expect employees to be experts in workplace adjustments.

Open conversations often help identify practical solutions that neither party initially considered.

Remember

Finding the right workplace adjustment is a collaborative process.

Myth: Employees must provide medical evidence before adjustments can be considered

Reality

Employees are not legally required to provide detailed medical information to request workplace adjustments.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth), managers should only seek information that is necessary to confirm an employee can perform the inherent requirements of their role or to manage specific health and safety risks.

Why it matters

Requests for unnecessary medical information may create barriers and discourage people from seeking support.

Any information provided must be handled respectfully and kept confidential.



Remember

Focus on workplace impacts and solutions, not medical diagnoses.

Myth: Workplace adjustments are only a workplace health and safety issue

Reality

Workplace adjustments are about inclusion, equity and human rights – not just safety.

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)* requires equal access to work and career opportunities for all employees.

Why it matters

While workplace health and safety (WHS) obligations remain important, adjustments also support employee wellbeing, engagement, retention and performance.

Treating adjustments solely as a safety issue can create stigma and discourage people from seeking support.

Remember

Workplace adjustments support inclusion, accessibility and productivity.

Myth: Workplace adjustments create extra work for other team members

Reality

Well-designed adjustments should enable people to perform their roles more effectively – not transfer work to others.

Why it matters

Research shows that appropriate support can improve engagement, retention, team performance and workplace culture.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth), managers must provide adjustments unless they cause unjustifiable hardship. Minor changes to work practices or routines do not generally constitute an unreasonable burden on a team.



Remember

Effective workplace adjustments benefit both employees and organisations.

Myth: Workplace adjustments are only about desks, chairs and equipment

Reality

Many workplace adjustments are not physical.

Research from the Australian Disability Network shows that some of the most effective adjustments involve changes to work arrangements, communication methods or workplace practices.

Examples

- Flexible working hours
- Hybrid working arrangements
- Modified communication methods
- Additional check-ins or guidance
- Adjusted work schedules

Remember

Adjustments are about removing barriers, not just providing equipment.

Myth: If an adjustment can't be provided exactly as requested, it can be refused

Reality

Workplace adjustments are not one-size-fits-all.

If a requested adjustment is not feasible, managers should work with the employee to explore alternative options.

Why it matters

The goal is to identify an effective solution, not simply accept or reject a request.

Failure to consider reasonable alternatives may expose an organisation to legal risk.



For example, in *Panazzolo v Don's Mechanical and Diesel Service Pty Ltd* [2023] FEDCFAMC2G 665, an employer was ordered to pay damages after refusing an injured worker's return-to-work arrangements without considering alternative adjustments.

Remember

Focus on achieving the outcome, not delivering a specific solution.

Myth: Disability is always visible

Reality

Many disabilities and health conditions are not visible.

This includes some mental health conditions, chronic illnesses, neurological conditions and other disabilities that may fluctuate over time.

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)* recognises both visible and invisible disability.

Why it matters

Managers should avoid making assumptions about a person's needs based on appearance.

Effective support relies on open communication, trust and a willingness to understand individual circumstances.

Remember

Disability may be visible, invisible, temporary, permanent or changing over time.



Quick myth-busting reference for managers

How to use this table

This table summarises common myths about workplace adjustments and the facts that help address them. Use it to guide workplace adjustment decisions and support conversations with employees. For detailed guidance, refer to the full sections above and your agency's workplace adjustment policies and procedures.

Common myths about workplace adjustments and the facts that help address them

Myth	Reality	What you need to know
Workplace adjustments are expensive and difficult to implement.	Most adjustments are free or low cost. JobAccess reports many are free and most cost less than \$1,000.	Adjustments are part of normal business operations. Agency funding and JobAccess support may be available for more specialised needs.
Employees must disclose a disability or diagnosis to receive adjustments.	Employees are not required to disclose a diagnosis to request support.	Focus on helping employees perform their role effectively, not on medical details. Any information shared should be treated confidentially.
Workplace adjustments are only for people with disability.	Adjustments can support a wide range of circumstances, including disability, illness, injury, mental health conditions, caring responsibilities, pregnancy and other life events.	The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) defines disability broadly, including conditions that are current, past, future or assumed.
Managers don't need to be involved – HR handles adjustments.	HR provides advice and guidance but managers play a key role in identifying, discussing and implementing adjustments.	Managers are responsible for supporting reasonable workplace adjustments and creating an inclusive workplace.



Myth	Reality	What you need to know
Workplace adjustments are only relevant during recruitment or onboarding.	People can request adjustments at any stage of employment.	Support needs can change as roles, health, technology or life circumstances change. Reviewing adjustments is part of responsive people management under the Integrated Leadership System.
Workplace adjustments are only for permanent conditions.	Temporary conditions may also require support. Adjustments may support recovery from injury, surgery or illness.	Temporary support can be just as important as long-term support.
Workplace adjustments give employees an unfair advantage.	Adjustments remove barriers and support equitable participation.	The goal is fairness and equal access, not special treatment. The Australian Disability Network reports 96% of employers believe adjustments support fair participation.
If one person receives an adjustment, everyone will want one.	Adjustments are tailored to individual circumstances and workplace needs.	Fairness means responding to different needs. The Australian Disability Network reports 89% of employers see improved engagement and retention after providing adjustments.
If an employee doesn't know what adjustment they need, they probably don't need one.	Identifying workplace adjustments is a shared process. Employees are not expected to be experts.	Work together and seek advice from HR, WHS or JobAccess where needed.
Employees must provide medical evidence before adjustments can be considered.	Detailed medical information is not always required.	Only seek information necessary to understand workplace impacts, inherent role requirements or specific WHS considerations. Focus on what support is needed at work.



Myth	Reality	What you need to know
Workplace adjustments are only a WHS issue.	Adjustments support inclusion, accessibility, participation and productivity – not just safety.	Consider adjustments through both a legal and people management lens. Treating adjustments only as a safety issue can create stigma.
Workplace adjustments create extra work for other team members.	Well-designed adjustments help people perform their role effectively rather than shift work to others.	Minor changes to work practices or routines rarely meet the threshold of unjustifiable hardship.
Workplace adjustments are only about desks, chairs and equipment.	Many adjustments are non-physical.	Common examples include flexible work, modified communication methods, adjusted schedules and additional guidance.
If an adjustment cannot be provided exactly as requested, it can be refused.	Managers should work with the employee to explore reasonable alternatives.	The obligation is to consider effective solutions, not simply approve or reject a specific request. Failure to explore alternatives may create legal risk.
Disability is always visible.	Many disabilities and health conditions are not visible.	Avoid assumptions. Support should be based on individual circumstances, workplace barriers and practical needs, not appearance.

Manager responsibilities at a glance

As a manager, you are responsible for:

- Considering workplace adjustment requests fairly and in a timely manner.
- Working collaboratively with employees to identify practical solutions.
- Focusing on workplace barriers and support needs rather than medical diagnoses.
- Maintaining privacy and confidentiality.
- Exploring alternative options where a requested adjustment is not feasible.



- Reviewing adjustments regularly and adapting support as needs, roles or circumstances change.
- Supporting employees to perform the inherent requirements of their role and participate fully at work.

Supporting an employee's evolving adjustment needs is a standard part of being a responsive manager under the Integrated Leadership System. Like other aspects of people management, workplace adjustments should be reviewed and adapted when a person's role, circumstances, health needs or working environment changes.

Legal obligations

Under *the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*, employers must consider and provide reasonable workplace adjustments for employees with disability, unless doing so would cause unjustifiable hardship.

Failing to consider reasonable workplace adjustments may expose an organisation to legal and workplace relations risks, including potential discrimination claims.

Key takeaway

Workplace adjustments are not exceptional – they are a normal part of creating a modern, inclusive and high-performing APS. When managers proactively remove barriers and support individual needs, they not only meet their legal obligations, they help create workplaces where everyone can participate fully and contribute effectively.

Additional information and support

For specialised guidance on workplace barriers, adjustments or complex technical requirements, managers and employees can contact JobAccess. As the national hub for workplace disability information, they provide free, expert advice on tailored adjustments and support.

JobAccess website: www.jobaccess.gov.au

Phone: 1800 464 800