



The case for change:

The business case for employing people with disability in the Australian Public Service



Employing people with disability in the Australian Public Service (APS) benefits not only people with disability but the APS as a whole. There are clear business benefits to employing people with disability—from greater innovation and flexibility to a workforce that builds and retains strong corporate knowledge. These benefits fall into four groups:

▶ Strategic

- Increasingly, businesses and individuals in the Australian community are looking to interact with organisations that have a reputation for diversity.¹
- The APS touches the lives of all Australians. The effects of the laws, policies and services we deliver as public servants are important to every Australian²—and one in five Australians has a disability restricting their life activities.³
- Having a workforce that reflects the diversity of the community also helps produce programs and policies that take into account the experiences and needs of people with disability.
- Diverse workforces have been shown to increase the flow of ideas and ensure a broad range of perspectives to tackle complex challenges.⁴

▶ Workforce planning

- If we don't think ahead, we will lose people we want to keep when they encounter disability.
- At June 2015, 31.7 per cent of APS employees were aged 50 years and over. Disability prevalence increases with age⁵, and most people with disability of working age acquire their condition at work.⁶ Many workers who develop a medical condition will leave an employer without fully investigating the reasonable adjustments that could have enabled them to remain at work—leading to a regrettable loss of talent and experience.⁷
- The 2015 Intergenerational Report highlighted that population ageing will place significantly more pressure on the Australian economy and that fully employing the working age population and maximising participation rates will become increasingly important.⁸

▶ Professional & technological

- Adopting and preferring accessible technology will mainstream the productivity benefits of that technology to all staff, such as those who travel, have work commitments outside a normal office or outside normal office hours.⁹
- Many people with disability rely on accessible technology and flexible working arrangements to deliver results. Technologies developed for people with disability transform into mainstream productivity tools e.g. optical character recognition, speech to text, text to speech, etc.

▶ Leadership

- Our leadership is tested and developed by managing a diverse workforce.
 - A disability-confident APS will strengthen leadership behaviours and flexible management practices. Studies indicate there are positive effects when employees can manage the demands of their work and personal lives, including job satisfaction, productivity and organisational commitment.¹⁰
 - The APS aims to be a model employer and a leader in workplace diversity. Australia is lagging behind in employment outcomes for people with disability, which affects the economic security and independence of individuals and costs the community. The cost of the Disability Support Pension is forecast to be 29.3 million over 5 years from 2013-14.¹¹
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- ¹ Australian Employers Network on Disability, Opportunity, Switzer Media & Publishing, 2008, p. 6.
- ² Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration, *Ahead of the Game: Blueprint for the Reform of Australian Government Administration*, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra, March 2010, p. viii
- ³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings*, 2009, cat. no. 4430.0, ABS, Canberra, 2010, p. 3.
- ⁴ Phillips, K. W., 'How Diversity Makes Us Smarter'; *Scientific American* 1 October 2014, <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter/>
- ⁵ Australian Public Service Commission, *State of the Service Report 2011–12*, Canberra, 2011, pp. 129
- ⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Disability programmes in need of reform: Policy Brief*, OECD, March 2003.
- ⁷ Beatty, J. E. & Joffe, R. 'An overlooked dimension of diversity: The career effects of chronic illness', *Organizational Dynamics*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2006, pp. 182–195.
- ⁸ Department of the Treasury, *Intergenerational Report 2015: Australia in 2055*, Canberra, 2015.
- ⁹ Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, *Telework Forum: Bringing home the benefits of telework using the NBN*, record of the Telework Forum, Sydney, 3 August 2011. See also Access Economics, *Impacts of Teleworking under the NBN*, Report to the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Canberra, 2010; Colmar Brunton and Deloitte Access Economics, *Creating jobs through NBN-enabled telework* (released November 2012).
- ¹⁰ Diversity Council Australia, *Get Flexible! Mainstreaming Flexible Work in Australian Business*, Diversity Council Australia, Sydney, 2012, pp. 24–25.
- ¹¹ http://www.aph.gov.au/about_parliament/parliamentary_departments/parliamentary_library/pubs/rp/budgetreview201415/dsp

