

Smart Paper

Profit and Purpose: Why Inclusive Hiring Makes Good Business Sense

November 2024



Acknowledgement of country

MTC Australia acknowledges all Traditional Custodians from all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations across Australia and extends our thanks for sharing the land that we live, meet and work on every day. We acknowledge and pay our respects to all Elders past and present and welcome all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to our services, to walk together into reconciliation.



Inclusive hiring makes good business sense

With 33% of occupations experiencing skills shortages and 20% of the Aussie population underutilised, it makes good sense to tap into the 113,000 capable and motivated individuals ready and eager to work.^{1,2}

Many forums have discussed and debated the challenges people with disability face in finding work, but few have explored the unique barriers and opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) considering inclusive hiring.

That's why MTC Australia has pulled together this paper, switching the focus to investigate the issue through an employer and economic lens.

We know that business is about more than profit. Long-term success relies on an engaged, resilient, and innovative workforce.

Inclusive hiring practices help build this kind of team, strengthening not only the bottom line but also the culture and success of the business.

There are new opportunities for Australia's SMEs to build a skilled and diverse workforce to meet the dual challenges of a tight labour market and cost of living pressures.

This smart paper explores the ways to unlock that potential.

“There are more than 2.5 million SMEs in Australia, and inclusive hiring has huge potential to solve current and future economic challenges”.³

Rob Marshall
MTC Australia CEO



Contents

-
- 5 Feeling the pinch? Skills and labour shortages
 - 6 Inclusive hiring – why does it matter?
 - 7 Thinking differently about hiring
 - 8 Building an inclusive workforce
 - 9 Integrating a diverse workforce
 - 10 Success story: Proving the naysayers wrong
 - 11 Are you future ready?
 - 12 Taking the next step
 - 13 References
-



Feeling the pinch?

Skills and labour shortages

Over the past decade, Australia's skills shortages have grown due to several factors. An aging population, rapid tech advancements, the pandemic, and the rising demand for care services have all contributed to the growing gap between labour supply and demand.

In 2024, 33% of all occupations in Australia faced a shortage of appropriately skilled workers, posing a significant challenge for businesses and the economy.⁴

Migration helps with Australia's workforce and skills shortages, but we need more creative hiring solutions that use local talent. People with disability, who are ready to work and live across cities and regional areas, are an important part of this talent pool.

A Business Council of Australia (BCA) report *Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disability*, highlights that 47% of business members surveyed indicated that labour shortages were one of the main factors influencing organisations' willingness/ability to develop employment initiatives focussed on people with disability in the future.⁵

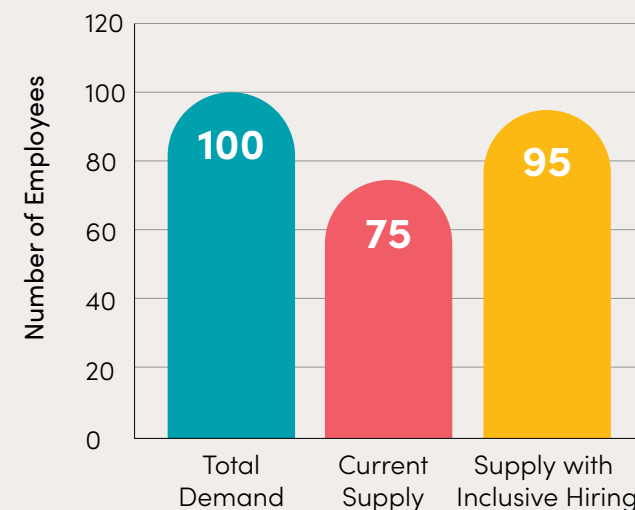
More than 113,000 people with disability are currently unemployed and looking to work. As well as those who are unemployed, many people with disability are underemployed or working part-time when they want more hours.⁶

In most cases, people with disability are ready and willing to fill labour shortages. We know the roles are there.

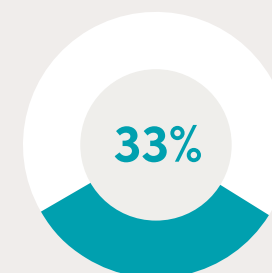
Creating more significant connections between this talent pool and employers – including large and small businesses – is key to achieving better social, business and economic outcomes for all.

Even an incremental increase in employment for people with disability could significantly improve overall skills shortages, commercial outcomes for businesses, and economic outcomes for Australia.

Inclusive hiring bridges workforce gaps



Australia 2024



33% of all occupations faced with skills shortages



113,000

people with disability looking for work



Inclusive hiring – what is it and why does it matter?

Diversity Council Australia (DCA) defines inclusive recruitment as hiring practices that value diversity, minimise bias, and enable a diversity of talent to be sourced, assessed, selected, and appointed. It includes inclusive practices from before a job is even advertised (i.e. writing the job description), all the way to onboarding successful hires.⁷

Businesses that embrace disability-inclusive hiring often see higher levels of:

- employee retention
- workplace morale
- productivity
- innovation
- problem-solving
- community and customer engagement.

They are also reported to achieve 28% higher revenue, twice the net income, and 30% higher profit margins than their peers who are not implementing best practices. These businesses are also two times more likely to have higher shareholder returns.

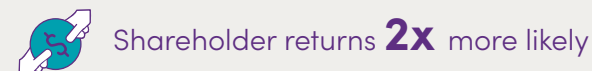
For the broader economy, increasing the labour market participation of people with disabilities contributes to reducing welfare dependency and rising household incomes, driving broader economic growth.

Economic modelling suggests that closing the gap between labour market participation rates and unemployment rates for people with and without disabilities by one-third would result in a cumulative \$43 billion increase in Australia's GDP over the next decade in real dollar terms.⁸

An economically robust Australia means more consumer spending, better access to funding, and new growth opportunities, creating a stronger market for SMEs to thrive.

Benefits for business and the broader economy

INCREASED BUSINESS REVENUE AND PROFITS



AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY



Businesses that embrace disability-inclusive hiring often see increased employee retention, improved workplace morale, and enhanced productivity.



Thinking differently about hiring

While many businesses are willing to be more inclusive, a gap remains between intention and outcome.

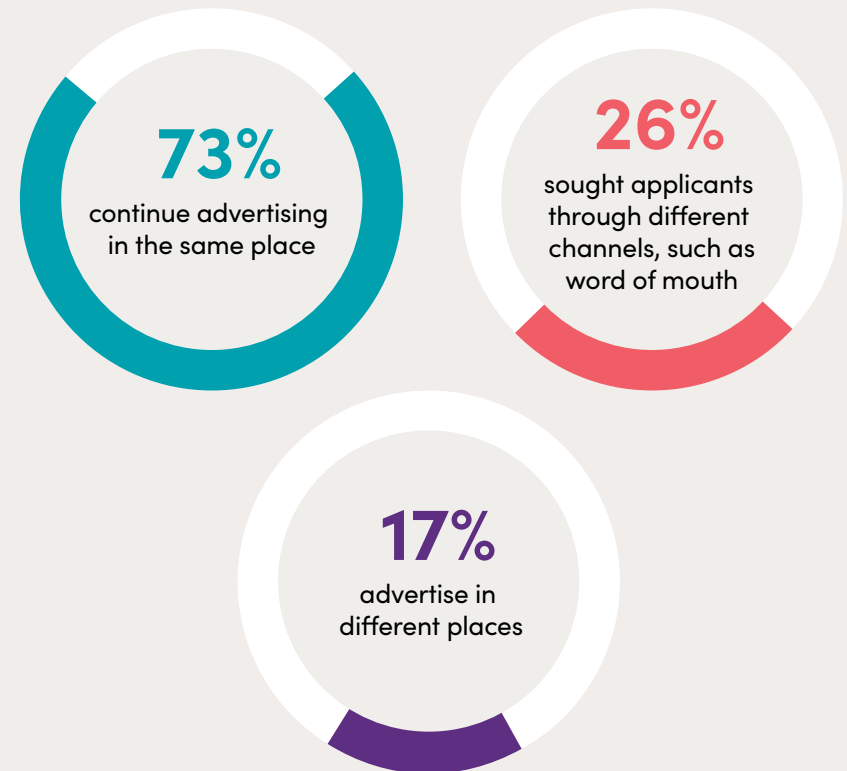
The recruitment process is where people with disabilities often face discrimination from employers, conscious or unconscious, which prematurely closes off the possibility of them becoming valued employees.

Despite escalating labour shortages across Australia, many employers are still reliant on traditional, static hiring practices. Statistics show that when employers cannot find suitable candidates through standard recruitment methods, they often simply re-advertise the same way, expecting different results.⁹

Sticking to inflexible hiring strategies means alternative labour pools, such as candidates with disability, may have been overlooked and remain underutilised.

Specialist organisations such as Disability Employment Service (DES) providers have a key role to play in bridging the gap and linking businesses with those with disability who are looking for work.

Top 3 employer responses when unable to fill a vacancy:¹⁰



Building an inclusive workforce

Integrating workers with disability and prioritising inclusion creates a productive, thriving workforce, boosting overall financial success.

Creating an inclusive workforce requires addressing both attitudes and practicalities. Businesses can benefit from resources that help reframe any potential biases, make adjustments for accessibility, and support integration. The Council of Small Business Organisations Australia (COSBOA) has previously called for new information and resources to be developed through codesign with small businesses, which ‘demystifies’ disability.¹⁰



Start with your culture

Unconscious biases can lead employers to undervalue contributions from people with disabilities, especially when disabilities aren’t visible.

Programs like NDS’s ‘Let’s Talk Disability’ workshops help teams:

- Challenge assumptions,
- Embrace diverse perspectives,
- Build a workplace culture that values all employees.¹¹



Address workplace logistics

Common concerns about workplace adjustments, legal issues, and productivity are often easier to address than expected.

- **JobAccess** provides tailored advice on accessibility and inclusion.¹²
- **Employment Assistance Fund (EAF)** offers funding for workplace modifications, helping employers accommodate diverse abilities.¹³



Leverage allied support for lasting success

Practising inclusive hiring is just the first step toward a supportive work environment.

Allied Health & Supports, such as those offered by MTC’s DES program, go beyond placement. These services allow people with disability and their employers to focus on post-employment integration for 6 months after commencement, through services such as **counselling, health and wellness support, psychosocial support and referrals to other services.**



Integrating diverse workforce

Employment programs that are inclusively designed and sustainable will ensure that Australian businesses attract and retain employees from the widest possible talent pool.

The impact of a diverse workforce is elevated when the team is truly integrated.

Employing someone with disability is the first step. Successful integration of any new employee needs to focus on long-term employment outcomes, and involves the input of the business, the employee and the services that connect them. In the disability employment space, partnerships and relationships are vital. Providers work to help employers navigate the system as much as they get the candidates into the job market.

Building a diverse, integrated workplace

There are programs that provide wrap-around support, and these tend to have the best results and drive positive change in Australia's workplaces. These programs include, for example, the employer support services and resources available through JobAccess, and the Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) which funds workplace modifications.¹⁴

Ways in which businesses can integrate a worker with disability successfully include:



Seek referrals from inclusive employment services, such as DES.



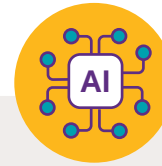
Provide guidance for staff on Diversity & Inclusion in the workplace.



Engage specialised providers for workplace adjustments, training, job customisation & other supports.



Provide tailored onboarding support for all new employees.



Understand how assistive technologies work and get demos.



Consider how performance targets and KPIs can be more inclusive.



Share case studies showing how others have built diverse workforces.

Benefits and commitments

Inclusive and diverse workplaces are good for everyone. The key step is finding a disability employment program that features inclusive hiring practices and

workspaces, planned positive integration and career development, and enlisting help so employees thrive.



Proving the naysayers wrong

MTC Australia Program Manager **Ozkan (Oz) Dincer** believes creating inclusive workplaces is largely about acceptance and balance. When working with participants in his program, Employability Skills Training, Oz encourages them to reach a point of acceptance about their disability and to see it as a point of difference rather than a barrier to finding meaningful employment. Similarly, he encourages employers to see past initial adaptations that may be needed to bring a person with disability into their team and recognise the many benefits inclusivity can bring.

Living with disability himself, Oz says that his approach is to try to stay positive no matter what comes his way. Oz was diagnosed with Cone Dystrophy as a toddler, a significant vision impairment that impacts his ability to read and to perceive colour, and he spent many years trying to hide his condition.

“In the past when I didn’t have much experience or skills, people would say ‘oh, you have a disability, you’re not going to get anywhere’. But I didn’t let that stop me. In fact, the naysayers were a motivation for me,” Oz says.

During his career, Oz has achieved a Certificate IV in Team Leadership Management, Certificate IV in Employment Services as well as a National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) Certificate.

With more than 25 years’ experience in Employment Services, Oz is rightly proud of the progress he has made in managing the Employability Skills Training program at MTC. Since starting 18 months ago, the program has grown from one trainer to four, and has shifted to regular, back-to-back courses in multiple regions.

“We’ve made great progress,” Oz says.

When he started with MTC, Oz was clear about the supports he needed to do his job effectively. Much of the technology and special equipment has been provided through Employment Assistance Fund from the Australian



Government, but accessing extra equipment is not an issue, with MTC willing to provide whatever else he needs.

“What I’ve seen at MTC is an understanding that everybody brings something different to the organisation and each of us should be valued. People with disability are often great at thinking around barriers and finding a different way to do things,” Oz says.

Oz says the benefits of employers being more inclusive are obvious.

“A little over 20% of our population lives with disability and they have a great deal to offer if employers can practice acceptance. If you ask me, I acknowledge and accept everyone as who they are and believe that we all have a purpose in life.”



Are you future ready?

Inclusive hiring is a strategic growth lever for businesses of all sizes. Now is the time to actively explore what it means for your workplace, noting several trends and opportunities that will make it both easier, and more important, to embrace.



Workforce expansion by 2 million

The Australian workforce is set to expand by around 2 million by 2033, leading to more opportunities to integrate inclusive hiring.¹⁵



New disability employment programs and initiatives

Launch of the government's new specialised employment program from 1 July 2025, including establishing a Disability Employment Centre of Excellence, will serve as a key resource for organisations aiming to improve disability employment outcomes.¹⁶



Shifting public perceptions through creative outcomes

Initiatives like 'Inclusively Made' campaign and Shift 20 Initiative are working to portray people with disabilities in everyday roles across media and marketing, and in onscreen productions, shifting public perceptions, fostering understanding and challenging stereotypes about disability.^{17, 18}



Business leading by example

BCA has documented that 92% of its members want to increase the hiring of people with disabilities, providing practical examples of how leading businesses achieve these goals, aiming to inspire more companies to follow suit.¹⁹



Empowering small businesses

Expanding inclusive hiring efforts to bring on board SMEs is another priority. SMEs could find local DES providers and access case studies and practical resources that empower them to contribute to inclusive hiring efforts.



Lived experience as a mandatory

Disability service providers have an essential role to play, beyond service provision, as studies show that 24% of these organisations do not employ people with disabilities themselves.²⁰ By actively employing people with disabilities, these providers can demonstrate the benefits of inclusion firsthand.



Looking overseas for best practice

Australia has a low employment rate for people with disability (21st out of 29 OECD countries), whereas countries such as Canada have successfully reduced employment disparities for people with disabilities. Adopting similar strategies in Australia could reduce the gap.^{21, 22}



Working with Government?

Other levers that could increase outcomes include greater promotion of Disability Action Plans, and integration of disability employment targets linked to government procurement.²³



Taking the next step

Where to from here? If you're an employer interested in taking the next step on your inclusive hiring journey but aren't sure where to start, or would simply like to chat with someone about what your business could do, then reach out.

MTC can help you on your journey, and if we aren't able to assist directly, we know someone who can – there are plenty of resources available from peak bodies and specialist organisations you can chat to.

Get in touch now.

Call **1300 232 663**

Email **info@mtcaustralia.com.au**.

Resources

[Australian Disability Network](#)

[Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

[Business Council of Australia](#)

[Council of Small Businesses Organisations Australia](#)

[Disability Employment Australia](#)

[Job Access](#)

[National Disability Services](#)

First five things to do.

- 1.** Expand your knowledge on the benefits of hiring a diverse team, and find out more about Disability Employment providers. They will be your biggest ally!
Learn more
- 2.** Want the best person for the job? Are you considering all candidates, or are some being overlooked? Anything else in your hiring process that could be more open and inclusive?
Learn more
- 3.** Is your team ready to embrace a diverse workforce? Are there any unconscious biases that might be getting in the way? How might you address those attitudes and perceptions?
Learn more
- 4.** Did you know there are laws against discriminating against people, not just in the workplace, but during recruitment? An inclusive mindset when hiring means less risk of discrimination. Know your legal obligations.
Learn more
- 5.** It's not only hiring people with disability you need to consider – what about your customers? Can you improve accessibility for customers with disability, creating a more inclusive environment generally?
Learn more

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to inclusive hiring, or integrating people with disability into your workforce. Take your time, find what works for your business and your team.

Remember: even an incremental increase in employment for people with disability can have far reaching impact, at many levels: individually, organisationally and societally.

Start with commitment; the rest will follow.



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Thank You



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