



**Disability
Assembly WA**

A collective voice for people with disability

Report on the Inaugural Disability Assembly WA (DAWA) Summit held on 29 July 2022

**Improving employment outcomes
for People with Disability**

**Disability Assembly
WA (DAWA)**

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Foreword

The Disability Assembly Western Australia (DAWA) is a new collective voice in WA for people with disability. It comprises a collection of passionate Western Australian volunteers, made up of people with disability, their families and carers, and people from the broader disability sector.

DAWA has evolved to fill a void that has developed since the arrival of the NDIS, a void that leaves many Western Australians navigating a fragmented system that lacks connection with the people with disability it is designed to support.

DAWA aims to reconnect the disability ecosystem in WA, by generating informed and impartial discussion on the big issues affecting people with disability. It will act as a conduit to convey the community's concerns and experiences as well as offer potential solutions to the governments of the day.

A feature of DAWA's approach will be a program of summits to tackle topics of scale and concern for people with disability. Participants in each summit will include a cross section of people with disability, families, carers, peak bodies, advocates, service providers, government representatives, plus experts and others with experience and potential influence in the topic under discussion.

The inaugural DAWA Summit was held on 29 July 2022. The topic was "Employment of People with Disability." Discussion focused on identifying what needs to change, and the priorities for action, to achieve a significant improvement in employment outcomes for people with disability.

Registrations exceeded expectations, with 85 participants attending the Summit.

This enabled a diversity of perspectives and experiences to be aired (including from people with disability, employment services providers, small and larger businesses), that contributed to highly constructive discussions and a series of genuinely informed suggestions for how outcomes could be improved.

As an outcome of the summit, DAWA is delighted to present this report entitled "Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disability." The report includes a summary of the proceedings and structures used on the day, and the "key findings" generated by the participants from across the disability ecosystem.



Disability Assembly WA

A collective voice for people with disability

The report findings are presented for consideration by governments, employers, peak bodies and industry groups and represent the key priorities for action identified by the disability ecosystem in Western Australia. By coming together and harnessing the power of our collective voice we hope to avoid the prospect of looking back in five to ten years' time and finding that minimal progress has been made.



Tony Vis

Chair, Disability Assembly of WA



DAWA Summit Sponsors

As a volunteer organisation DAWA appreciates the support of sponsors who enabled the Summit to occur and provided transport and accommodation for participants from regional WA.





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Executive Summary

The Disability Assembly Western Australia (DAWA) is a new Collective Voice in Western Australia for people with disability.

DAWA has evolved in response to a void that has developed in the State with a loss of local system ownership, leadership, management, and connection within the disability community since the introduction of the NDIS, a void which impacts significantly on many individuals, families and their specialist providers.

A key pillar of DAWA's approach to fulfilling its purpose, is through convening a number of "Summits" each year.

By invitation for each summit, DAWA assembles and connects around 100 people from across the disability ecosystem, including regional WA, to discuss and debate a priority topic.

Following consultation through two focus groups with people with disability, families and carers, "Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disability" was selected as the topic for the inaugural DAWA summit. The selection reflected the strategic and state-wide importance of the topic, the potential to impact on a significant number of people with disability, and the alignment with the high priority identified within both Australian and State Disability Strategies.

The DAWA Employment for People with Disability Summit, was held on Friday 29 July at the Telethon Speech and Hearing Function Centre, 36 Dodd Street, Wembley.

85 participants attended, including 30 people with disability and family members/carers, around 20 representatives from employment services or disability services providers, and around 40 representing a mix of government bodies (state and local), peak bodies, and small to large businesses.

The morning session aimed to provide all participants with clear context on the topic of employment for people with disability, through information provision, clarification and group discussion with a range of highly credentialled keynote speakers and "experts" on the subject of "what works" in relation to the employment of people with disability.



The afternoon sessions of the DAWA Employment for People with Disability Summit were dedicated to facilitated participant discussion in small working groups – named “PODS.” To ensure the individual perspective and lived experience was front-and-centre for each discussion, each of the ten (10) PODS comprised up to ten (10) Summit participants and included at least one person with disability (and a support person/family member/carer, if required).

The broad discussion topic for each of the PODS was:

Over the past 20 years, national and state disability strategies have included commitments to improve employment outcomes for people with disability, but we remain in the position where the unemployment rate for people with disability is more than double that for people without disability (and disproportionately worse for people with high and complex needs, including people with intellectual disability).

What must change to achieve the desired growth in employment for people with disability in Western Australia; and what are the priorities to avoid the prospect of looking back in ten years' time and again seeing minimal progress made?

The POD discussions lasted 1¾ hours, following which, participants regrouped to hear and help consolidate the overall feedback from each of the PODS.

A detailed discussion of the key themes that arose within the POD discussions is provided in Section 3 of this report. A summary is provided below:



- **Action is needed now!**

The “Employ My Ability –Australian Disability Employment Strategy 2021-2031” highlights that:

- Just 53.4% of people with disability are in the labour force, compared with 84.1% of those without disability.
- The gap of over 30% has remained largely unchanged for almost 20 years (since 2003).
- The unemployment rate for people with disability is double that of working age people without disability (10% compared to 4.6%); and
- More than 113,000 people with disability are currently unemployed and looking for work.

Against this background and frustration at the stubborn lack of real progress over decades, summit participants were loud in demanding that “It’s time for this to change!”

- **Focus on the person**

Summit participants expressed that the failure to be mindful of different disabilities, abilities and capabilities, and that work meets different needs in all of us, means that “many people with disability are not getting a fair go.”

To achieve success, it is vital that all involved accept that jobs and careers are, by definition, personal; and that employment approaches should be as individualised as possible, designed and implemented to understand the person first and to fulfil individual ambition – including a process of “discovery” to explore their interests, skills, motivations, and the person’s situation.

- **Real Government, Public Sector and Industry Leadership is required**

A consistent theme in all POD conversations related to the lack of real leadership shown to date by government(s), employers, and industry leaders – resulting in a call from participants for these bodies to “step up to the plate” and actively demonstrate and drive the changes required, to improve employment outcomes for people with disability.



- **Consistent support required at the school to employment transition point**

Many of the POD discussions focused on participants' experiences when transitioning from school and seeking employment opportunities.

All agreed the education systems need to be set up to enable all school students with disability to succeed. They also agreed that prioritising the focus on pathways for the younger generation would pay huge dividends in the longer term, and that if done well, it would help change the perceptions and expectations of employers.

Summit participants therefore called for additional funding support through Education Departments to enable the provision, in all schools, of the early support required for people with disability to explore employment / career opportunities and pathways as they move towards exiting high school.

Participants also requested that similar early support be made available for parents of a child with disability, for example to connect them to the supports and opportunities available.

Finally, summit participants called for greater engagement of and commitment from the TAFE, University and private RTO systems, to better engage in providing skills and job readiness training for people with disability, including through offering more flexibility in delivery. An opportunity was also considered to exist for these education bodies to provide and support 'diversity' training for employers (see below).

- **Training and Capacity Building of Employers**

Considering the evidence and their own experiences, summit participants considered that the development and delivery of a range of training for organisation leaders (and HR managers) is urgently required to increase disability awareness and confidence among employers (and to upskill their HR teams).

Increased disability awareness and capability training could be led / facilitated / delivered by industry groups and peak bodies, which would also demonstrate their commitment to improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

To accompany the above employer training, summit participants also called for the development of broader 'employer and grass roots market education' through:



- Sharing, celebration and promotion of the range of existing significant success stories and best practice examples;
- Storytelling of success stories for people with disability, to increase visibility of the issue and to seek to change the hearts and minds of leaders / potential employers;
- Using social media to raise the profile of the range of 'gifts and talents' that people with disabilities can bring to an employer; and
- Targeting presentations/expos at industry conferences, for example, tourism, hospitality and education.

- **Inclusive Recruitment Practices**

Many of the POD discussions identified recruitment 'bias' and the recruitment processes of potential employers, including the public service, as an inherent 'exclusion' barrier impacting on the employment of people with disability.

Summit participants therefore called for a fundamental reform of recruitment processes to ensure accessibility and effectiveness from the perspective of a person with disability. In this respect, they encouraged all employers to look closely at their policies around inclusion and at the accessibility of their entire recruitment process, to remove all potential barriers to people with disability even 'getting into the room.'

- **Address other Gaps, Disconnects, and Barriers**

As part of the POD discussions a range of other gaps, system disconnects, and barriers to improving employment outcomes for people with disability were identified by the summit participants.

Many related to 'fragmentation' in the system; for example, participants felt strongly that fragmentation of funding needs to be addressed.

The need for greater system navigation support was identified as another priority to help connect people with disability with job opportunities and employers, and DES providers with 'interested' companies.

Other gaps and barriers highlighted by participants as needing to be addressed included:



- A lack of available and effective advocacy (individual and systemic) for those who need it most;
- The 'competition' that exists between employment services providers (largely because of contractual incentives; and
- the need for genuine and meaningful employment-related targets to be set for each individual and monitored closely.

- **Funding Support Required**

Many of the calls for action described in the previous themes in this report will require funding support from the state and commonwealth governments. However, a few additional funding requirements were identified by summit participants.

Firstly, participants identified that some of the current funding incentives for businesses to employ a person with disability cease after around 26 weeks, making it difficult or challenging to continue to employ the person without some additional support. Participants therefore called for consideration of a period of additional funding, where an employer experiences difficulties, to cover a percentage of an employee's wages.

Secondly, participants called for funding to be made available to assist employers with exploring the potential engagement of people with disability, and to assist with training and any reasonable adjustments required to enable the employment of the person.

Thirdly (and finally), participants called for greater funding support to be available through the NDIS for 'items' such as employment exploration and development, for such funding to be made available for both a person with disability and a potential employer, for the funding to be able to be used flexibly, and to be able to be continuous and portable.

Drawing from the themes arising in the Summit POD and full group discussions, the final section of the report presents a series of key messages generated by the Summit participants.

The participants requested DAWA to ensure these messages were conveyed for consideration by the WA State Government (including messages for the State



Government to include in their advocacy with the Commonwealth Government), industry peak bodies, employers (including in the corporate sector) and by other key influencers/leaders who should be able to effect change in the priority afforded to the employment of people with disability.

The Summit summary and key messages are on the following pages and are also available as separate printable pages.



Summary of overarching messages from the DAWA 2022 Summit - Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disability

- People with disabilities have the capacity to immensely add to the workplace. **They are an untapped resource!** But there are many barriers preventing them from making a meaningful contribution.
- Rates of employment of people with disabilities is significantly lower than people without disabilities, and the difference has not improved in 20 years.
- The benefits of employing people with disabilities is reflected in the performance, culture, and capacity of organisations.
- Navigation of the system needs to be simplified, for individuals and for employers. Supports are available but are often fragmented and not readily apparent.
- The State Government has a critical role to play to lead the change that will produce positive outcomes in employment of people with disabilities.
- The Commonwealth Government needs to address:
 - Funding supports for people with disabilities seeking employment - support needs to be more tailored to the individual
 - Disincentives, such as significant loss of pensions and medical benefits – disincentives need to be removed as people transition into employment
 - Lack of transparency of progress towards national employment and other targets
- Industry peak bodies and employers need to play a greater leadership role - Business can learn from others who have had success in the employment of people with disabilities, to make their own journey easier
- There are some simple changes that can occur **now** to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities – we don't need any further research or pilot programs.



Messages for the WA State Government

The State Government has a central role to play to lead the change that will produce positive outcomes in employment of people with disabilities:

- As a champion employer – leading the way in WA by:
 - As a minimum, achieve the current target of 5% employment in the public sector before 2025 and hold Directors General to account on their performance as part of its existing commitment to *Australia's Disability Strategy*
 - Co-design recruitment to ensure it is accessible, inclusive, and non-discriminatory
 - Ensure people with disabilities are involved in recruitment panels
 - Facilitate workforce training to create better workplace cultures that embrace disability employment
 - Ensure public service has flexibility in job design, so roles are built around the strengths, passions and capabilities of people with disabilities
 - Publishing progress towards targets in key initiatives such as Employment Targeted Action Plan in the Australian Disability Strategy, from the State Disability Strategy, and other initiatives in a timely manner
- As a facilitator – providing people with disabilities, carers, families, employers, peak bodies with an effective and up-to-date service to guide people where to start their journey of employment or employment of people with disabilities by:
 - Providing information for industry, peak bodies, employers, etc with information, toolkits, and support to increase participation for people with disabilities in the workforce
 - Creating an easier interface between public sector agencies for the employment of people with disabilities
 - Providing funding to small to medium enterprises to make their workplace appropriate for people with disabilities, and promote the availability of such funding



- As a legislator – reviewing existing and creating new legislation to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities
 - Create legislation / regulations that mandate employment of people with disabilities for the state public service and local government authorities
 - Reverse the onus of proof around discriminatory practice in employment for people with disabilities.

- As an advocate – holding the Commonwealth Government to account, and ensuring programs and funding lead to better outcomes in employment for people with disabilities by:
 - Strong and effective involvement with the Employment Targeted Action Plan, ensuring the commitments of the Commonwealth are met
 - Using the Disability Reform Ministers forum to ensure pre-election promises are delivered
 - Advocating for the removal of disincentives for transitioning into employment, such as the loss of pension and medical entitlements
 - Negotiating for funding reform, so employment related funding starts earlier and follows people through life stages and transitions
 - Ensuring the continuity of a spectrum of employment options (including Australian Disability Enterprises), whilst there is a transition into more mainstream employment.



Messages for Industry Groups, Peak Bodies and Employers

Employing people with disabilities makes good business sense:

- You enhance diversity and build your company's capacity, culture, and performance.
- By opening opportunities to people with disabilities you can widen your recruitment pool to meet your specific business needs.
- People with a disability often have the lowest absenteeism and turnover of any category of staff.
- Customer feedback shows the community often love the interactions they have with people with a disability in the workplace.
- There are wonderful businesses already making employment of people with disabilities a resounding success.

Yet, people with a disability in WA are **not getting a fair go**:

- They experience barriers and other discrimination when applying for jobs – and the onus is on them to prove it.
- Traditional recruitment methods can often disadvantage a person with a disability, despite the value they can add.
- Abilities of people with disabilities are not seen – overshadowed by a fear of offence, and a lack of familiarity with coworkers participating alongside them in all aspects of education, work, and community life.

“Businesses are missing out on an untapped resource”

Peak Bodies have a Role in Addressing this too:

- Commence the conversations with your members about the benefits of employing people with disabilities
- Facilitate training for members, getting them ready to make the experience of employing people with disabilities the positive one it should be
- Connect with disability employment providers and other agencies that will work with your industry and connect your members to them



- Work with your members and other peak bodies to identify and promote employers who are “disability employment champions”, and get them to share their successes
- Support the advocacy to government about integrated and more appropriate funding support for employers and for people with disability
- Lobby the State and Commonwealth Governments for effective supports and information for industry that will lead to an increase in participation for people with disabilities in the workforce
- Be a champion of disability employment by reviewing your own practices and commence the employment process.

“Start the conversation and take a first step now”

Messages for Employers

Actions Businesses Can Take Now

- Tap into the knowledge and understanding of your workforce to understand many of your staff already have a link to someone with a disability
- Develop and deliver education and training packages to ensure you provide a disability safe and discrimination free workplace
- Engage in “job carving” - examine the work you need doing and see what can be done to match the skills and strengths of a person with a disability
- Adjust your recruitment processes to remove the conscious or unconscious barriers people with disabilities face
- Note in your job advertisements (formal or informal) that people with disabilities are encouraged to apply
- Explore volunteering as a pre-cursor to your first step into employing people with disabilities
- Access support on how to recruit people with disabilities and inform and prepare your existing workforce for successful integration
- Connect with a specific Disability Employment Service or organisation what will support employers to provide you with opportunities and access to funding



While you are doing this, please:

- Have open conversations with your existing team about the desire to employ people with disabilities
- Ensure your induction programs include buddies to socially include the person with a disability to others in the organisation
- Connect with other businesses who have had success in employing people with disabilities.

“Start the conversation and take a first step now”



Section 1 - Introduction

About the Disability Assembly Western Australia

The Disability Assembly Western Australia (DAWA) is a new Collective Voice in Western Australia for people with disability.

DAWA has evolved in response to a void that has developed in the State with a loss of local system ownership, leadership, management, and connection within the disability community since the introduction of the NDIS, a void which impacts significantly on many individuals, families and their specialist providers.

DAWA's vision is to unify, support and champion a thriving disability ecosystem in Western Australia to achieve world leading and sustainable outcomes for people with disability, their families and carers.

DAWA's purpose is to bring together people with disability, families, carers, peaks, advocates, providers and experienced individuals, from a range of backgrounds, professions and disciplines. We want to generate informed, impartial and integrated discussion, debate, information, and advice for the broader sector on system-wide issues that require diverse perspectives and innovative thinking.

DAWA is supported by more than 100 advocates reflecting the diversity of Western Australia. It provides a safe place to meet, share knowledge and expertise, and a place to work together to contribute real life experience and breed local ownership and respect.

About the Disability Assembly WA Summit Program

A key pillar of DAWA's approach to fulfilling its purpose, is through convening a number of "Summits" each year.

By invitation for each summit, DAWA assembles and connects around 100 people from across the disability ecosystem to discuss and debate a priority topic. Topics are identified through consultation with DAWA stakeholders based on their strategic and state-wide importance and the potential to improve outcomes for people with disability in WA.



Taking a person-centred approach at all times to ensure the individual perspective and lived experience is front-and-centre for each gathering, summit participants are engaged in a facilitated, solution focused process to:

- leverage, build and share knowledge to support effective local market stewardship;
- be a champion, honest broker, advocate and collaborator for people living with disability;
- be the connection between disability and other systems such as education, health, corrections, child protection, mental health, aged care;
- collect and disseminate information relating to people living with disability;
- display leadership and provide evidence-based insights, narratives and data; and
- provide, through active and informed discussion and debate, impartial advice and recommendations on complex challenges in disability.

A report is produced following each DAWA summit, which contains a summary of the process and highlights, together with key findings generated by participants and agreed messages, recommendations or outcomes.

The report is published on the DAWA website, but more importantly is provided to the WA Minister for Disability Services, other relevant state and federal Ministers and other people or stakeholders with an ability to influence and/or support the implementation of the report recommendations.

Inaugural DAWA Summit Topic – Employment of People with Disability

Following consultation through two focus groups with people with disability, families and carers, “Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disability” was selected as the topic for the inaugural DAWA summit.

The selection reflected the strategic and state-wide importance of the topic, the potential to impact on a significant number of people with disability, and the alignment with the high priority identified within both Australian and State Disability Strategies.



Raising the profile of the need for employers to consider inclusion of people with disability was also considered timely in an environment of significant challenges for many employers in recruiting and retaining an appropriately skilled workforce.

Aligned Australian and State Disability strategies include:

1. Employ My Ability – the Australian Disability Employment Strategy 2021 - 2031

Developed in conjunction with Australia's Disability Strategy 2021 – 2031, 'Employ My Ability – the Australian Disability Employment Strategy' presents a 10-year commitment to improving employment opportunities for people with disability.

It seeks to put the focus on the ability and capability of every single person, with a Vision for "Inclusive workplace cultures where people with disability thrive in their careers"

'Employ My Ability' highlights that in 2021:

- About 4.4 million people in Australia have a disability (around 1 in 6 people);
- Just 53.4% of people with disability are in the labour force, compared with 84.1% of those without disability;
- The gap of over 30% has remained largely unchanged for almost 20 years (since 2003);
- The unemployment rate for people with disability is double that of working age people without disability (10% compared to 4.6%); and
- More than 113,000 people with disability are currently unemployed and looking for work.

The strategy emphasises we all have a role to play in achieving the vision – employers, governments, parents and carers, teachers, and career practitioners – and that attitudes, practices and structures can act as barriers that prevent people from fulfilling their potential and exercising their rights as equal members of the community.

Four priority areas are identified for change:



- Lifting employer engagement, capability and demand: providing employers with the tools and abilities to confidently hire, support, develop and retain more people with disability.
- Building employment skills, experience and confidence of young people with disability: ensuring young people with disability are supported to obtain work and careers of their choice.
- Improving systems and services for job seekers and employers: making it simpler for job seekers with disability and employers to navigate and utilise services, and driving better performance from service providers.
- Changing community attitudes: changing people's perception and expectation about the capability of people with disability in the workplace.

2. WA State Disability Strategy 2020 – 2030

The vision of the WA State Disability Strategy 2020 – 2030 is that “People with disability, and those who share their lives, are engaged and feel empowered to live as they choose in a community where everyone belongs.”

The strategy represents the State's commitment to transformative change including equitable opportunities and outcomes in all areas of life.

Four pillars of change were developed by a co-design group and underpin the strategy:

1. Participate and contribute
2. Inclusive communities
3. Living well; and
4. Rights and equality

Improving employment outcomes for people with disability is identified as a priority under pillar one (participate and contribute), where one of the strategic priorities is for “people with disability to have opportunities for meaningful and inclusive employment and economic independence.”

This strategic priority is underpinned by a recognition that improving the economic participation of people with disability will benefit not only the individual, but also the WA economy as a whole. It highlights that improving employment



outcomes requires employers to consider how they can create and sustain more job opportunities and accessible workplaces, which might include employers:

- changing recruitment processes to make sure candidates with disability are able to apply and succeed in roles they aspire to;
- working with employment service providers to match people with disability to job roles that suit their skills and interests;
- exploring ways to provide a safe and productive workplace;
- providing appropriate supports to enable people with disability to succeed; and
- creating opportunities for career progression.

3. Public Sector Commission Workforce Diversification and Inclusion Strategy for WA Public Sector Employment 2020 - 2025

The WA State Disability Strategy 2020 – 2030 identifies that improving employment outcomes for people with disability will require businesses of all sizes, the public sector and the not-for-profit sector to play their part. Using the public sector as an example, the strategy identifies that when the public sector workforce reflects the community it serves, it will be better equipped to create inclusive policies and services.

Aligned to the strategy, the Public Sector Commission's People with Disability Action Plan to improve WA Public Sector Employment Outcomes (sitting beneath its Workforce Diversification and Inclusion Strategy 2020 - 2025) aims to increase the representation of people employed within the public sector to five per cent and support inclusive workplaces.



Section 2 – DAWA Summit on Employment – The process/proceedings

The DAWA summit on employment of people with disability, was held on Friday 29 July at the Telethon Speech and Hearing Function Centre, 36 Dodd Street, Wembley.

Friday was identified as the preferred day for the summit, particularly for people with disability and their families/carers living outside the Perth metropolitan area, following focus group consultation hosted by

- Kalparrin (member organisation providing advice, guidance and support to families raising children with disability and/or additional needs); and
- Developmental Disability WA (DDWA - the peak organisation in WA for people with intellectual and other developmental disability and their families, and the organisations and people who support them).

The Telethon Speech and Hearing Function Centre was selected as the preferred venue because of its ability to meet parking and other accessibility requirements for people with disability and because of the range of conference and 'break out' rooms available.

85 participants attended, including 30 people with disability and family members/carers, around 20 representatives from employment services or disability services providers, and around 40 representing a mix of government bodies (state and local), peak bodies, and small to large businesses. Unfortunately, less than 10 participants were from regional/remote WA.

Summit Agenda

The agenda for the summit was also designed in consultation with people with disabilities and family members, who provided valuable input through the Kalparrin and DDWA-hosted focus groups on their personal experiences and associated matters they would like to see covered/discussed during the day.

The result was the program below, with each session co-hosted by MCs with either a disability or parent of a person with disability.



Proceedings were also greatly assisted through the use of SLIDO, an easy-to-use Q+A and polling platform for live events. SLIDO enabled participants to register questions and comments during the presentations and “vote up” their favourite questions, which helped the MCs to shortlist the questions to be posed to the presenters.



Summit on Employment for People with Disability Program

9am **Registration**

Morning tea and networking on arrival

9.45am **Welcome to Country**

Vivienne Hansen

Welcome

Tony Vis, Chair, Disability Assembly WA; and

Bruce Langoulant, Council Member, Disability Assembly WA

Welcome

Co-MC's Jodie Nikolic and Tim McMillian

Keynote Address

Dr Ben Gauntlett, Disability Discrimination Commissioner,

Australian Human Rights Commission

Address

Catherine McAlpine, Chief Executive Officer, Inclusion Australia

Address

Lindsay Warner, Executive Director, Public Sector Commission

11.15am **Panel Session**

Bronia Holyoak

Renae Hartmann, Gaelen Williams and Will Scott-Jeffs, APM

Sally Hollins, Edge Employment Solutions

Charmain Fitzgerald and Shaun Sandy, RAC

12.45pm **Lunch**

1.30pm **Workshop Groups** – facilitated person-centred approach to ensure the consumer perspective and lived experience is front-and-centre



3.10pm **Welcome Back**

Co-MC's Chris Easter and Kane Blackman

Workshop Group Facilitator Presentations & Assembly

Agreement on Recommendations

Neil Guard, DAWA Council

Closing Remarks

Tony Vis, Chair Disability Assembly WA; and

Bruce Langoulant, Council Member, Disability Assembly WA

4.30pm Event Close

Morning Session

The morning session aimed to provide all participants with clear context on the topic of employment for people with disability, through information provision, clarification and group discussion with a range of highly credentialled keynote speakers and “experts” on the subject of “what works” in relation to the employment of people with disability. In summary:

- **Opening Keynote Address – Dr Ben Gauntlett, Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission**

Dr Gauntlett highlighted one of his highest term goals as Disability Discrimination Commissioner is to increase access to meaningful employment for people with disability; also highlighting that the reason that employment is important is different for everyone and how we need to acknowledge that disability is diverse and that people with disability are diverse too.

He reminded the audience that compared with other OECD countries Australia is underperforming in relation to the employment of people with disability and the employment participation rate has been stuck on around 53% for 20 years. In addition, when people with disability are employed, they are often in jobs where their income is lower than people without disability.



For Australia to move forward, Dr Gauntlett identified the need to raise the expectations of how society sees people with disability – for example, pointing out that under 20% of the top 50 ASX listed companies have a disability action plan.

He also stressed it is of the utmost importance in employing people with disability, that every effort is made not to employ them on a segregated basis. Businesses need to understand the importance of reasonable workplace adjustments and that employing people with disability brings a wealth of benefits to an organisation as a whole – often more productive and more likely to be loyal to corporation and brand.

Among his responses to a range of questions from the audience, Dr Gauntlett proffered the view that:

- Government wage subsidies are a useful tool to enable a person with disability to be trained and acquire new skills. However, he expressed that the system needs to be more user friendly for small business (employers of the majority of people with disability);
- Countries higher in the OECD rankings tend to link education, training, transport and access to social services in a better way than is the case presently in Australia;
- There is a need to address the current negative risk concerning the entitlement to the disability support pension when a person with disability seeks to be employed/participate on an economic basis in society;
- One of the main reasons Australia seems to have been ‘stuck’ at only 53% of people with disability in employment for the past 20 years is that not enough has been done to convince the largest businesses that employing people with disability is good business. In addition, there is a need to better promote the range of success stories to smaller businesses; and
- The three ‘L’s of Leadership, a Long-term focus and a Learning mentality are vital ingredients for employers to be successful when they commit to employ people with disability.



- **Second Keynote Address – Catherine McAlpine, CEO Inclusion Australia**

Catherine McAlpine introduced Inclusion Australia (IA) as the national representative organisation for people with an intellectual disability and their families – a system advocacy organisation founded in 1954, and almost 70 years later still advocating for greater inclusion for people with intellectual disability. IA has an extensive history of working for employment equality for people with an intellectual disability and Catherine strongly espoused the view that everyone can work, when they get the right support.

Building on the statistics quoted by Dr Gauntlett, Catherine highlighted that only 39% of people with intellectual disability are in the labour force, a significant proportion of whom earn less than full award wages. In addition, while around 115,000 people who receive the disability support pension note that intellectual disability is their primary disability, disability employment providers (that support people with disability to find open employment) have fewer than 10,000 people on their books and around 16,000 work in Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs).

Catherine reported that at a public hearing of the Disability Royal Commission (DRC) in April 2022, evidence was provided of people working in ADEs earning as little as \$2.50 an hour, when the current minimum wage is \$21.38 an hour. Catherine shared two key themes that people had asked her to share at the DRC hearing:

- a. Proper pay matters – when people with disability are not paid properly it has flow on effects on the lives of people with disability and their families, including a continuing reliance on the disability support pension, a lack of purchasing power and choice, and a framing of people with disability as burdens (costs) rather than contributors (benefits); and
- b. Segregation also needs to end – attitudinal change happens with direct contact, so when people with disability are separated from people without disability, it reinforces the ideas of difference. In addition,



Catherine expressed the view that segregated spaces are not safe for people with disability.

Catherine stressed the need to increasingly promote strategies that have strong evidence to show they work, including customised employment and building on a person's strengths and interests, rather than having to accept any job offered. Having the opportunity to speak out about their dreams for employment and their own life is really important.

Initial questions posed to Catherine McAlpine related to the future of ADEs and specifically why people with disability should not be afforded the choice of working in an ADE if they have tried other options and do not like them. In response, Catherine expressed the view that the issues included the need for much better support for decision making and for significantly improved support for people with disability in open employment. She also expressed that choice should include the opportunity to work with other people with disability, but that this should not need to be a completely separate system.

Other views expressed by Catherine included:

- When talking about “meaningful work”, it is important that what is meaningful is defined by the person with disability;
 - While some TAFEs and universities are inclusive, the ability of TAFEs in particular has been significantly compromised over a number of years. There needs to be real change to help teachers to understand what inclusion looks like and how to support people; and
 - While some of the statistics are damning, she feels optimistic about the future, in particular because of the growing level of conversation about employment of people with disability.
- **Address – Lindsay Warner**, Executive Director Policy and Diversity, WA Public Sector Commission (PSC)
Lindsay advised that the government is one of the largest employers in WA, employing almost 160,000 in the public service.

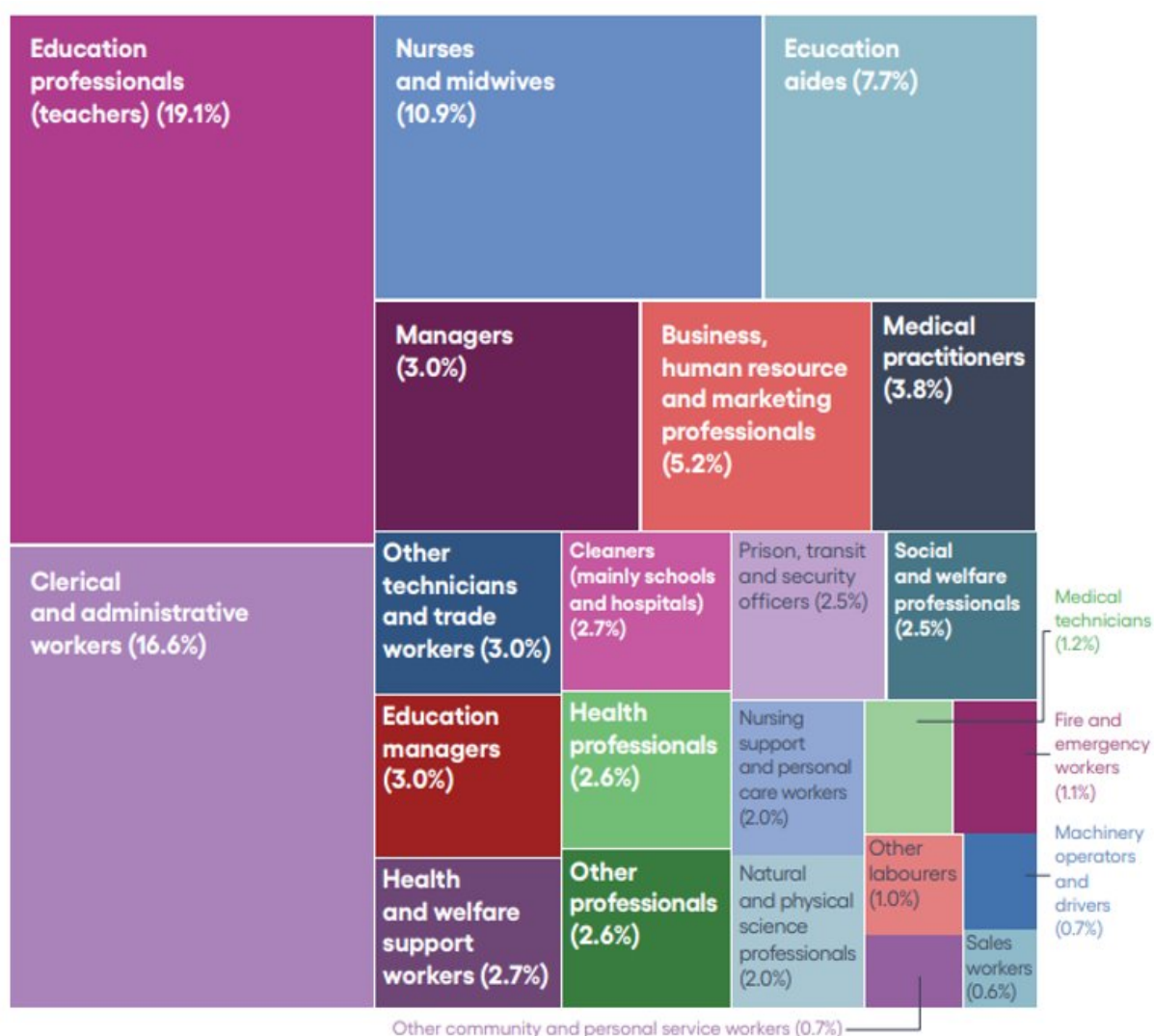


Disability Assembly WA

A collective voice for people with disability

While around 70% of employees are in the education and health sectors, employment in the government sector is highly diverse when considered by occupational group, such that real opportunities for employment of people with disability should exist moving forward (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1 – Public Sector Employment by Occupational Group



Public Sector Commission data collected during the recruitment process suggest that around 2,000 people with disability are employed in the sector, equating to around 1.5% of the workforce (Note: more recent data collected in 2021 through a census pilot of 23,000 employees in 17 government agencies (n = 11,000 responses) suggested the rate of employment of people with disability could be as high as 3.4%, so a full sector census is being considered).



Lindsay advised that in September 2020 the WA government released its workforce diversification strategy, supported by a specific action plan for people with disability, to guide government agencies. The strategy sets an aspirational target to increase the employment of people with disability to 5% by 2025 (equivalent to an increase of 6,000 people with disability).

With employment decisions made by agency CEOs, the PSC is trying to influence and change behaviours, to make the positive decisions required to deliver the government outcomes. Lindsay touched on the following initiatives being utilised as part of the PSC toolbox:

- CEO performance agreements – to hold CEOs accountable for disability employment outcomes as part of their performance assessment;
- Including diversity in the 2021 update of the manual for government boards and committees;
- Incorporating elements about how to attract diverse and capable candidates, including people with disability in the “hiring manager’s toolkit”; and
- Releasing a guide to agencies on how to use the provisions for positive discrimination in law when making recruitment decisions; and partnering with National Disability Services to provide training within the PSC’s talent pool initiative.

In closing his address, Lindsay outlined that collective effort and accountability would be the key to success within the public sector, and welcomed advice from summit participants on other strategies the PSC could/should consider.

Comments and questions from participants focused on obtaining more information on the breakdown of the types of jobs that might be available in the public sector, and on how the government might also use its social procurement framework and procurement ‘power’ to support the achievement of employment outcomes for people with disability more broadly.



- **Panel Presenters and Discussion**

The Summit panel session provided 15 minutes for each of the presenters (or small presenter groups) to speak to the audience about their area of expertise and the available evidence, then 30 minutes for facilitated Q+A and panel discussion with the participants.

- **Bronia Holyoak**

Bronia opened her address with a plea that now is the time to raise the bar for employment of people with disability – when we have an unemployment rate of just 3.5%.

Highlighting also that only 11.4% of people with profound disability are currently working in full time employment and only 24% of NDIS participants of working age are in properly paid employment, Bronia also highlighted that now is the opportunity for change in the NDIS participant employment strategy and that the changes to the NDIS pricing arrangements should enable people to have much more choice around supports in employment.

Bronia defined a microenterprise as “a small business with lean start-up costs (requires minimal capital) that can be owned and operated by a person with assistance from family, friends and paid supporters.” Often the most successful microenterprises operate with just a wide working circle of family and friends motivating and supporting the person with disability in their business.

Bronia described the “discovery” process as one of the most important components to starting up a microenterprise – providing an opportunity to discover a person’s passions, gifts and strengths - and then develop the employment opportunities and business plan based around these passions, interests and abilities, tailored to the individual’s needs.

The benefits to the person with disability include a high level of autonomy (own boss), and the ability to work when, where, and how the person wants.

Bronia then shared a range of examples to illustrate the microenterprise employment model, including a gardening business called “Ground Control by Major Tom” and JI Artwork. Bronia finished with the story of Thia, whose passions for fashion and



photography led to a thriving business as a designer and fashion model – her new clothing range was showcased at the walkway at New York Fashion Week in February 2022.

- **Renae Hartmann, Gaelen Williams and Will Scott-Jeffs – APM**

Gaelen Williams opened the presentation on behalf of APM, and stressed that he was proud to be representing an organisation that has thrown its commitment behind real work for real pay for people with disability within its own organisation – using an innovative “customised employment” solution. He defined customised employment as “a flexible process designed to personalise the employment relationship between a job seeker and an employer in a way that meets the needs of both.”

Gaelen explained that following an APM pilot in May 2016, the NDIA had thrown its support behind this innovative employment solution, including within the NDIS price guide and pricing arrangements.

Gaelen described the four stages to the customised employment approach, all focused around the individual:

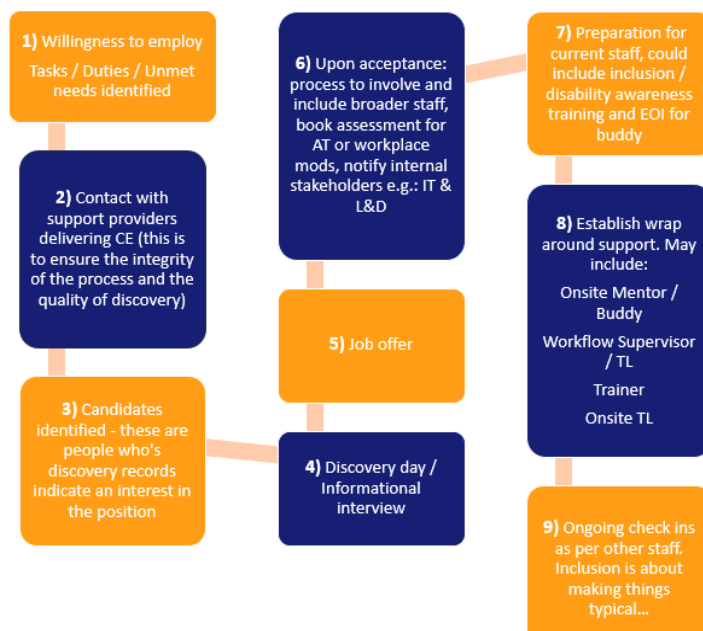
- Discovery;
- Job Search Planning;
- Job Development and Negotiation. and
- Post-Employment Support

Renae Hartman spoke with equal pride about the approach in Figure 2 below, taken by APM communities itself to employ people with disability. She described how, based on APM’s success with this approach for people with disability, they want to get to the point where the approach is normal practice and typical for all staff members, all people, whether they have a disability or not.



Figure 2 – APM's Customised Employment Project

APM's Customised Employment Project



Renae then introduced Will Scott-Jeffs, who described himself as a person with high functioning autism, who prior to his current jobs had been unemployed for 3½ years. Will described how his current role as an APM LAC support officer had been made possible through the customised employment approach, including how the funding through his NDIS plan had enabled him to be supported through the customised employment approach by a trained service provider. Will now has jobs with both APM and Rocky Bay (peer group researcher).

- **Sally Hollins - Edge Employment Solutions**

Sally introduced herself as an employer of people with disability for over 30 years and currently CEO of Edge Employment Solutions, one of WA's oldest employment agencies that was specifically established to find open employment for people with disability.

Edge uses a three-step "match-maker" process to assist job seekers with a diagnosed disability aged between 14 and 65 years to find and prepare for employment; and assist employers to fill vacancies, diversify their workforce and sustain valuable employment:



- Registration – developing a profile based on the job-seeker's interests, aspirations, and goals;
- Job Search – seeking the 'right' job for the job-seeker; and
- Job Support – including a job support coach preparing the newly employed worker and helping them in the new job.

Since their inception, Edge has helped secure 8,739 jobs for people with disability.

Assistance to employers has also included:

- Wage Subsidies;
- Apprenticeships and Traineeships;
- Job Access Audits;
- Workplace Modifications; and
- Workplace Training.

Despite this success, and a fundamental belief that typically employers have good intentions and a desire to do more, in 2021 Edge commissioned independent research with the support of a Department of Communities ILC Grant, to understand what more was needed to help employers move from good intention to action. 400 people participated in the research and Sally detailed the following key research findings for the Summit audience:

- Many employers have misperceptions about employees with disability and those misperceptions affect all stages and considerations of the employment process;
- Many people with disability hesitate to disclose their condition to employers, driven by a valid fear of losing their job - one in ten people with disability reported having lost their job following disclosure
- Low rates of disclosure about mental health conditions drives misperceptions that people with these conditions do not require support and can result in a culture that does not actively foster a sense of safety and positivity towards their employment;
- Recruitment processes are often inequitable and compromised by being merit based;



- Recruitment is hampered by employers' concerns about the support they think a person with disability may require.

Despite the above findings, the research also found that the needs and expectations of people with disability are quite reasonable and often the same as any other employee.

Based on the research findings, Sally recommended that to make a real difference in employment outcomes for people with disability, the start point must be with business leaders, because “when organisations do look to employ people with disability, it’s because a leader in the organisation is driving that change.”

- **Charmain Fitzgerald and Shaun Sandy, RAC**

Charmain Fitzgerald opened the presentation on behalf of the RAC, outlining that diversity and inclusion have become a very strong focus at RAC, with good governance structures put in place to drive positive organisational outcomes. The structures include an “Inclusion Council” headed up by the Group Executive, which oversees four resource/working groups – one of which is an “Enabling Abilities” working group that includes Charmain, Shaun and representation of other employees across the RAC, including a number who identify with disability. The executive sponsor of the Enabling Abilities working group is the RAC Chief Operating Officer and one of its main focus areas is breaking down the barriers to employment for people with disability.

Charmain emphasised:

- that commitment at the executive level is critical to drive successful outcomes – approval of diversity and inclusion as key parts of group strategy and business plans, establishing the governance structures, providing funding for initiatives, leading by example and driving the communication;
- that effective change management is also vital, with some significant changes required to embed new ways of working and changes to previously established processes;
- there is no “one size fits all” – everything needs to be tailored to the individual; and



- improving accessibility benefits everyone; for example closed captioning is a useful language tool and mobile apps and devices built to improve accessibility are generally of benefit for all customers.

Shaun Sandy talked about his own journey with RAC, reflecting that he approached RAC five years ago through a recruitment agent who had an established relationship. The person who interviewed him had been briefed on some of the challenges that Shaun might face in interview and accommodated those challenges. As a result, Shaun could relax and perform, enabling his 'capability' and not just his ability to shine through the interview process.

Shaun has since been supported through various roles in the RAC, who he praised for doing everything they can to help him grow.

As expected, following their presentations, the panel members received and responded to several comments and questions, including requests for further information/detail. A summary of the questions submitted through SLIDO is included as an Appendix to this report.



Afternoon Sessions

The afternoon sessions of the DAWA Employment for People with Disability Summit were dedicated to facilitated participant discussion in small working groups – named “PODS” – with the work and recommendations from each POD presented back for full group consideration in the final session of the day.

Each of the ten (10) PODS comprised up to ten (10) Summit participants and included at least one person with disability (and a support person/family member/carer, if required) and a mix of employment providers, disability services providers, businesses/employers, advocates, peak bodies, government, and other subject expert representatives i.e., each group was designed to include a mix of stakeholders and experience, placing the person(s) with disability at the centre. The objective of each of the PODS was defined as ‘to capture the individual and collective insights, experience and ideas to improve employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disability.’

More specifically, the broad discussion topic for each of the PODS was:

“Over the past 20 years, national and state disability strategies have included commitments to improve employment outcomes for people with disability, but we remain in the position where the unemployment rate for people with disability is more than double that for people without disability (and disproportionately worse for people with high and complex needs, including people with intellectual disability).

What must change to achieve the desired growth in employment for people with disability in Western Australia; and what are the priorities to avoid the prospect of looking back in ten years’ time and again seeing minimal progress made?”

The discussion at each table was facilitated by a passionate volunteer – not necessarily a ‘professional facilitator,’ but a person with a range of involvement in the sector, briefed and provided with facilitation tips to:



- manage the process of discussion (not as a key expert);
- ensure all voices were heard – with a declared bias to those with lived experience; and
- provide the group's feedback to the broader forum following the discussion – including summarising the 3 – 4 key priorities for action identified through the discussion and touching on what stood out most in the group conversation.

The facilitators were provided with a range of example 'prompt' questions to help facilitate the discussion, but invariably the make-up of the table was the key factor flavouring the focus of each POD discussion, with success defined as “at the end of the session, all participants have collaborated in collaborative discussion and feel heard, energised, more connected, informed and hopeful.”

The POD discussions lasted 1¾ hours, following which, participants regrouped to hear and help consolidate the overall feedback from each of the PODS.

The consolidated feedback – “Key Messages from the DAWA Summit on Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disability” is provided in the next section of this report.



Section 3 - Key Messages from the DAWA Summit on Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disability

The previous section of this report detailed the process of the DAWA summit on Improving Outcomes for People with Disability, in which the morning session focused on providing context, facts, and the available evidence from research and working experience about “what works” and where the main barriers and gaps lie.

During the afternoon sessions the participants broke into small, facilitated working groups to consider the information provided by the speakers in the morning session alongside their own experiences and perspectives. POD groups were asked to consider and present back responses to the following questions:

- What must change to achieve the desired growth in employment for people with disability in Western Australia?;
- What are the priorities to avoid the prospect of looking back in ten years’ time and again seeing minimal progress made?”

This third section of the report provides a consolidated summary of the key themes that arose within these group discussions. While the flow of the discussion differed to reflect the composition and individual experiences of each group, the key themes arising from the discussions were generally similar. The themes also generally align with the four priority areas identified for change within the ‘Employ My Ability – Australian Disability Employment Strategy 2021-2031’ and Pillar 1 (participate and contribute) of the WA State Disability Strategy 2020-2030.

After presenting the key themes from the Summit working group discussions, the report then presents a series of key messages generated by the collective voices of all summit participants and which they requested DAWA to convey strongly for consideration by the WA State Government (and where necessary to include in advocacy with the Commonwealth Government), employers, and by other key stakeholders who can influence and effect change in the priority afforded to the employment of people with disability.



Key Themes arising from Summit Discussions

The key themes that arose within the POD discussions were:

- **Action is needed now!**

The 'Employ My Ability –Australian Disability Employment Strategy 2021-2031' highlights that:

- Just 53.4% of people with disability are in the labour force, compared with 84.1% of those without disability.
- The gap of over 30% has remained largely unchanged for almost 20 years (since 2003).
- The unemployment rate for people with disability is double that of working age people without disability (10% compared to 4.6%); and
- More than 113,000 people with disability are currently unemployed and looking for work.

Against this background and frustration at the stubborn lack of real progress over decades, summit participants were loud in demanding that "It's time for this to change!"

This assertion was backed by the morning presentations that demonstrated extensive knowledge from many years of research and pilot programs, and from a range of success stories providing evidence, that "we already know what works – we just need more commitment to act."

- **Focus on the person**

Summit participants expressed that all too often people with disability are treated as one generic group when it comes to programs, funding and work/career opportunities. The failure to be mindful of different disabilities, abilities and capabilities, and that work meets different needs in all of us means that "many people with disability are not getting a fair go" - missing out on potential employment opportunities - and that many employers are also missing out on an untapped resource that is likely to be more productive and more loyal to the business.



To achieve success, it is vital that all involved accept that jobs and careers are, by definition, personal; and that employment approaches should be as individualised as possible, designed and implemented to understand the person first and to fulfil individual ambition – including a process of “discovery” to explore their interests, skills, motivations, and the person’s situation.

- **Real Government, Public Sector and Industry Leadership is required**

A consistent theme in all POD conversations related to the lack of real leadership shown to date by government(s), employers, and industry leaders – resulting in a call from participants for these bodies to “step up to the plate” and actively drive the changes required, to improve employment outcomes for people with disability.

Government Leadership

While the production of relatively new State and Commonwealth Strategies and Employment Action Plans was acknowledged and welcomed by participants, who also acknowledged the growing levels of government, employer and community discussion on the topic over the past year, the participants expressed frustration at the lack of leadership from the WA State Government in particular.

All consider the State Government has a central role to play to lead the change to produce positive outcomes for people with disability, particularly while the government is highly motivated to address skills and workforce shortages generally. This leadership should be much more visible following the release of the State Disability Strategy 2020-2030, which was accompanied by the development of the Public Sector Commission’s People with Disability Action Plan to improve WA Public Sector Employment Outcomes.

Given the many roles of the State Government, participants expressed that “there needs to be more ‘doing’ and accountability in the employment space, rather than just more talking.”

The calls for more ‘doing’ by the State Government include both carrot and stick approaches:

- As a champion employer – leading the way in WA; for example, by setting/mandating Public Sector KPIs for the employment of people with



disability that are representative of the WA community to improve disability employment; and then holding Directors General to account on performance

- As a facilitator – for example, through the provision of incentive grants and by providing people with disabilities, carers, families, employers, peak bodies with an effective and up-to-date service to guide people where to start their journey of employment or employment of people with disabilities
- As a legislator – for example, using or reviewing existing legislation (possibly including Disability Access and Inclusion Plans) and/or creating alternative legislation to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities
- As a purchaser – for example, using the government's purchasing power and contracting processes to incentivise consideration of employing people with disability
- As an advocate – for example, advocacy to address the situation where the government social security entitlements of a person with disability may be threatened when a person with disability gains employment (the two should be complementary and supportive, not act as a disincentive to finding employment); and holding the Commonwealth Government to account by using the COAG Disability Ministers forum to ensure pre-election promises are delivered.

See the final sub-section of this report for a more comprehensive list of the key messages from Summit participants to the State Government.

Public Sector

Facilitating the Public Sector to become a champion employer of people with disability, the Public Sector Commission must play an active leadership role to ensure the sector meets its target to 'increase the representation of people employed within the sector to five per cent by 2025 and support inclusive workplaces.'

In addition to supporting the State Government to set Public Sector KPIs for the employment of people with disability that are representative of the WA community, the Commission should ensure greater accountability through prioritisation of this



KPI in performance agreements. It should also mandate greater transparency on progress reporting through the annual reporting cycle, for example, within the Public Sector Commission or individual agency annual reports.

The Commission should also:

- Facilitate workplace training to support government agencies to create better workplace cultures that embrace disability employment;
- Review and co-design public sector recruitment processes to ensure they are accessible, inclusive, and less discriminatory;
- Notify all public sector job opportunities to disability employment services (DES) providers;
- Ensure the public sector has the flexibility to facilitate better outcomes through flexibly in job design;
- Focus on increasing representation of people with disability on government boards;
- Provide the public sector (and industry groups, peak bodies and employers), with information, toolkits and support to help them to start their journeys and increase participation of people with disability in their workforces; and
- Ensure people with disability are involved in recruitment panels.

Industry Groups, Peak Bodies and Employers

Evidence demonstrates that employing people with disability makes good business sense from a range of perspectives, including:

- Enhancing diversity and building a company's capacity, culture and performance;
- Widening the recruitment pool to meet specific business needs;
- Lower absenteeism and turnover rates; and
- Customer feedback, which demonstrates that customers often love the interactions with people with disability in the workplace.

Yet despite the evidence, many employers are still reluctant to take the first step. Summit participants therefore agreed that employer peak bodies need to play a greater leadership role in encouraging their members to identify opportunities to



employ people with varying disabilities, and they should also offer training and support.

Participants felt strongly that the roles played by industry peaks could include, but not be limited to:

- Commencing the conversations with members about the benefits of employing people with disability;
- Facilitating training for members to help make their initial experience of employing people with disability a positive one;
- Connecting members with disability employment providers;
- Showcasing employer success stories as they emerge;
- Supporting advocacy with governments for integrated and appropriate funding support for employers and people with disability; and
- Championing disability employment within their own organisations, including through reviewing recruitment and retention practices.

See the final sub-section of this report for a more comprehensive list of the key messages from Summit participants to industry peak bodies and employers.

- **Consistent support required at the school to employment transition point**

Many of the POD discussions focused on participants' experiences when transitioning from school and seeking employment opportunities. At best, the current supports were reported as variable and inconsistent between schools, with some participants describing situations of having to move schools because of a complete lack of transition support.

All agreed the education systems need to be set up to enable all school students with disability to succeed. They also agreed that prioritising the focus on pathways for the younger generation would pay huge dividends in the longer term, and that if done well, it would help change the perceptions and expectations of employers. This focus should include improving disability education for teachers and other professionals, for example through an additional unit in all higher education programs.



Summit participants therefore called for additional funding support through Education Departments to enable the provision, in all schools, of the early support required for people with disability to explore employment / career opportunities and pathways as they move towards exiting high school. The participants called for this transition support to:

- commence by year 9 at the latest (though some suggested the employment education and career planning process should commence even earlier than high school and be part of the education lifespan (primary -> high school -> post school);
- be based around the individual – commencing with, and consistently involving, a process of ‘discovery,’ exploring the student’s passions, interests, skills and motivations, and appreciating that these may change over time; and
- ensuring each individual is supported to explore and test a variety of jobs / career options (for example through work-experience and weekend jobs), and with funding support from the Education Department or from the NDIS.

Participants also requested that similar early support be made available for parents of a child with disability, for example to connect them to the supports and opportunities available.

Finally, summit participants called for greater engagement of and commitment from the TAFE, University and private RTO systems, to better engage in providing skills and job readiness training for people with disability, including through offering more flexibility in delivery. An opportunity was also considered to exist for these education bodies to provide and support ‘diversity’ training for employers (see below).

• **Training and Capacity Building of Employers**

During the morning plenary session, the summit participants heard the findings of extensive research, which among other things highlighted significant misconceptions, false perceptions (and consequential risk aversion) that exists among many potential employers of people with disability. The research identified that many were concerned at what it might take/how difficult it might be, while others



considered they would not be capable of providing the required support, and a few still believed that people with disability do not want to work.

Considering this evidence and their own experiences, summit participants considered that the development and delivery of a range of training for organisation leaders (and HR managers) is urgently required to increase disability awareness and confidence among employers (and to upskill their HR teams).

Increased disability awareness and capability training could be led / facilitated / delivered by industry groups and peak bodies, which would also demonstrate their commitment to improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

‘Job Readiness’ training packages should also be developed and implemented through the TAFE/RTO system and should be highly subsidised to maximise take up. Participants accepted that adaptation of the above approaches may need to be considered for regional locations/communities.

To accompany the above employer training, summit participants also called for the development of broader ‘employer and grass roots market education’ through:

- Sharing, celebration and promotion of the range of existing significant success stories and best practice examples, such as those demonstrated during the summit, for example, by RAC and APM. Employer market education should include using examples that show how the employment of people with disability ties into business and commercial success. It should target business leaders and the broader business community, with an aim of making the employment of people with disability a key part of others’ corporate social responsibility;
- Storytelling of success stories for people with disability, to increase visibility of the issue and to seek to change the hearts and minds of leaders / potential employers;
- Using social media to raise the profile of the range of ‘gifts and talents’ that people with disabilities can bring to an employer (including that they are generally highly motivated, dedicated, and likely to be long-term); and
- Targeting presentations/expos at industry conferences, for example, tourism, hospitality and education.



A further overarching objective of the approach outlined above, might also be to create a 'social movement' through using social media to promote and encourage customers to use the 'companies and organisations' that demonstrate courage, and a commitment to diversity in the employment space.

• **Inclusive Recruitment Practices**

Many of the POD discussions identified recruitment 'bias' and the recruitment processes of potential employers, including the public service, as an inherent 'exclusion' barrier impacting on the employment of people with disability.

Participants' comments included that:

- Merit-based selection may not always provide the level playing field intended;
- People with disability are generally required to use online sources, such as Seek to identify job opportunities;
- Currently many of the processes required to apply for a job (application forms, on-line applications, formal interviews) are complex, at best 'difficult' for a person with a disability (e.g., visual impaired, hearing impaired, intellectual disability) and more often restrictive; and
- Employers could make better use of Disability Employment Services (DES) providers.

Summit participants therefore called for a fundamental reform of recruitment processes to ensure accessibility and effectiveness from the perspective of a person with disability. In this respect, they encouraged all employers to look closely at their policies around inclusion and at the accessibility of their recruitment process, to remove all potential barriers to people with disability even 'getting into the room.'

Participants felt strongly that;

- Strong leadership, disability education and awareness were vital ingredients for success (see points on training and capacity building of employers above);
- More organisations should be encouraged to create roles/jobs that 'suit,' rather than always trying to fit people into pre-established jobs; in this respect participants called for traditional job design to be "turned on its head" with more job roles built around strengths, passions and capacities (job carving). A



greater focus on alignment of individual and company values is also key to success;

- Recruitment processes need to be far more accessible and 'humanised'- designed to actually help people with disabilities to find potential opportunities and take part in application and interview processes;
- Companies could use DES partners and people with disability themselves to help redesign/co-design roles;
- All potential job opportunities should be notified to DES providers;
- People with disability should be included on recruitment panels;
- Companies should look to use IT in their recruitment processes in a smarter way;
- Greater use of traineeships and pre-traineeships should be considered;
- Industry groups and peak bodies could develop a how to recruit 'toolkit' for SME's, covering best practice in relation to the hiring of people with disability;
- Demonstration projects including a combination of the above points (for example, involving people with disability in job codesign and interview processes), should be part of an overall improvement focused approach.

- **Address other Gaps, Disconnects, and Barriers**

In addition to the points made under the previous headings, as part of the POD discussions a range of other gaps, system disconnects, and barriers to improving employment outcomes for people with disability were identified by the summit participants.

Many related to 'fragmentation' in the system; for example, participants felt strongly that fragmentation of funding needs to be addressed. To address this, they proposed consideration of an audit of potential funding programs across government(s) and community, with a view to consolidation into one funding stream that would provide support to potential employers and employees with an easy application process and short lead-in time.

The need for greater system navigation support (to address a major gap, fragmentation of current support and a lack of integration) was identified as another



priority to help connect people with disability with job opportunities and employers, and DES providers with 'interested' companies.

In this respect, summit participants proposed a "One Stop Shop" as a central point with responsibility for promoting the available jobs and linking potential applicants/job seekers with potential employers. The one stop shop would maintain a central registry of employers and people with disability seeking employment, would use the individual plan of each person with disability to identify appropriate opportunities, and should include a helpline. In an ideal world participants felt the "shop" should be led by people with disability themselves, playing a key role in 'joining the dots' through information sharing and dissemination.

Other gaps and barriers highlighted by participants as needing to be addressed included:

- A lack of available and effective advocacy (individual and systemic) for those who need it most, for example, for people with communication difficulties and others with particularly profound and complex needs;
- The 'competition' that exists between employment services providers (largely because of contractual incentives), which needs to be replaced with greater collaboration and partnerships to achieve better employment outcomes (between service providers and employers); and
- the need for genuine and meaningful employment-related targets to be set for each individual and monitored closely. The targets should be accompanied by fit-for-purpose measurement tools, customised around the person with disability, and with both qualitative and quantitative measures, because 'what gets measured gets action and priority.'



- **Funding Support Required**

Many of the calls for action described in the previous themes in this report will require funding support from the state and commonwealth governments to achieve the significant improvement sought in employment outcomes for people with disability; for example funding for training and capacity building initiatives. However, a few additional funding requirements were identified by summit participants.

Firstly, participants identified that some of the most willing employers, small to medium sized businesses, were often concerned about managing their cash flow. Some outlined that current funding incentives to employ a person with disability generally cease after around 26 weeks, making it difficult or challenging to continue to employ the person without some additional support. Participants therefore called for consideration of an additional period of additional funding, where an employer experiences difficulties, to cover a percentage of an employee's wages.

Secondly, participants called for funding to be made available to assist employers with exploring the potential engagement of people with disability, and to assist with training and any reasonable adjustments required to enable the employment of the person.

Thirdly (and finally), participants called for greater funding support to be available through the NDIS for 'items' such as employment exploration and development, for such funding to be made available for both a person with disability and a potential employer, for the funding to be able to be used flexibly, and to be able to be continuous and portable.



Key messages from the Summit

As outlined in the opening paragraphs of the Key Messages from the 'DAWA Summit on Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disability' section of the report, drawing from the themes arising in the Summit POD and full group discussions, this final section of the report presents a series of key messages generated by the Summit participants.

The participants requested DAWA to ensure these messages were conveyed for consideration by the WA State Government (including messages for the State Government to include in their advocacy with the Commonwealth Government), industry peak bodies, employers (including in the corporate sector) and by other key influencers/leaders who should be able to effect change in the priority afforded to the employment of people with disability.

The Summit summary and key messages are as follows:

About the DAWA 2022 Summit – Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disability

Held on 29 July 2022, the DAWA Summit brought together, people with disabilities, families/carers, service providers, business, and government representatives, providing the opportunity to have an open discussion about improving the employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

Speakers who have embarked on strategies to employ people with disabilities, shared their journey and the positive impact the employment of people with disabilities has had on the person with a disability, the company and the companies' sense of social responsibility.

The Summit canvassed a diversity of views but was unanimous in its passion and resolve to seek change in our community, to ensure that we increase employment opportunities for people with disability in WA.

The Summit provided a collaborative environment, and as one person noted "I, as a small business, can employ someone with a disability; there was much I learned I did



not know about and realise there is a possibility for me and my business” – breaking down barriers to employment of people with a disability is everyone’s responsibility.

Key Facts:

- Just 53.4% of people with disability are in the labour force, compared with 84.1% of those without disability - this gap of over 30% has remained largely unchanged since 2003
- The unemployment rate for people with disability is over double that of people without disability
- More than 113,000 people with disability are currently unemployed and looking to work

People with a disability in WA are not getting a fair go.

It’s time for this to change!



Summary of overarching messages from the DAWA 2022 Summit - Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disability

- People with disabilities have the capacity to immensely add to the workplace. **They are an untapped resource!** But there are many barriers preventing them from making a meaningful contribution.
- Rates of employment of people with disabilities is significantly lower than people without disabilities, and the difference has not improved in 20 years.
- The benefits of employing people with disabilities is reflected in the performance, culture, and capacity of organisations.
- Navigation of the system needs to be simplified, for individuals and for employers. Supports are available but are often fragmented and not readily apparent.
- The State Government has a critical role to play to lead the change that will produce positive outcomes in employment of people with disabilities.
- The Commonwealth Government needs to address:
 - Funding supports for people with disabilities seeking employment - support needs to be more tailored to the individual
 - Disincentives, such as significant loss of pensions and medical benefits – disincentives need to be removed as people transition into employment
 - Lack of transparency of progress towards national employment and other targets
- Industry peak bodies and employers need to play a greater leadership role - Business can learn from others who have had success in the employment of people with disabilities, to make their own journey easier
- There are some simple changes that can occur **now** to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities – we don't need any further research or pilot programs.



Messages for the WA State Government

The State Government has a central role to play to lead the change that will produce positive outcomes in employment of people with disabilities:

- As a champion employer – leading the way in WA by:
 - As a minimum, achieve the current target of 5% employment in the public sector before 2025 and hold Directors General to account on their performance as part of its existing commitment to Australia's Disability Strategy
 - Co-design recruitment to ensure it is accessible, inclusive, and non-discriminatory
 - Ensure people with disabilities are involved in recruitment panels
 - Facilitate workforce training to create better workplace cultures that embrace disability employment
 - Ensure public service has flexibility in job design, so roles are built around the strengths, passions, and capacities of people with disabilities
 - Publishing progress towards targets in key initiatives such as Employment Targeted Action Plan in the Australian Disability Strategy, from the State Disability Strategy, and other initiatives in a timely manner
- As a facilitator – providing people with disabilities, carers, families, employers, peak bodies with an effective and up-to-date service to guide people where to start their journey of employment or employment of people with disabilities by:
 - Providing information for industry, peak bodies, employers, etc with information, toolkits, and support to increase participation for people with disabilities in the workforce
 - Creating an easier interface between public sector agencies for the employment of people with disabilities
 - Providing funding to small to medium enterprises to make their workplace appropriate for people with disabilities, and promote the availability of such funding
- As a legislator – reviewing existing and creating new legislation to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities



- Create legislation / regulations that mandate employment of people with disabilities for the state public service and local government authorities
- Reverse the onus of proof around discriminatory practice in employment for people with disabilities.
- As an advocate – holding the Commonwealth Government to account, and ensuring programs and funding lead to better outcomes in employment for people with disabilities by:
 - Strong and effective involvement with the Employment Targeted Action Plan, ensuring the commitments of the Commonwealth are met
 - Using the Disability Reform Ministers forum to ensure pre-election promises are delivered
 - Advocating for the removal of disincentives for transitioning into employment, such as the loss of pension and medical entitlements
 - Negotiating for funding reform, so employment related funding starts earlier and follows people through life stages and transitions
 - Ensuring the continuity of a spectrum of employment options (including Australian Disability Enterprises), whilst there is a transition into more mainstream employment.



Messages for Industry Groups, Peak Bodies and Employers

Employing people with disabilities makes good business sense:

- You enhance diversity and build your company's capacity, culture, and performance.
- By opening opportunities to people with disabilities you can widen your recruitment pool to meet your specific business needs.
- People with a disability often have the lowest absenteeism and turnover of any category of staff.
- Customer feedback shows the community often love the interactions they have with people with a disability in the workplace.
- There are wonderful businesses already making employment of people with disabilities a resounding success.

Yet, people with a disability in WA are **not getting a fair go**:

- They experience barriers and other discrimination when applying for jobs – and the onus is on them to prove it.
- Traditional recruitment methods can often disadvantage a person with a disability, despite the value they can add.
- Abilities of people with disabilities are not seen – overshadowed by a fear of offence, and a lack of familiarity with coworkers participating alongside them in all aspects of education, work, and community life.

“Businesses are missing out on an untapped resource”



Peak Bodies have a Role in Addressing this too:

- Commence the conversations with your members about the benefits of employing people with disabilities
- Facilitate training for members, getting them ready to make the experience of employing people with disabilities the positive one it should be
- Connect with disability employment providers and other agencies that will work with your industry and connect your members to them
- Work with your members and other peak bodies to identify and promote employers who are “disability employment champions”, and get them to share their successes
- Support the advocacy to government about integrated and more appropriate funding support for employers and for people with disability
- Lobby the State and Commonwealth Governments for effective supports and information for industry that will lead to an increase in participation for people with disabilities in the workforce
- Be a champion of disability employment by reviewing your own practices and commence the employment process.

“Start the conversation and take a first step now”



Messages for Employers

Actions Businesses Can Take Now

- Tap into the knowledge and understanding of your workforce to understand many of your staff already have a link to someone with a disability
- Develop and deliver education and training packages to ensure you provide a disability safe and discrimination free workplace
- Engage in “job carving” - examine the work you need doing and see what can be done to match the skills and strengths of a person with a disability
- Adjust your recruitment processes to remove the conscious or unconscious barriers people with disabilities face
- Note in your job advertisements (formal or informal) that people with disabilities are encouraged to apply
- Explore volunteering as a pre-cursor to your first step into employing people with disabilities
- Access support on how to recruit people with disabilities and inform and prepare your existing workforce for successful integration
- Connect with a specific Disability Employment Service or organisation what will support employers to provide you with opportunities and access to funding

While you are doing this, please:

- Have open conversations with your existing team about the desire to employ people with disabilities
- Ensure your induction programs include buddies to socially include the person with a disability to others in the organisation
- Connect with other businesses who have had success in employing people with disabilities.

“Start the conversation and take a first step now”