



Enabled Employment
Real work. Real jobs. Real people.

SUBMISSION TO THE ACT GOVERNMENT

ACT INQUIRY INTO THE EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

ACT INQUIRY INTO THE EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services (the Committee) is conducting an inquiry into the Employment of People with Disabilities.

The Committee is interested in understanding the factors that contribute to the attraction and retention of people with disabilities, particularly in the ACT public service.

The Committee would like to invite you to make a submission to this inquiry.

Submissions close on **26 April 2017**. It is expected that a public hearing will be held in May 2017. Please note that submissions will be publically available unless otherwise indicated on the submission.

The Terms of Reference for the inquiry are available at <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/in-committees/standing-committees-current-assembly/standing-committee-on-health,-ageing-and-community-services>.

If you would like any further information, please contact the Secretary, Kate Harkins, can be contacted on (02) 6207 0524 or by email at: committees@parliament.act.gov.au.

This submission is provided by Enabled Employment in response to the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services (the Committee) call for submissions to the inquiry into the Employment of People with Disabilities.

This submission contains information to assist the Committee in its review of the current disability employment levels in the ACT Government public sector and other employers.

As the Committee is in the early stages of it's the Inquiry, with detailed consideration yet to be undertaken, Enabled Employment is willing to work with the Committee at any point to provide further industry information.

We conduct our business as people with a disability, and are competing against DES providers who are subsidised to provide employment services to people with a disability – a costly exercise for the taxpayer, and an ineffective solution for the majority of people with a disability.

Our placement rate for people with a disability is, and has been over the last two years, higher than the placement rate of either DES providers or mainstream recruitment agencies.

Enabled Employment does not receive government funding, but operates as a private specialist provider in the mainstream market – without offering subsidies to employers.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

RECOMMENDATION 1

The definition of disability should be standardised across the ACT public sector to ensure adequate access. The recommended definition is that taken from the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers – namely – any limitation, restriction or impairment which restricts everyday activities and has lasted, or is likely to last for at least six months.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The ACT Public Sector undertake a genuine and thorough program of disability awareness training that is compulsory for every employee, including management and diversity and inclusion officers, which is *not* an online ‘tick and flick’ but an in-face course of awareness training run by an external organisation with lived experience of disability. Enabled Employment can highly recommend the Australian Network on Disability as a partner in providing disability confidence training for employees.

RECOMMENDATION 3

All contracts requiring recruitment of personnel on a temporary basis be exempt from tendering requirements should it be filled by a person with a disability, similar to the federal government’s procurement guideline exemptions under Division 2.

RECOMMENDATION 4

A paid internship program be established for people with a disability to enter the skilled policy and administration streams of the ACT public sector, similar to graduate employment recruitment strategies.

RECOMMENDATION 5

A recruitment and retention policy for any organisation must include the following as a minimum, in our view:



Enabled Employment

Real work. Real jobs. Real people.

- a) Acknowledgement that all staff need disability awareness training and funding committed for such training.
- b) Flexible working and reasonable adjustment, including a results only work environment, home based work, flexible work, part time work, job sharing and accessible workplaces (which doesn't just mean a wheelchair ramp, it means provision of equipment of any kind, but also access to flexible working without it being viewed as a privilege) are no barrier to entry, nor a barrier to retention.
- c) Disclosure for people with a disability must remain a choice, and be subject to the Privacy Act if disclosed.
- d) Applicants must not be forced to disclose in order to 'get an interview' as the federal government has done – all this does is encourage bean counting, but does not raise the level of employment of people with a disability.
- e) Stereotypes held of people with a disability must be addressed by an internal training and communication campaign, including disability and inclusion being on every agenda of every meeting of every committee, management committee, and human resources management committee, and any other relevant committee or meeting.
- f) Paid internship programs should be established service-wide to provide career paths and genuine work opportunities for people with a disability.
- g) Quotas for each Directorate be considered to raise the number of job opportunities that can be identified for people with a disability.
- h) All measures taken to ensure people with a disability are given every opportunity to be employed, and stay employed within the ACT Government Public Sector must be reported to the Chief Minister on a quarterly basis, and made publicly available in an Access and Equity Report to be tabled with the ACT Government's Annual Reports.

RECOMMENDATION 6

That every directorate in the ACT public sector be required to table an access and equity report containing the points a) through h) above as a minimum, and that this report be tabled with the directorate's annual report to the Legislative Assembly. This report will have thorough coverage of disability employment rates in the sector, strategies to address training and development for current staff, actual training delivered, inclusive practices in recruitment, number of paid internships offered, and retention rates.

RECOMMENDATION 7

That assessment of any and every policy or program which is intended to raise the employment rates of people with a disability in the ACT Government sector and the private sector be done every 12 months and reported on in the ACT Government's annual reporting process and made publicly available. The assessments should be done as an outcomes based audit process and made available to the Legislative Assembly and the public.

RECOMMENDATION 8

That the ACT Government reassess this report in their own terms, using genuine community consultation with appropriate community and private sector groups, to form a real and durable strategy for the future of employment for people with a disability in both the public and private sectors in the ACT.

Introduction

The United Nations definition of people with a disability is as follows:

“Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”¹

The Australian Bureau of Statistics uses a definition of a person with a disability taken from the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers:

“The Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) defines disability as any limitation, restriction or impairment which restricts everyday activities and has lasted or is likely to last for at least six months.”²

Executive summary

It is our strong view that the most appropriate way forward to increase the levels of employment for people with a disability is a much greater emphasis on employers being inclusive and facilitating remote working arrangements, flexible working including job sharing and part time work, and a results only work environment.³

From our experience, the biggest barrier people with a disability face in gaining employment, whether in the public or private sector, is a stereotypical mythology about their suitability as employees. There is a strong expectation of underperformance⁴, a lack of awareness of adaptive technology and the costs associated with employing a person with a disability, an underestimation of their skills, and the expectation it will be expensive and require too much management on the job.

While we acknowledge the ACT Government public sector has a higher rate of employment of people with a disability than the federal public sector, there may still remain high levels of misconception about the definition of disability, and an aversion to employing anybody with the label ‘disability’ at all levels of the ACT public sector. There are positive ways to move forward, though, and the ACT Government is in a great position to move forward further with the inclusion rate of people with a disability in the public sector workforce.

¹ *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*

² <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4430.0>

³ <https://workplacepsychology.net/2017/01/04/results-only-work-environment-rowe/>

⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16971765>

1. The implementation of the ACT Public Service Disability Employment Strategy

We note that the ACT Public Service Disability Employment Strategy is now outdated by two years and look forward to this document being updated.

The use of imagery in this document also perpetuates the myths and misconceptions of people with a disability by using those who have a visible disability only. Ninety per cent of people with a disability do not have a visible disability, and are not assisted under the NDIS nor by DES providers, and are equally as unable to access work opportunities either in the public or private sectors.

While the ACT public sector has made progress in inclusion, the targets set under this report were not reached, despite having a better performance in employing people with a disability than the federal government. The current 2.3 per cent of the workforce employed falls short of the not ambitious target of 3.4 per cent by 30 June 2010. We are making a series of recommendations to assist the ACT Government public sector in this submission which we think may be of use in reaching the target of 3.4 percent as a component of the ACT public sector workforce.

2. The effectiveness of current attraction and retention programs in the ACT Public Service

In identifying why the targets set under the ACT Public Service Disability Employment Strategy have not been reached, we can offer some insights which may be of use. Enabled Employment works with the ACT, Federal and other State and Territory Government services to identify the barriers to entry for people with a disability, and some remedial actions.

If the ACT Government is to achieve effective employment strategies for people with a disability in the ACT Public Service, there are three aspects which must be examined.

i) Disclosure

The first is the issue of disclosure and personal self-identification as a person with a disability.

The first reason many people who meet the ABS definition of disability are unwilling or unlikely to disclose their status is that they do not identify as a person with a disability. They may be unaware of the definition, or hold the view that there are many 'worse off' than they are, or hold the view that disability means being either in

a wheelchair or having an intellectual disability. Many ‘invisible’ disabilities are acquired conditions, in fact, 50.7 per cent of Australians will acquire a disability by the age of 65⁵. They may not realise that they fit under the definition of disability, nor identify as a person with a disability.

The second reason people may not disclose their disability is due to fear of discrimination or loss of their job due to discrimination. An effective disability employment strategy depends on the workforce at all levels being aware of the definition of disability and comfortable with the options available for workers with a disability such as flexible working, job sharing, part time work and a results only work environment. What we have found, working with various different public sector agencies, is that there are stereotypes about skill levels, types of disability, costs and management time needed for supervision of a person with a disability.

ii) Attitudes of co-workers, management and stereotypes

There can be a commonly held stereotype of disability as only applying to a person who has an intellectual disability or who uses a wheelchair, in effect, a visible disability. Given that 90 per cent of disabilities are invisible, the attitudes of management, co-workers and all employees can help to include people with a disability as genuinely valuable employees. Enabled Employment operates under the principle that:

1. A person with a disability does *not* need to disclose their condition, all they need to disclose is any reasonable adjustments that need to be made in the workplace to enable them to successfully undertake the job they have been employed to undertake.

iii) Knowledge of current exemptions and inclusion of contract workers in reporting

The Australian Government Division 2 of the Procurement Guidelines exempts any organisation operated by people with a disability from tendering for employment contractor positions.⁶ We are therefore able to be included in tenders for staffing automatically, cutting the red tape for disability employment service providers.

At present, the ACT Government’s procurement guidelines include social procurement, with a panel of providers available (Australian Disability Enterprises) for procurement for particular services such as horticulture, mail sorting, copying, packaging and litter patrol.

⁵ <https://www.and.org.au/pages/disability-statistics.html>

⁶ <https://www.finance.gov.au/procurement/procurement-policy-and-guidance/buying/procurement-practice/exemption-from-mandatory-procurement-procedures/practice.html>

A positive way forward would be to expand this panel to include DES providers, and companies such as Enabled Employment, ensuring that all levels of service provision are included in social procurement.

Another suggestion is that in outsourcing exercises for contract or temporary workers, to mirror the response of the Australian Government's procurement strategy, and exempt all organisations operated by people with a disability and providing the services of people with a disability from tender submission processes, and inclusion on all provider panels for contract and temporary work.

At present the ACT Government does not include temporary workers with a disability in the statistics and reporting, so any temporary or contract workers hired through either Enabled Employment or a DES provider or an Australian Disability Enterprise are not included in the statistical reporting.

iv) Recruitment of people with a disability

It is important to recognise that recruitment processes sometimes may be difficult for people with a disability, both at interview and on the job if they are successful in their application and interview. If an interview panel is not experienced in interviewing a person with a disability, there may be unintended discrimination.

Example 1

Consider the case of a person with a Doctorate in Statistical Analysis applying for a job, being interviewed, and being told they are unsuitable over 100 times during a one year period. Was it because she had a guide dog?

How does she prove that? She is well qualified, can undertake work such as any other person, but she has a guide dog. The perceptions of over 100 employers, in her case, must have been partly to do with concerns over her ability to undertake work, and in some cases, a reluctance to have an animal in the workplace (although refusal of a service dog is illegal). How is it possible for her to prove discrimination because of her disability? She isn't party to the other candidate's qualifications and skills that she was competing against, nor is she party to the individuals who interviewed her views on disability and stereotyping.

It can never be proven that the reason she did not get one of over 100 jobs after interview was due to her disability.

The process for making a complaint to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission is impossible for some people with a disability to access due to the lack

of skill or representation, or fatigue. The amount of energy we have each day, depending on our disability, can be limited. Once you've used up 90% of your energy available for the day, there's not a lot left over to undertake a bureaucratic appeals process.

Employing a person with a disability and ensuring they contribute at the level of their role depends on ensuring a person with a disability having the reasonable adjustments they need on the job, and ensuring they are in place. Flexible working, reasonable adjustments and the portability of these conditions to any position the person with a disability may successfully apply for in the ACT Government public sector ensures loyalty, staff retention, and performance at the level expected of them.

People with a disability may have skills and qualifications, but it can be exceptionally difficult to gain experience.

There is an enormous amount of work yet to be done to change attitudes to focus on skills and abilities, and giving people with a disability the right reasonable adjustments – at no cost to the employer (a federal government grant is available for any workplace adaptations) and the right flexible working conditions.

Aside from enforcing a law that people with a disability who are suitably qualified for the job must be given the job in preference over those who do not have a disability, it is almost impossible to prove discrimination. The answer lies in education and public campaigns to destroy the stereotypes people have of people with a disability as employees, which should be positive campaigns – not negative ones.

Another suggested way forward is the establishment of an employment program such as that used by the federal and NSW governments for graduate employment – such as a paid internship program.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The ACT Public Sector undertake a genuine and thorough program of disability awareness training that is compulsory for every employee, including management and diversity and inclusion officers, which is *not* an online 'tick and flick' but an in-face course of awareness training run by an external organisation with lived experience of disability. Enabled Employment can highly recommend the Australian Network on Disability as a partner in providing disability confidence training for employees.

RECOMMENDATION 3

All contracts requiring recruitment of personnel on a temporary basis be exempt from tendering requirements should it be filled by a person with a disability, similar to the federal government's procurement guideline exemptions under Division 2.

RECOMMENDATION 4

A paid internship program be established for people with a disability to enter the skilled policy and administration streams of the ACT public sector, similar to graduate employment recruitment strategies.

3. The effectiveness of current attraction and retention programs for ACT based private enterprise and community organisations

The ACT Involve website seems an ideal place to incorporate the ACT public sector's employment strategy for people with a disability. However, it currently appears to sit under the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate website – which gives a 404 Page Not Found Error when trying to access the ACT Government's Employment Strategy for People with Disability (sic).

There may be an expectation of underperformance for people with a disability in the ACT public sector – not unlike the rest of Australia. For example, when discussing employment opportunities with an ACT Public Sector Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Enabled Employment was disappointed to hear that the proposal from this particular Directorate was to establish a photocopying centre where people with a disability could be employed to scan documents.

While this may be suitable work for some people with a disability, and a great opportunity, 90% of people with a disability have skills, qualifications and work experience, making them over qualified for a role such as this. There are young people graduating from Canberra's Universities who could benefit hugely from an internship program for people with a disability.

We would prefer there were a service wide 'internship' program with the right reasonable adjustments and flexible working conditions to ensure success in future employment in the ACT Public Service.

This would be a first for local government in Australia, and we would love to see the ACT Government take the lead on providing meaningful careers for people with a

disability at all levels by establishing such a program, and providing flexible working opportunities for people with a disability in general, including telework opportunities and home based work, results only work environments and paid internship programs.

RECOMMENDATION 5

A recruitment and retention policy for any organisation must include the following as a minimum, in our view:

- a) Acknowledgement that all staff need disability awareness training and funding committed for such training.
- b) Flexible working and reasonable adjustment, including a results only work environment, home based work, flexible work, part time work, job sharing and accessible workplaces are no barrier to entry, nor a barrier to retention.
- c) Disclosure for people with a disability must remain a choice, and be subject to the Privacy Act if disclosed.
- d) Applicants must not be forced to disclose in order to 'get an interview' as the federal government has done – all this does is enhance statistics, but does not raise the level of employment of people with a disability.
- e) Stereotypes held of people with a disability must be addressed by an internal training and communication campaign, including disability and inclusion being on every agenda of every meeting of every committee, management committee, and human resources management committee, and any other relevant committee or meeting.
- f) Paid internship programs should be established service-wide to provide career paths and genuine work opportunities for people with a disability.
- g) Quotas for each Directorate be considered to raise the number of job opportunities that can be identified for people with a disability.
- h) All measures taken to ensure people with a disability are given every opportunity to be employed, and stay employed within the ACT Government Public Sector must be reported to the Chief Minister on a quarterly basis, and made publicly available in an Access and Equity Report to be tabled with the ACT Government's Annual Reports.

4. Data collection, monitoring and reporting mechanisms

Data collection on the attraction and retention of people with a disability in the ACT public sector is problematic.

Data collection is problematic because it requires a person with a disability to disclose their condition, which they may not want to do due to preconceptions, stereotypes and lack of privacy, discrimination, past experience and fear of killing their career. To make the assertion that there is no discrimination or stereotyping within the ACT public sector is as untrue as of the rest of the population, despite the best efforts of the ACT government.

The key to ensuring people *will* disclose is to provide an environment in which it is *safe to do so*. That means that there will be no stereotype conceptions such as an expectation of underperformance, lack of career advancement, lack of opportunity and pressure to conform to a ‘medical model’ of disability in the workplace such as ‘rehabilitation’ rather than the ‘social model’ of disability – which adapts the environment (including other’s attitudes) to accepting and enabling a person with a disability in the workplace⁷. Unfortunately, it would appear that this is not an easy task, given that 20 per cent of people in the general population will have a disability. For the ACT public service to be truly reflective of the population, to the percentage of the workforce with a disability needs to be an ambitious 20 per cent.

If the ACT Government follows the federal government model, there is a danger that people with a disability will be forced to disclose in order to get an interview for a position, a strategy which has not increased the federal public sector’s inclusion rate, instead, it continues to decline.

Reporting, therefore, should be inclusive of:

- a) the number of disability awareness and inclusion training sessions provided at all levels in the service, per person
- b) the number of meetings at which disability employment is included on the agenda as a standing item
- c) the number of new employees with a disability that have disclosed
- d) the number of current employees with a disability that have disclosed
- e) the number of contractors with a disability that have disclosed

⁷ <http://www.pwd.org.au/student-section/the-social-model-of-disability.html>

- f) the number of positions identified as positions available to people with a disability only and ensuring they are segmented across all levels and positions and not just entry level roles
- g) the number of paid internships for people with a disability
- h) best practice examples within ACT Government's public sector
- i) key issues identified by the community and private sector be acknowledged and addressed
- j) implementation dates for initiatives and reports be met, and if not, highlighted and redressed
- k) details of community and private sector consultation be transparent and also reportable.

RECOMMENDATION 6

That every directorate in the ACT public sector be required to table an access and equity report containing the points a) through k) above as a minimum, and that this report be tabled with the directorate's annual report to the Legislative Assembly. This report will have thorough coverage of disability employment rates in the sector, strategies to address training and development for current staff, actual training delivered, inclusive practices in recruitment, number of paid internships offered, and retention rates.

5. Relevant experiences and learning from Australian State, Commonwealth and international jurisdictions

Enabled Employment has conducted its own extensive research into what makes an organisation a leader in the field of disability employment.

In fact, our business was formed on the basis of this research, and takes a substantially different approach to any other agency providing disability employment services in the *world*.

In summary, we confidently and firmly believe that the employment of people with a disability is facilitated *not* by government subsidy nor supported wage arrangements, but by making employing a person with a disability as *normal as any other person's employment*, with the genuine and applied use of flexible working arrangements, results only work environments and paid internship programs as a point of entry to the service, and to a long lasting and durable career path.

That means:

1. The introduction of real flexible working arrangements, teleworking, job sharing, part time work, and assistive technology compatibility enabling an equal playing field for people with a disability who have skills and qualifications.
2. Paid internships – similar to graduate employment programs – are adopted by all employers both private and public sector.
3. Research has proven time and time again that people with a disability take *less* sick leave, make *less* workers' compensation claims, are *more* loyal to a company/agency, are *equally* as qualified and able to undertake a job as anybody else *given the right flexible working conditions and reasonable adjustments*.

We suggest the need for outcomes based assessments of any policy or program on an annual basis, to prioritise the issue.

RECOMMENDATION 7

That review and assessment of every policy or program which is intended to raise the employment rates of people with a disability in the ACT Government sector be done every 12 months and reported on in the ACT Government's annual reporting process and made publicly available. The assessments should be done as an outcomes based audit process and made available to the Legislative Assembly and the public.

6. The applicability to the ACT Public Service, of recommendations and findings from the report *Employing people with disability in the APS* published by the University of Canberra

Unfortunately, to date, the recommendations of this report as applied in the federal public sector appear to be limited. To genuinely implement the recommendations of this report, positive discrimination is necessary, and must be facilitated and funded.

There are several parts of the *Employing people with disability in the APS* report that are outdated.

- 1 It does not include private companies such as Enabled Employment being a source of candidates for positions advertised – only DES providers.

- 2 Unpaid work experience for people with a disability is inappropriate. The APS does not provide unpaid work experience for any other disadvantaged group. Why people with a disability? This perpetuates the expectation that people with a disability will work for nothing or less than their abled counterparts with the same skills and qualifications.
- 3 The APSC uses its 'State of the Service' report to release information as it sees fit, not to accurately report on all equity arrangements. The federal government used to release an Access and Equity report annually, which focussed on multicultural employment, but did not report on disability. The State of the Service report has not released any information on the number of people with a disability employed as yet.
- 4 There has, equally, been no reporting on the amount of training given to recruitment panels on how to conduct an accessible interview.
- 5 Despite acknowledging flexible working arrangements as part of the solution to raising disability employment levels, the federal government's flexible working arrangements are more difficult to access. Flexible working in the federal government context does not seem to include job sharing, part time work or results only work environments.
- 6 The report (as interpreted by the federal government) immediately perpetuates the expectation of under performance by assuming that the person with the disability will not be able to undertake the duties of their position and therefore be put on the Supported Wage System. This is open to abuse by managers who are not aware of other options such as job redesign, flexible working, home based work, job sharing, results only work environments or part-time work.
- 7 The report (as interpreted by the federal government) blames underreporting of disability for the ever plummeting rate of disability in its ranks. The failure of the federal government to *make it safe to disclose* and the lack of flexible working arrangements is at fault, not the lack of APS 1-2 positions, nor the inability to collect data on disability in its ranks. Data can be collected anonymously, without individuals having to disclose.
- 8 Accessibility arrangements are limited for the APS, including many websites not conforming to W3C standards.
- 9 No report is available on the compatibility of APS information technology systems being compatible with screen readers for visually impaired workers. Anecdotal evidence available to Enabled Employment indicates that people

with visual impairment were made redundant from the APS because new technology introduced was incompatible with screen readers, and it was 'cheaper' to make employees redundant than invest in making systems compatible with assistive technology.

Lessons can be learned from the reaction of the federal public sector to genuinely implement the recommendations of this report. The ACT Government has an opportunity to do this right, as opposed to the federal public sector, who have failed to raise the number of people with a disability in their ranks.

RECOMMENDATION 8

That the ACT Government reassess this report in their own terms, using genuine community consultation with appropriate community and private sector groups, to form a real and durable strategy for the future of employment for people with a disability in both the public and private sectors in the ACT.

7. Gender related matters that intersect with the employment of people with disabilities

Nil.

8. Any other relevant matter.

Enabled Employment made a submission to the Department of Social Services review of the Disability Employment Services in which we suggested a major media campaign to challenge the stereotypes. Many have tried and failed, but there has never been a co-ordinated effort between government, not-for-profits and the private sector to get across the salient facts:

- People with a disability take less sick leave than other workers
- People with a disability make less workers' compensation claims
- People with a disability are more loyal to their employer
- People with a disability are just as skilled and qualified, and produce better results than their co-workers given the right reasonable adjustments and flexible working conditions.
- The average cost of employing a person with a disability in making reasonable adjustments is \$600, for which there is a federal government grant available.

Discrimination against those currently in employment

There are several components which can lead to the loss of employment for those people with a disability who are currently successfully employed.

a) Disclosure of an invisible disability

Disclosure of an invisible disability, particularly one that is episodic in nature, such as a mental health condition – for example – can lead to discrimination. Due to stereotyping by work colleagues and employers, the fear remains that disclosure of an invisible disability can often spell the end of your job. Disclosing carries a great deal of fear, because of the overwhelmingly negative implications for a person's career or job future.

b) People are unaware of what constitutes disability discrimination.

Example:

An office kitchen – a basic facility for any office – is protected by heavy fire doors. Glass ones, but heavy. There is a person in the office who has difficulty accessing the kitchen because of the weight of the doors. He has a walking cane, and cannot open the door of the kitchen because he has no free hand if he is carrying either his lunch or his coffee cup.

Employer's initial reaction:

The employer's initial reaction is that the reasonable adjustment needed is to automate the fire doors to open. This is an expensive adjustment, and the office can't afford it.

The actual reasonable adjustment needed:

If the employer had asked the person with the walking cane how to solve the problem, they would have advised a shelf set on the wall beside the door, 10 x 20 cm, would be sufficient to allow him to put his lunch or coffee cup down on the shelf, freeing up a hand to open the door to the kitchen. Solution cost: \$10-20.

c) The importance of flexible work

Flexible work conditions such as home based work (telework) or flexible hours outside core hours can sometimes be seen as a 'privilege' and not extended to those who need home based work or a results only work

environment. There needs to be an enforceable model of reasonable adjustment in the workplace if people with a disability are to genuinely be able to join, and stay in, the workforce. The 'medical' model of disability is applied, to force a person with a disability to conform to the office nine to five regime. If the 'social' model⁸ of disability were routinely applied, then there wouldn't be such a high unemployment rate for people with a disability.

d) **Dispel the myths**

A full marketing stack about disability discrimination as an awareness raising exercise for the entire country would assist greatly in alleviating the stereotypes that exist in the minds of employers and colleagues of a person with a disability.

e) **Make it enforceable.**

Enforceable laws with criminal penalties would also ensure that discrimination is reduced.

Conclusion:

Systemic change in terms of disability discrimination is not only about people with a disability – it is also about the attitudes of those *without* disability.

The social model of disability should be explained in simple, clear terms so that employers know the principles of reasonable adjustment are much broader than simply providing assistive technology, or putting in a wheelchair ramp.

The cost of reasonable adjustment is often understood to be in the thousands of dollars rather than the average \$600 per person it actually costs. Employers need education on this issue to ensure that at interview for a job this is not an issue at all.

A full marketing stack including television, radio and print materials distributed to every employer in Australia might sound impossible, but that's what we'd like to see. Until attitudes towards people with a disability change, there is no hope of finding or sustaining employment, and no hope of attitude change within the ACT or the rest of Australia.

⁸ <http://www.pwd.org.au/student-section/the-social-model-of-disability.html>