Manager's Disability Inclusion Toolkit

Helping you shape an inclusive employee experience for people with disability

NSW GOVERNMENT

Acknowledgement of Country

The New South Wales Public Service Commission acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that contributed to the development of this Strategy.

We advise this resource may contain images, voices or names of deceased persons in photographs, film, audio recordings or historical content.

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I want to learn more about disability

What Is Disability?

Disability includes long-term physical, mental health, intellectual, neurological or sensory differences which, in interaction with various attitudinal and environmental barriers, may hinder full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Many disabilities are not visible, such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, diabetes or dyslexia.

Disability is a natural part of human diversity and everybody is likely to experience disability at some point in life. Disability may be present from birth, acquired due to illness or accident, or come about with time as a result of age.

Get to know the person and follow their lead

Each person's disability and experience of it is unique; we can't assume two people with the same type of disability have the same needs. People with disability have diverse experiences, views and preferences.

A person may see their disability as part of their identity or as separate to who they are. Get to know the individual. Follow the person's lead on language preferences related to disability. If in doubt, use 'person with disability' or 'people with disability'.

There are many types of disability:

Physical

Physical disability occurs where a person has physical impairment associated with a structure, function or condition of the body, that limits their physical functioning, mobility, stamina or dexterity. People with physical disability may find tasks more challenging and require more time, aids or process adjustments. Physical disability may be present from birth or acquired through accident, injury or illness.

Examples include spinal cord injury, loss of or missing body part, dwarfism, finger fusion, cerebral palsy, impairment from severe burns, spina bifida, or muscular dystrophy.

Sensory

Sensory disability occurs where one or more of a person's senses is impaired: touch, hearing, sight, taste, smell, or spatial awareness. Sensory disability is defined by the degree of impairment of the sense.

Examples include deafness or hard of hearing, sensory processing disorder, blind and low vision.

Intellectual

Intellectual disability occurs where a person has cognitive impairment (from birth or childhood) and experiences limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour. It may arise with chromosomal differences such as Trisomy 21 (Down Syndrome); or through accident or injury. There are wide variations in intellectual disability and degree of impact on daily living.

Neurodevelopmental

Neurodevelopmental disability occurs where the brain has developed differently and affects the way the person communicates and interacts with the world. This includes autism spectrum, which may include:

- challenges with communicating and interacting with others
- repetitive behaviours, moving their body in different ways
- strong interest in one topic or subject
- unusual reactions to sensory input, such as reactions to noise, smells, or being touched
- preferences for routines and dislike of change.

Some people with autism have co-existing conditions such as epilepsy, sleep difficulties and anxiety.

Neurological

Neurological disability occurs where a person has damage or degeneration of nerve cells in the central nervous system, occurring after birth.

Examples include some types of epilepsy, Alzheimer's disease, multiple sclerosis, Huntington's disease and Parkinson's disease.

Psychosocial

Psychosocial disability describes disability that may arise from nervous or emotional conditions, memory problems or periods of confusion, social or behavioural difficulties which cause restrictions in everyday activities.

This includes people living with an ongoing mental health condition, such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, or condition associated with brain injury and stroke. Psychosocial disability is not about a diagnosis, but rather the impact on functioning and barriers that may be faced by someone living with these ongoing health conditions.

Learning disability or specific learning difficulty

Learning disability or difficulty occurs where a person has altered brain functioning that generally arises from genetic and/or neurobiological factors that impact how the brain processes information for learning.

These processing issues can interfere with learning particular skills (such as reading) in the typical manner. For some, it may impact higher level skills such as organisation, time planning, memory and attention. The most common is dyslexia.

Chronic illness or condition

A person may have a chronic illness or condition with persistent significant impacts on their functioning in daily life activities such as mobility, self-care or communication. Examples can include arthritis, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, emphysema, osteoporosis and stroke.

Mental health conditions

Mental health conditions are a group of health issues that significantly affect thinking and emotion regulation processes, impacting mood, behaviour or the way they perceive the world. Mental health conditions are diagnosed according to standard criteria. While everyone experiences strong feelings at times, for people with mental health conditions these may become so invasive and overwhelming that they have difficulty functioning in day-to-day activities, such as work, leisure, and relationships.

Causes involve complex interaction of factors including genetics, individual factors, biological factors, how the brain works and/or develops through childhood experience, trauma and exposure to extreme or persistent stress.

Examples include depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia nervosa.

Want to learn more?

- Australian Network on Disability

- Disability: Ask us anything – YouTube

- Australian Human Rights Commission - Workers with a mental illness - a practical guide for managers

What type of barriers do people with disability experience?

In 2008 Australia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD), a human rights treaty designed to protect the rights and dignity of people with disability.

The CRPD is based on the social model of disability, which underlines that 'disability' results from the interaction between persons with impairments and societal barriers.

In employment environments, these barriers can be categorised as:

- **Attitudinal barriers:** lack of knowledge and understanding, lack of confidence of recruiters and hiring managers, low expectations, and/or fear of making a mistake.

- **Systemic barriers:** job descriptions, application processes, built environment barriers, lack of time and resources, lack of 'straight-through' processes, and/or complexity of employment service programs and providers.

- **Structural disadvantage:** education, work experience and discrimination.

Want to learn more?

- [Learn more about types of barriers people with disability experience.](#)

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) – a human rights treaty designed to protect the rights and dignity of people with disability.

How can I remove recruitment barriers?

Design inclusive job adverts

- Add welcome wording in advertisements. Example: 'Applicants with disability are welcome to apply' or 'Adjustments can be made during recruitment and on the job'.

- Include a statement on valuing a diverse workforce and inclusive hiring practices.

- Use plain language – no internal jargon or acronyms.

- Give options on ways people can communicate with the job contact person – for example, direct phone and email – to allow for varied communication needs.

- Reach out to potential candidates with disability through specialist disability employment services (DES) or by partnering with disability peak bodies or providers.

Provide more information in the application process

- Include information about how candidates will be assessed during recruitment so candidates can identify if they may need an adjustment during the process.

- Include information to highlight adjustments that can be made.

- List more than one method of reaching the contact person for the role, such as a direct phone number and email, to accommodate different communication needs in your candidate pool.

- Provide another contact person, who is not a member of the assessment panel, to discuss individual needs for adjustments. An independent contact can provide candidates with confidence that their adjustment needs won't disadvantage them when being considered for a role.

- Specify any job-related essential medical or physical requirements – for example, manual handling.

- Make the information pack accessible in varied formats, such as easy read or large print formats.

Update role descriptions to remove unintended barriers

- Think 'inclusion' in job design by reviewing the job requirements to remove unnecessary or unintended barriers. Focus on essential tasks and standards, rather than how tasks are done.

- Consider the role description essential requirements carefully – are they truly necessary to deliver the required outcomes?

- Consider the skills and attributes that are truly essential to the role. Some requirements such as a current driver's licence or good communication skills may not be essential to carrying out the role and will exclude some people with disability from applying.

- Specify job-related **essential** medical or physical requirements.

Customise a job role with a person with disability in mind

- Job customisation involves reallocating certain tasks or duties of a role to other team members or creating a customised role for a particular candidate, also known as 'job carving'.

- Consider customising a role for people with disability that utilises strengths and brings benefits to the organisation. For example, a person with intellectual disability may be an ideal candidate for work tasks that are repetitive and concrete – tasks like setting up and packing away meeting/training rooms, meet and greets, restocking supplies, data entry, etc.

- When customising a role, work with the person to understand the work implications and co-design solutions that suit their individual circumstances, and business and team outcomes.

- Ensure the role contains the optimal mix of tasks for the time available yet remains challenging and with career potential and development opportunities.

Make the assessment process work for all candidates

- Build an inclusive assessment process for all that does not disadvantage nor focus on candidates with disability.

- Think ahead to be flexible about possible adjustments as candidates may not say they have a disability in advance.

- Provide information to all candidates on the assessment type and process.

- Ask all candidates when booking interviews and assessments if they need any adjustments

- Reassure applicants that asking for adjustments will not disadvantage them and that the public sector is an inclusive employer.

- Ensure assessment/interview locations are accessible.

- Avoid discriminatory question styles. Don't ask a candidate with disability:
  – What disability do you have?
  – How did you acquire your disability?
  – How will your disability affect your ability to do this job?

- Ask questions **equitably to all candidates**, such as:
  – Can you safely perform all the requirements of this job?
  – How would you go about the tasks in this job?
  – Will you need any changes or adjustments to the workplace to perform this job?

- As with all candidates, give specific, constructive feedback so people know the actions they could take or type of experience they need to gain.

What are some examples of recruitment adjustments?

Most candidates with disability will not require any adjustments during recruitment. Sometimes it may be necessary to make a few changes to the assessment process to remove any barriers and enable a person with disability to fully participate.

Some examples of adjustments include:

- providing a different way to assess the required capabilities to perform the role – fors example, asking the candidate to do a scenario-based written assessment instead of a psychometric assessment or interview

- adapting the assessment format – for example, allowing the candidate to respond to interview questions in writing

- allowing candidates to use their own laptop or assistive technology, such as screen readers, preferred screen settings, a vision board, or mouse

- ensuring the interview and assessment room meets individual needs – good lighting, reduced noise, interview seating arrangements

- providing an Auslan interpreter, sound amplification devices such as hearing loops, or Text Telephone (TTY).

It's important to be aware of potential barriers posed by cognitive testing and other forms of online assessments.

- Assessments completed within a time limit are less accessible for people who have anxiety disorders, read slowly, have manual dexterity challenges or require frequent rest breaks.

- Online assessments may be incompatible with screen reader software.

- People with dyslexia may have difficulty accessing written materials and online assessments.

- A person with neurodiversity, anxiety disorders or a speech or hearing impairment may have difficulty participating in group discussions.

If there is doubt about the accessibility of an assessment for the candidate, provide an opportunity to preview a version of the material. For online assessments, ask the assessment vendor for a link to a practice test where they can complete some sample items to determine whether the assessment is accessible to them – for example, whether it works with their screen reader software.

Discuss the adjustment needs of candidates with disability with your HR business partner or assessment vendor.

Use Rule 26 of the *Government Sector Employment (General) Rules 2014* to modify recruitment and selection practices

While it's important for all recruitment practices to be inclusive and barrier free, NSW government sector agencies can use Rule 26 of the *Government Sector Employment (General) Rules 2014*) to change their recruitment and selection process to help employ people from designated groups in non-executive roles. People with disability are one of the designated groups.

Rule 26 allows you to make changes to advertising requirements and assessment processes, such as:

- advertising through a specialised job board which also counts as external advertising for offering employment

- reducing the number of capability-based assessments

- removing the interview and focus on inclusive work sample tests or a presentation

- removing the requirement for a written component of the application, allowing candidates to submit a resume instead

- using one or two assessors instead of three or more

- conducting group interviews and work skills tests

- using a staged interview process instead of traditional interviews to assess person's ability to perform the inherent role requirements.

Before modifying an assessment process, consider any adjustments that could be made as standard practice to enable a person to fully participate in a selection process.

Want to learn more?

- Tips and resources for inclusive recruitment practices | NSW Public Service Commission

- Role design - inherent and essential requirements - NSW Public Service Commission

- Applying Rule 26 to facilitate employment of people with disability - NSW Public Service Commission

What are workplace adjustments?

Workplace adjustments are changes to work processes, practices or environments that enable a person with disability to:

- perform to the best of their ability
- work productively
- work in a safe environment
- feel included in the workplace
- increase their engagement and motivation to improve performance.

Adjustments can include changes to recruiting methods, equipment, work practices and environment, and may change as people's needs change.

Most adjustments are simple to arrange and involve little cost. What's most important is for people to have what they need and be able to participate in the workplace on an equal basis with others.

Having the mindset of 'How can we make this work for you and the organisation?' is a positive way of looking for simple or creative ways to meet both individual and organisational needs.

Simply ask the person 'What do you need?' or 'What will work for you?'

Some examples of workplace adjustments:

Role design

Making adjustments for a person with disability may require you to re-think the tasks in the employee's role, where and when the work takes place and how it is arranged.

Consider whether:

- all the requirements of the role are essential, or just 'nice to have'. Focus on the outcomes that need to be achieved rather than how work has been done in the past.
- co-workers can exchange tasks or non-essential job tasks can be removed.

People's needs can change during their employment. A person can acquire a disability, or their existing disability can change over time. This may impact their ability or capacity to do certain tasks they would normally do in the role.

In these cases, it's important to support them by considering different ways the work can be done. This may involve adjusting a role that balances an individual's needs and organisational outcomes that still need to be achieved.

Similarly, the nature of some disabilities, such as mental health conditions or a degenerative condition, may mean that the employee requires a temporary role adjustment.

Flexible working

Flexible working is another type of workplace adjustment for employees with disability. People with disability have a right to ask for flexible work arrangements, and employers cannot discriminate against people with a disability, including when considering a request for flexible work.

Flexible work can help to improve wellbeing and allow people to better manage their disability. This is an important thing to remember, especially during the pandemic. People with disability need to be considered in the response to COVID-19 in the workplace.

Flexible work may include:

- frequent breaks during the day
- hot-desking at alternate locations closer to home
- working from home
- flexible start and finish times
- flexible rostering.

Flexible work can help with work/life balance, parenting of children, spending time with family, taking time to recover from illness or surgery and caring for family members who are sick or have a disability. It can also improve productivity at work.

The best way to find out what might help is to ask the employee who needs it. They'll be the expert on their needs and what will work for them.

The *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* (NSW) and *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) are also relevant as they allow for workplace adjustments for employees covered by these acts.

Want to learn more?

- Information and guidance on how to redesign a role
- Building a flexible working culture; A conversation guide for managers
- Webinar: Flexibility and Role Design for employees with disability

Workplace practice adjustments

- Provide an Auslan interpreter for training, meetings, reviews, interviews
- Positioning work area/desk to reduce background noise
- Braille signage in communal work locations, such as meeting rooms or a kitchen
- Parking space close to the work location for an employee with mobility issues
- Provide accessible meetings and one-on-ones – always make sure everyone in your team is included in an equitable way
- Work at the same desk rather than hot-desking
- Work area lighting
- Visual cues for key procedures
- Allocated quiet time space
- Provide a support person or mentor
- Structured thinking templates, such as for planning daily work priorities
- Arrange an emergency buddy system (for example, in the event of a fire for person with autism/vision impairment/intellectual disability).

Workplace environment adjustments

- Provide an occupational therapist assessment, ergonomic desk and chair assessment
- Add Braille signage in communal work locations like meeting rooms, photocopier area and the kitchen
- Provide a parking space close to the work location for an employee who uses a wheelchair or has mobility issues
- Use of assistive technology and equipment, such as:
  - built-in accessibility features on devices (phones, computers, laptops, iPads, tablets)
  - reading software such as text-to-speech, speech recognition, screen reading, screen magnification, captions
  - adjustable equipment, including monitors, tables, chairs, mouse and keyboard
  - refreshable braille displays for reading text
  - adaptive switches that enable people to use technology
  - noise reducing headphones.

Be an advocate!

Lead the way and advocate for accessibility to be built into all work practices and environments, including the procurement of goods and services.

Did you know?

The federal government **JobAccess Employment Assistance Fund (EAF)** gives financial help to eligible people with disability and employers to buy work-related modifications, equipment, Auslan services, workplace assistance and support services.

[Learn more about the EAF](#).

Lead the way and advocate for accessibility to be built into all work practices and environments, including the procurement of goods and services.

Want to learn more?

- Workplace adjustments - NSW Public Service Commission

- Assistive technology catalogue and Accessible ICT - NSW Public Service Commission

- Government accessibility standards for ICT - buy. nsw

How can I create a positive employee experience?

You can:

- make a time to talk ahead of the person's start date and explore their needs for adjustments and preferences

- put any adjustments in place from day one

- ask all new employees if they need any disability-related adjustments at work.

Examples of questions may include

- 'What works best for you to start well in the workplace and team?'

- 'How much or little do you like to share with others about adjustments or disability information? It's your choice whether to share any information. I'll be guided by you on that.'

- 'What works for you for communication and information systems at work?'

- 'What works for you for using all areas of the workplace?'

- 'What works for you for meetings and group events?'

- 'What works best for you in the event of an emergency at work?'

These are suggestions only and not a script, so avoid a barrage of questions. Simply ask the most relevant questions for the individual's circumstances to create a positive start in the workplace and team.

Encourage the new employee to let you know if they identify any other needed adjustments once they have settled in, and check-in with the person regularly on this.
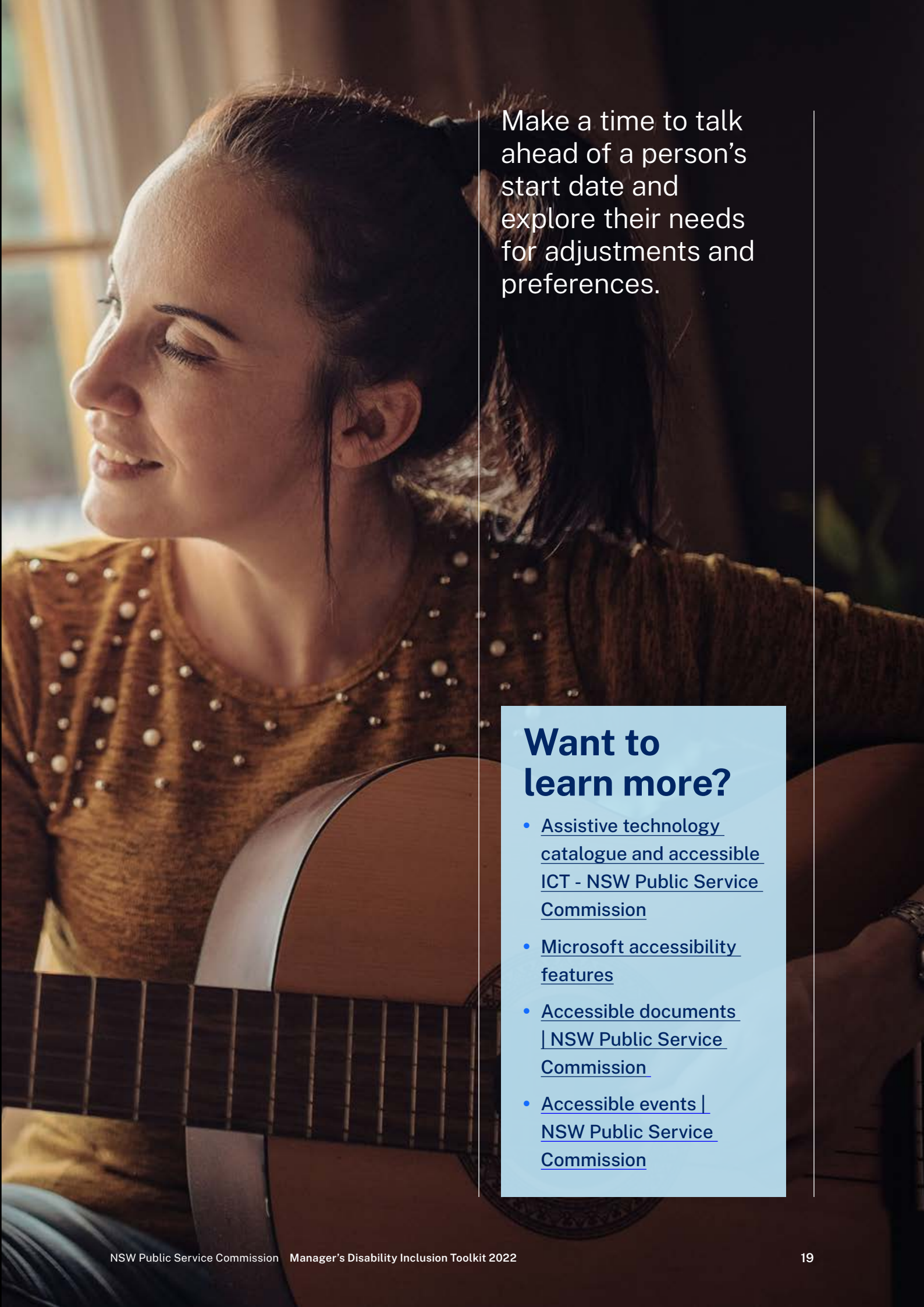
What type of accessibility issues should I be aware of?

There are many types of accessibility issues that create barriers for people with disability.

Some examples of barriers include:

- physical access to and within buildings and facilities such as meeting rooms, kitchens, amenities, emergency exits

- information, content and communications

- activities and events

- processes and procedures

- technology (including digital technology), corporate systems and equipment.

Remember, a disability inclusive workplace is an accessible workplace for everyone, where people with disability don't experience disadvantage or barriers in doing their work or in the workplace.

Make a time to talk ahead of a person's start date and explore their needs for adjustments and preferences.

Want to learn more?

- Assistive technology catalogue and accessible ICT - NSW Public Service Commission
- Microsoft accessibility features
- Accessible documents | NSW Public Service Commission
- Accessible events | NSW Public Service Commission

What should I consider for performance and career development discussions?

Create equitable opportunities and support career aspirations

- Ask about aspirations as for any employee, then focus on capability steps to get there and any adjustments needed to remove barriers.

- If an employee's career goals seem unachievable, first check your own assumptions are not limiting the employee with disability.

- Breaking the career goal down into steps and tackling the first steps first can assist an employee to test out for themselves whether the main career goal will be achievable.

- Ensure employees with disability have equal access to the range of opportunities including career development programs, secondments, on the job training and formal training.

- Create opportunities for teamwork and collaboration to build working relationships and confidence, stretch the person's capabilities and provide new experiences. This can also help break down stereotypes and bias that other employees may have about disability.

- Support the employee to expand their network to achieve career goals, including general networks plus employees with disability networks.

- Arrange mentoring for the employee. As they grow in experience, employees with disability should be considered as potential mentors for other employees.

- Discuss and prioritise work goals – focusing on outcomes. Discuss adjustments so they can perform at their best.

Build trust, have expectations and provide constructive feedback

- Get to know the person, their strengths and areas that need developing. Establishing trust is especially important for some people with disability who may feel more vulnerable if they are managing sensitive disability and chronic health conditions, that can also change over time.

- Show empathy and support the person by asking if any adjustments are needed to agreed work goals and objectives during challenging times associated with fluctuating or episodic disability.

- Provide and seek constructive feedback, as for any employee. Constructive feedback is vital to developing individuals and their performance. Focus on outcomes and essential job requirements. Seek feedback to check

if your management support is working for the employee with disability to achieve their best.

- There may be times when a person's performance may not be meeting expectations or the role requirements.
  - Sensitively ask the person if there is anything that may be impacting their performance, rather than asking questions on whether their disability is impacting their performance
  - Having regular discussions are important to understand if the person is encountering barriers or other issues that may be impacting their work
  - As with any team member, it's important to discuss how to resolve the issue and agree on the next steps to be taken.
- Ensure expectations of the employee with disability are fair, as long as you regularly check with the employee their adjustments are working well for them.

- Ensure fair processes for performance reviews, including workplace adjustments (e.g., Auslan interpreter or job coach support person for such important meeting).
- Manage underperformance fairly – focus on essential requirements and outcomes and be open to negotiate on how tasks to achieve these happen. Always check your own assumptions are not creating a barrier.
- For ongoing performance issues, people with disability are subject to the same ongoing poor performance processes as people without disability. However, you should first check the person is not experiencing disadvantage or any form of discrimination in the workplace that may be negatively impacting their performance.
- Never make performance comparisons between employees with the same disability type. Always take a person-centred approach. Remember, every person's disability and experience of it is unique and impacts for work vary greatly.

How can I create a safe space for sharing disability information?

You can:

- respect an individual's right and choice – there is no legal obligation for the person to share information about their disability, unless it is likely to impact their performance, ability to do the job's essential requirements or to work safely

    - If a person shares their disability information with you, you cannot share this information with others unless the person gives their permission. A person's disability and health information must be kept secure and confidential in line with Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 (NSW) (HRIP Act).

- build and demonstrate trust and form a relationship so the person feels safe to share information with you. Respond with interest when disability information is shared with you.

- give signals that you are interested and willing to support individual needs.

- normalise conversations about mental health, disability and that support for inclusion is available to everyone.

Words and actions matter

Your words and actions have a major impact on whether a person has a positive or negative experience at work. Most of the things you can do are quite simple.

Make the commitment to be an inclusive manager by removing barriers and creating positive work experiences for all team members.

Set the tone by taking actions that include and enable all to give their best at work.

- Use respectful appropriate language around disability and make sure to equally include all team members in the life of the team.

- Develop your team's disability confidence and inclusive behaviours – for example, ask your team to do the disability awareness training that is available online for NSW public sector employees.

- Call out inappropriate language and exclusion behaviour of others.

- Talk about disability as being part of human diversity.

- Build and maintain trust with individuals who choose to share their disability information.

- Remove barriers and be flexible for individual needs.

Where to start?

Start by asking...

"What can I do today to show my commitment to being an inclusive and supportive manager?"

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Manager's Guide to
Disability Inclusion Toolkit

Access this toolkit online at:
www.psc.nsw.gov.au

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