DOING IT DIFFERENTLY
STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF THE BARRIERS TO WORKPLACE PARTICIPATION EXPERIENCED BY PUBLIC SERVANTS WITH DISABILITY IN THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

MARK EVANS, MEREDITH EDWARDS, CARMEL McGREGOR AND PENNEY UPTON
CONTENTS

04 Acknowledgements
05 About the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis
06 About the Authors
08 Acronyms
09 Prologue: – selected perceptions of people with disability
11 Executive Summary
24 1. Introduction
26 2. What the existing evidence tells us
38 3. Research methods
41 4. Research Findings
62 5. In Conclusion – doing it differently
66 6. References
70 ANNEX A: Recruitment Guide for Focus Groups
71 ANNEX B: Focus Group Schedules
77 ANNEX C: Quantitative Survey Questionnaire
81 ANNEX D: Focus Group Perceptions of the State of Play and the Way Forward

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figures
20 Figure ES1: Barriers to workplace participation experienced by people with disability
40 Figure 1: Declared disabilities
63 Figure 2: Barriers to workplace participation experienced by people with disability

Tables
39 Table 1: Roles and disability status of respondents
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project forms part of a broader program of research on disability policy in Australia which began in 2014. Members of the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis (IGPA) at the University of Canberra were concerned to build on the gains of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and heighten public awareness of the need for disability policy reform in Australia. A Reference Group consisting of David Brady (Deafness Forum of Australia), Laurie Brown (Professor, IGPA), Meredith Edwards AM (Emeritus Professor IGPA), Mark Evans (Director, IGPA), Josh Fear (Mental Health Australia), Owen Livermore (Australian Public Service Commission), Keith Mahar (Mental Illness Education ACT), Carmel McGregor (Adj. Professor IGPA and Institute for Public Administration Australia), Christina Ryan (Advocacy for Inclusion), Sue Salthouse (Women with Disabilities ACT) and Veronica Wensing (ACT Community Services Directorate), Jane Flanagan (National Ethnic Disability Alliance), Tony Davidson (Australian Human Rights Commission), and, Trish Gray (UC PhD student), was set up to oversee the work. With the guidance of that Group, IGPA sponsored a Parliamentary Triangle Seminar in October 2014 on the topic of ‘Disability Policy Reform – Confronting the realities’. The seminar explored the extent to which current initiatives in disability policy reform enabled people with disability to participate in our society. Speakers emphasized the importance of enabling greater participation and in particular focused on the barriers they faced. Soon after, the Reference Group discovered that there was no qualitative research at the Commonwealth level on barriers to workplace participation experienced by people with disability in the Australian Public Service (APS) and sought to build partnerships with Commonwealth departments and agencies to redress the imbalance.

We are extremely fortunate to have had the ability to complete this report at this particular moment in the history of disability policy in Australia. There is a distinct sense of renewal occurring in Australia; a recognition of the need for change tempered by acceptance that there is still much to do to break through the barriers. We would therefore like to express our gratitude to those collaborators who have helped us define the challenge for reform and map some potential pathways to its achievement. Firstly, to our passionate and creative Reference Group, thank you for your dedication and creativity. Secondly, to our inspirational Reference Group Chair, Meredith Edwards AM, many thanks for your leadership.

Special thanks must also be conveyed to our research team – Meredith Edwards AM, Penney Upton, Carmel McGregor PSM, and Katie Singleton. Penney’s role as project manager has been absolutely invaluable to meeting our research aims. As always, however, the interpretation of data in the analysis which follows remains the sole responsibility of the lead investigator.

Professor Mark Evans

1. Speakers included Graeme Innes AM, former Disability Commissioner with the Australian Human Rights Commission, Sue Salthouse, 2015 ACT Senior Woman of the Year, John Walsh AM, previously consulting with the Productivity Commission on disability reform and Liz Carr, Director of Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (VMIAC).
ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNANCE AND POLICY ANALYSIS

The Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis at the University of Canberra was established in January 2014 to harness the research strengths of the ANZSOG Institute for Governance (ANZSIG), the Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance (CDG) led by the Australian Laureate Professor John Dryzek and the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM). The aim of the Institute is to create and sustain an international class research institution for the study and practice of governance and public policy. The Institute has a strong social mission committed to the production of leading edge research and research driven education programs with genuine public value and, by implication, policy impact.

The integration of ANZSIG, CDG and NATSEM has created exciting opportunities for the development of cutting edge, mixed methods research in governance and public policy analysis through combining knowledge in institutional design with expertise in qualitative and quantitative methods, evaluation, micro-simulation and policy modelling. It has also allowed us to assemble probably the largest critical mass of governance and public policy scholars in Australia and an eminent adjunct faculty which includes 14 award winning members of the Commonwealth Senior Executive Service and the world of political communication.

Policy changes often have to be made without sufficient information about either the current environment or the consequences of change. IGPA aims to be a key contributor to social and economic policy debate and analysis by undertaking independent and impartial research of the highest quality, including supplying valued consultancy services. In keeping with IGPA’s core mission, many of our research projects have had significant policy impact and led to changes in policy.
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Meredith Edwards AM** has seen an extensive career as a professor, researcher and senior policy analyst. She is best known for developing policies around AUSTUDY, Child Support, HECS and long-term unemployment initiatives and was a Deputy Secretary in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Meredith was also a member of the Wran Committee on Higher Education Funding (1988-1989) and was awarded the Order of Australia (AM) in 1992. She was appointed Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canberra in August 1997-2002 when she also became Professor. In 1999 she became Director of the National Institute for Governance at the University of Canberra, a position she held until 2004. Meredith trained as an economist, is a Fellow of the Institute of Public Administration Australia, Fellow of ANZSOG, Fellow of the Academy of Social Science Australia and Member, Committee of Experts on Public Administration, United Nations. She is currently Emeritus Professor, in the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis at the University of Canberra.

**Professor Mark Evans** is currently the Director of the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis and Professor of Governance at the University of Canberra. His research focuses on governance and policy analysis. He is the author or co-author of 25 books including the best-selling politics book in Australia in 2011; The Rudd Government. Mark was previously, Professor of Government, Head of the Department of Politics and Provost of Halifax College at the University of York, UK. He was also the inaugural coordinator of the Worldwide Universities Public Policy Network and has edited the international journal Policy Studies since 2005. Mark has acted as a senior policy advisor, delivered leadership training and managed evaluation projects in 26 countries including Australia, Brazil, China and the United Kingdom and for international organisations including the European Union, the UN and the World Bank. He has been awarded honorary research positions at the Universities of Bath, Hull, and York in the UK and Renmin in China and is an IPAA Council member.

**Carmel McGregor PSM** is an adjunct Professor at IGPA University of Canberra. Carmel is the former Deputy Secretary People in the Department of Defence. Carmel’s previous position was that of Deputy Australian Public Service Commissioner (APSC). During this period she was a member of the Prime Minister’s Advisory Group on the Reform. During 2011 she led a review entitled ‘Pathways for APS Women’ in Defence. Prior to joining the APSC in 2008, Carmel was Deputy Secretary, Client and Corporate Services in the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). From 2008 to 2012 Carmel was Australia’s representative and Vice Chair of the OECD’s Public Governance Committee. She is a Fellow of the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI) and non-executive director of the AHRI Board, a Fellow and Vice President of
Institute of Public Administration Australia in the ACT, a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management, a member of Australian Institute of Training and Development and a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. In 2013, she was awarded the inaugural Public Policy AFR/Westpac 100 Women of Influence award.

Recently arrived from the United Kingdom, Dr Penney Upton is a Chartered Psychologist and senior researcher with over 20 years of research experience. She has a particular interest in the impact of health on individual wellbeing across the lifespan and has led projects related to quality of life and wellbeing in chronic illness, disability, and long-term conditions. Her expertise includes the application of qualitative and quantitative research methods, attitude surveys and psychometric measurement and interventions to support behaviour change at an individual and group level. Dr Upton has published widely on topics related to chronic illness, behaviour change and workplace performance. Study findings have resulted in changes to policy and strategy both locally and nationally in the UK.
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What is disability?
Physical and mental… I think people make the assumption that if you have a disability it has to be visual, like you can see the disability (Public servant without disability).

This is usually defined as someone who has an ongoing condition for six months or more (APS Manager).

Disability is defined in quite broad terms through some sort of impairment or incapacity. In the employment areas, which I work in, disability might be a short-term issue or it might be longer term but the issue of duration is important (Public servant without disability).

…I focus in on the concept of reasonable adjustment. What does any human being need to work in a working environment? Just a shame that it isn’t for everybody. Everybody’s entitled to ask for reasonable adjustment. You shouldn’t have to display a disability before you get it (APS Manager).

How are people with disability treated?
I think it depends on the manager. I’ve recently been blessed with a rather sensitive manager but the last two have been challenging (Public servant with disability).

As it stands at the moment I think there’s a strong perception that if you were to self-disclose having a disability, especially with a mental psychosocial type of disability, there is the strong potential that it will negatively impact on your chances of getting a promotion (Manager).

Depends on your manager and your division (Manager).

My experiences have mostly been positive (Public servant with disability).

What needs to change?
I think there’s a massive cultural problem at the SES level. This is just from my experience and some SES are very, very open and welcoming to diversity… (Manager).
People with disability have to take some responsibility. If we want to be treated as equal we need to be confident in our manager/team leader and disclose so we get what help is needed (Public servant with disability).

I think sometimes managers just don’t know how to do it. They really do not know, they don’t have the understanding or the support to support other people. But I don’t think it’s for lack of people not thinking about it and trying to put things in place to support managers to be able to do that. It’s just a lack of either understanding or having the knowledge or the right focus to help (Public servant with disability).

Managers should be managing each individual personally... I mean differently (Public Servant without disability).

On disclosure
I think, too. it can be workplace culture. I think they might have heard things being said inappropriately about somebody else and they don’t want to get caught in that. It’s partly stigma but it’s also partly a work culture (Public servant without disability).

In terms of disclosing, I mean if people hear such poor experiences, for example, from our indigenous colleagues, or people with families then disclosing disabilities are that much harder (Public servant without disability).
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sometimes you actually try harder but you push yourself a little bit too far because you want to fit in. You want to be the same. You don’t want to be different (Public servant with disability).

It is as if people are uncomfortable with the disabled like a pubescent boy is with approaching the object of their desire (Public servant with disability).

The fact that they don’t want to put more pressure on me and I know I’m ready, that’s very hard to take. They don’t know about my journey. If they knew about the challenges that I’ve met there would be no doubts in their minds (Public servant with disability).

The purpose of this report
This report presents the findings from research conducted in 2015 and 2016 across seven Australian Government departments. It identifies critical dilemmas and generates a series of knowledge claims and practice-based recommendations for the service as a whole.

It is hoped that the findings will provide the Australian Public Service (APS) with: an enhanced understanding of the barriers, challenges and benefits for employees and managers of people with disability; an assessment of the effectiveness of existing policies and protocols; an understanding of the motivations behind an employee’s decision to disclose or not to disclose their disability; and, insights into how better data can be collected on these issues in the future.

Theory and methods
The research team adopted Amartya Sen’s conception of capability as a person’s capacity to use and expand their individual capabilities to meet individual desires and contribute to the betterment of society (Sen, 1999, 2009). This was measured through identifying barriers and enablers to workplace culture, individual capability and organisational capability.

A mixed methods approach to data collection was used as follows:

• qualitative analysis via the delivery of three focus groups in each participating department: one with SES and EL participants; one with a mixture of staff across departmental functions; and a mixed group of public servants who had declared different types of disability at levels of the organisation;
• a quantitative on-line survey was undertaken with all participating departments, in order to validate findings emerging from the qualitative work and to identify any inconsistent knowledge claims; and,
a further quantitative analysis was undertaken of relevant responses on disability to the Australian Public Service Commission’s (APSC) 2014 State of the Service Survey which was conducted across all Australian Government departments. Although it must be noted that we focused on ACT respondents, the survey data provides a further source of validation on emerging knowledge claims.

A comparison was therefore undertaken of workplace participation for those with disability versus those without, to see if people with disability have achieved workplace inclusion. Perceptions of public servants without disability towards those with disability were evaluated to ascertain whether a progressive culture for the advancement of a diversity agenda exists. In sum, these methods allowed us to assess:

(1) how successful Departments and agencies have been in expanding the capabilities of employees experiencing disability and enhancing individual wellbeing.

(2) And, what dimensions of the implementation process for empowering people with disability and enhancing workplace participation are perceived to be effective or not.

**Caveats**

Six caveats need to be made at the outset of this report about the knowledge claims that we can generate from the research findings that follow:

1. Firstly, it must be noted that the participating departments in this research are full of good intentions. There is a palpable sense of the need to do the right things to affect inclusion. Moreover, during the course of the research a range of interventions were introduced by both the APSC and departments to address different aspects of exclusion. However, achieving an inclusive organisational culture remains a significant challenge particularly for those organisations that have achieved a cohesive dominant culture with embedded norms and values. Indeed, there is a danger of building an organisational culture around a concept of high performance that can be perceived by people with disability as exclusionary (see Section 2.3 for a more detailed exposition of this observation).

2. People with disability require greater organisational accommodation to individual needs than most other minority groups.

3. The number of responses for the quantitative survey was small in some departments, thus the views propounded may not be representative of all staff. However they provide data indicative of a range of dilemmas that may need to be considered by the Department.

4. Departments were responsible for the composition of the focus groups and it is not easy to ensure representativeness of opinion in this domain.
5. However, as we are dealing with ‘perceptions’ here, 1,862 perspectives provide a reasonable basis for flushing out perceptions and identifying dilemmas to be addressed through better practice. Moreover, our qualitative and quantitative findings were in keeping with those arising from the 2014 State of the Service Survey.

6. Although departmental actions on disability may be very proactive this is not necessarily reflected in the perceptions of respondents and this research focuses on presenting those perceptions.

**Key findings**

**Defining disability**

1. Certain definitional issues loomed large in focus group discussion. We begin with the proposition reflected in the title of the report that people with a disability working in the APS wish to be regarded not as being provided with special advantages but as *working differently*. This observation should be captured in any new operational definition that emphasizes difference rather than incapacity.

2. The current definition of disability used by the APS needs greater clarity in regard to its treatment of employees with mental or other cognitive barriers.

3. The adjustments requirements of assistive technology need to be integrated into the definition e.g. just because someone has a hearing aid doesn’t mean that their disability has been treated.

**Perceptions on disclosing disability (quantitative)**

4. The majority of public servants who disclosed that they had a disability did so once a job is secured (71%). There is a strong fear of being treated differently (57%) and experiencing different treatment as a consequence (27%). Disclosure is mainly done to achieve adjustments (60%). It is not seen as important if disability does not impact on work (36%). Disclosure is facilitated by a supportive relationship with either a colleague or manager (51%). According to the 2014 State of the Service Survey, there is a lower rate of disclosure in the ACT (47%) than in other states and territories (57%).

**Perceptions on disclosing disability (qualitative)**

*Luckily, I have really good managers that understand that I do have some limitations but they are equally comfortable for me to say what help I need (Public servant with disability).*

*The fact that somebody has a disability, if it doesn’t impact on the ability to do the job, then it’s nobody’s damn business (Public servant with disability).*
5. Positive and negative responses to disclosure were described; positive experiences often ascribed to good fortune and individual management style. It was agreed that disclosure should only be necessary if and when the disability was likely to affect someone’s ability to carry out their duties. The focus group data demonstrate a clear perception that there is a positive relationship between empowerment, confidence and trust. People with disability feel at their most confident when they are empowered with a task that they know they can do well. Time to prepare is also viewed as a critical condition of empowerment. By implication this heightens the level of trust between the individual and the department. Trust is the key to enhancing disclosure.

**Perceptions on barriers and enablers to disclosure (quantitative)**

6. Potential barriers to disclosure include: fear of not being hired/or being fired (42%); it will lead to a focus on disability rather than skills and abilities (49%); it will limit future opportunities (51%); and, disclosure heightens the risk of losing health care benefits (5%).

7. According to the 2014 State of the Service Survey, 48% of people with disability were dissatisfied with opportunities for career progression. This was significantly higher than the dissatisfaction shown by people without disability. In addition 32% of people with disability were dissatisfied with ability to access and use flexible working practices; again significantly higher than the dissatisfaction shown by people without disability. And, more than twice the proportion of people with disability disagreed that their agency supported people who become injured/ill due to work (15% v. 6%).

8. Potential enablers to disclosure include: a disability friendly department (45%); familiarity of HR personnel with disability and accommodations (44%); a fair system in place to resolve complaints (46%); active disability recruitment (36%); recognition of disability in diversity statement (34%); and, flexible working practices (25%).

**Perceptions on barriers and enablers to positive workplace culture (quantitative)**

9. Only four per cent of respondents felt that there were no barriers for people with disability and 45 per cent perceived their department to be inclusive. A fifth perceived there to be evidence of workplace harassment (20%), bullying (20%) and a quarter, exclusion from networks (24%) and evidence of an exclusive culture (26%). In the 2014 State of the Service Survey, 30 per cent of people with disability and 15 per cent of people without disability said they had experienced workplace harassment and bullying. The majority though do not report instances of bullying (62% and 65% respectively).

**Perceptions on barriers and enablers to positive workplace culture (qualitative)**

10. Although some clear examples of bullying were described by participants, unconscious bias and inflexible working practices presented a broader problem:
I don’t see active discrimination against people with disabilities, but I do see inflexibility, or a system that isn’t easy to change (Public servant with disability).

I do not believe this is malicious, just that people are ignorant (Public servant with disability).

Perceptions on barriers and enablers to positive organisational capability (quantitative)

11. In general, the majority perceive there to be sound policies in place to enable public servants with disability to participate in the workplace; for example, general awareness of relevant policy/procedure (65%) and perceptions that policies and procedures are supportive (67%). There is less certainty on the effectiveness of certain policies and on the quality of implementation: 54 per cent view believe that policies and procedures are applied effectively; 55 per cent view recruitment policies as satisfactory; 52 per cent consider training and development satisfactory; 53 per cent perceive general working practices to be satisfactory and 51 per cent are dissatisfied with their Department’s Disability Network.

Perceptions on barriers and enablers to positive organisational capability (qualitative)

12. Another key issue that emerged from the focus groups was the need to increase disability awareness and understanding in the workforce generally, and for managers specifically. Mental Health was identified as one area in particular, where more educational work needed to be implemented. Managers themselves often recognised this gap in their skill-set:

*Education should be mandatory and it should not be online, because you can click through as many pages as you want (APS Manager).*

*There are the disabilities, mental disabilities and things of that nature, which might not be so obvious and just aren’t understood by a lot of people (APS Manager).*

*I don’t feel that I have the tools and maybe I should be reaching out more between determining is that a behaviour that needs to be addressed and trying to provide some support and sort of bring awareness to that (APS Manager).*

Perceptions on barriers and enablers to positive individual capability (quantitative)

13. Two mutually reinforcing barriers impact adversely on individual capability. Unconscious bias is often reflected in general staff and managerial behaviour towards people with disability and is reflected in negative preconceptions of their capability (60%) and perpetuated through a top-down conception of high performance. This leads to lack of self-confidence for the person with disability (41%).
14. Supportive managers and colleagues were seen as key enablers for public servants by around three-quarters of respondent, although a smaller percentage actually felt supported (55% supported by managers and 64% by colleagues). In some departments there was a significant difference experienced in terms of management support between those with and without disability.

15. The 2014 State of the Service Survey 2014 (ACT) reports some worrying trends on the issue of ‘feeling respected’. There is evidence of different experiences between people with disability and those without disability in whether they felt respected by others: 10% of people with disability felt they were never respected, compared to five per cent of those without disability; a further 25% felt they were sometimes respected compared to 19% of those without disability; and, 74% of people with disability felt there was mutual respect in their work group compared to 82% of those without disability.

Perceptions on barriers and enablers to positive individual capability (qualitative)

16. In focus groups, public servants with disability also described a lack of confidence as a significant barrier. It was also perceived that people with disability often had to work harder than others to get the same level of recognition. However, support from managers and colleagues was seen as critical to individual success:

We just get on with our work and we’re not the greatest at up-selling ourselves (Public servant with disability).
I’ve always been of the assumption that you have to be twice as good to be considered half as good (Public servant with disability).

The barriers come down to individuals surrounding the person with a disability. Some people/areas are brilliant. Others just do not give you a chance (Public servant with disability).

The state of play

During the focus groups, staff were asked how they would summarise the current situation for people with disability in their Department (see Annex D). It was noted across most departments that the experiences of people with disability differed a great deal depending on a number of factors including:

- The type of disability, with better outcomes perceived for those with more visible physical disabilities;
- the section in which the person worked;
the capacity/understanding/flexibility of individual line managers;
• whether or not disability is confused with performance;
• the restrictive nature of some policies which are not necessarily inclusive (e.g. ‘Return to Work’, ‘Working from Home’); and,
• how articulate the person with disability is. Public servants that are able to advocate effectively and communicate their support needs clearly are viewed to have better outcomes.

**Achieving progress**

Focus group participants were also asked to identify the one thing that could be changed in their organisation to improve the experience of those with disability (see Annex D). Across all departments better disability awareness training was seen as critical and education for all staff was seen as paramount to enabling cultural change. It was often noted across the sample that this should be mandatory. However, the principal feature of this education should be a focus on people, not policy. Thus an emphasis on what people with disability can achieve and how best to help them be productive in the workplace was seen as important, along with education on specific disabilities, particularly those related to mental health. Other changes identified in different departments included:

**Enhancing workplace culture**

• changing Departmental culture to one that was more person-centric and no longer saw people with disability as a separate section of the workforce;
• enabling people to feel that disclosing disability would result in support rather than being discriminated against;
• reducing fear and increasing confidence – both for people with disability and their managers;
• increasing the number of employees with disability through the recruitment process, and promoting individuals with disability into higher level roles;

**Enhancing organisational capability**

• mandatory ‘people’ training for middle managers;
• providing more information to explain to people what ‘ticking the disability box’ means;
• employing an independent intermediary (sitting outside of HR) with specific expertise in non-medical models of disability and reasonable adjustments to support managers and people with disability develop sustainable working situations together; and,
• including people with disability on recruitment panels.
Enhancing individual capability

- ensuring people with disability have access to mentors to support their progress in the department;
- better use of flexible working and greater consistency in approach was seen as providing a positive way forward.

In overview then, respect, tolerance and engagement with others were seen as key components of the process of change, along with making disability more visible. As one focus group participant put it:

*It really shouldn’t matter if you’re disabled or not. If that’s what you need, that’s what you need (Public servant without disability).*

Focus areas for improvement

Our research identifies three dilemmas which should provide focus areas for improvement in the APS. As Figure ES1 illustrates, these can be organised around cultural, organisational capability and individual capability barriers. In practice, these barriers interact with one another in a dynamic way and impact directly and indirectly on the implementation of departmental policies, and processes, the wellbeing of people with disability and the overall health of the service itself.

**Dilemma 1: cultural alienation**

The existing definition of disability (which is based on a deficit model) disempowers rather than empowers people with disability, particularly those with mental illness and/or requiring organisational support for assistive technology. Lack of empowerment leads to low levels of employee confidence and organisational trust. Trust remains the key to enhancing disclosure.

Unconscious bias is often reflected in general staff and managerial behaviour towards people with disability and is reflected in negative preconceptions of their capability and perpetuated through a top-down conception of high performance which serves to disempower rather than empower people with certain disabilities.

It should be recognised that people with disability may simply work differently.

**Dilemma 2: managerial capability and support**

Managers are seen as an important support mechanism for people with disability by the majority of our respondents but on average just under half felt supported by managers. Inconsistent managerial practices create a significant implementation gap in disability policy. Managers require significant upskilling particular in
people management skills. At the same time, it is equally evident that managers need to be incentivised to take the time to think about how to work differently to accommodate (and benefit from) diversity. There is also an urgent need for more HR expertise in disability to support management. Moreover, there can be no doubt that the APS would benefit from role models at the senior management levels. Executive voice is critical to the achievement of a diverse and progressive culture.

Dilemma 3: implementation and learning

The APS needs to ‘step into the shoes’ of people with disability. Significant barriers persist in working practices that serve to exclude rather than enhance workplace participation in areas such as recruitment, career planning, reasonable adjustment, flexible work, and performance management. Although the majority of respondents said they were aware of disability policy and procedure, and believed these policies supported staff needs, most respondents felt these were not being applied effectively. The quality of learning and development was viewed to be poor, especially for managers, and largely based on E-learning without fundamental human interaction. In many departments training was not mandatory.
New policy directions

Principles

Any causal theory of cultural change has to be founded on strong evidence of how target groups are currently behaving and what new behaviours are necessary to make a difference. In the case of

Figure ES1: Barriers to workplace participation experienced by people with disability

Cultural barriers and triggers

1. Unconscious bias is often reflected in general staff and managerial behaviours & preconceptions of capability
2. Unsupportive culture – the majority perceive that the APS is exclusive
3. High stress environment
4. Paternalistic value system

Individual barriers and triggers

1. Lack of empowerment, leads to low levels of employee confidence and organisational trust
2. Absence of appropriate but fulfilling work
3. Humiliating case management processes
4. Slow reasonable adjustment processes
5. Inflexible working practices
6. Uninformed performance review processes

Organisational barriers and triggers

1. The existing definition of disability disempowers rather than empowers people with a disability, particularly those suffering from mental illness or other cognitive barriers and/or requiring organisational support for assistive technology
2. Lack of empowerment, leads to low levels of employee confidence and organisational trust. Trust is the key to enhancing disclosure.
3. Poor disability training and development
4. Limited people-management skills exhibited by some middle managers
5. Absence of role models at the senior level
6. Insufficient recruitment and advancement of staff with disability
7. Limited HR expertise in disability
8. Little incentive to take the time to think about how to work differently to ‘accommodate (and benefit from) diversity’

Impacts on departmental policies, processes and culture

Disability policy outputs → Problematic compliance with outputs by target groups → Actual impacts of outputs → Perceived impacts of outputs → Identification of implementation gaps
public servants with disability this involves recognition by public servants without disability that they may do things differently but no less effectively. Hence a fundamental starting point to cultural change in this context has to be the adoption of a definition of disability that empowers rather than disempowers people with disability. We therefore propose the 2007 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which Australia ratified in 2008 as an empowering alternative:

*Recognizing that disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with other (Preamble section (e)).*

Five operational principles for Strategic HR emanate from this definition and should inform progressive practice.

- Firstly, departments need to focus on interventions for achieving a healthy workplace. A healthy workplace requires that employers help all their employees achieve their aspirations and be the best that they can be.
- Secondly, co-design policies and processes with public servants with disability by default to “step into the shoes” of people with disability and build trust and confidence.
- Thirdly, co-design “strength-based” career pathways with and for people with disability in appropriate areas.
- Fourthly, think carefully about issues of strategic sequencing to ensure that the organisation is ready for change to avoid adverse unintended consequences.
- Fifthly, use progressive language to underpin the change process (e.g. “sharing” rather than “disclosure”).

**Actions to enhance individual capability**

- The co-design of “strength-based” career pathways requires an evidence-based approach – hence the need for a “light touch” APS capability review in this area. This action will also enhance organisational capability.
- To meet the short-term imperative of increasing the visibility of senior role models, co-design a fast track emerging leaders program benchmarked against best international practices.
- To meet medium to long-term imperatives for maintaining senior role models co-design a talent management program (including mentoring, learning and development and appropriate knowledge base) benchmarked against best international practices.
- Co-design a developmental performance review system to support public servants with disability to be the best that they can be.
✓ Introduce a passport system to ease system navigation of the reasonable adjustment process.
✓ Co-design conditions determining workplace flexibility.
✓ Co-design interventions to help identify and diffuse best practices (e.g. blogs written by public servants with disability or ‘Talking Head’ video clips describing coping mechanisms that have held them in good stead).
✓ To enhance capability and expand opportunity for deploying teams engineered to ensure inclusion (e.g. 6plus6 and 10plus10 models).

**Actions to enhance organisational capability**

✓ Short, medium and long-term targets should be established for recruitment of public servants with disability to the SES.
✓ An action-based capability review should be conducted to define the diversity challenge for APS HR management systems and the professional skills and resources required to meet them.
✓ Given the scale of the challenge, mental health should form a central component of this review.
✓ A review and subsequent reform of performance standards should be initiated crystallised around a developmental rather than judgemental philosophy.
✓ An “Ask the person” approach should be used in all service interactions with public servants with disability.
✓ Exemplar managers and divisions should be identified to distil and diffuse better practice.
✓ APSC Management Helpline/Employee Assistance Program could be established to augment capability and support for both managers and public servants with disability.
✓ Mandatory face to face learning and development should underpin core disability awareness training and education.
✓ Talking Heads best practice interviews with exemplar public servants should be conducted and widely promoted and distributed.
✓ Outcome based monitoring, evaluation and learning systems should be established in this area with direct reporting to the Secretary.
✓ We would recommend exploring the use of Washington Group questions to inform APS data collection on disability issues.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The purpose of the project

One in seven Australians of working age has a disability with over 550,000 individuals aged between 15 and 64 years experiencing significant limitations to their core activities of daily living. On average, people with disability, tend to experience higher instances of relationship breakdown, and lower rates of education, participation in paid work and social inclusion (Brown, 2014: 8-9).

Despite the establishment of the APS’s Diversity Council in 2012 and its successor Disability Champions Network in 2015, there is currently no qualitative research which explores staff perceptions of the barriers to workplace participation experienced by public servants with a disability in the APS at the Commonwealth level to inform better decision-making. The Diversity Council had a particular focus on improving employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians and people with disability in the APS, in response to unfavourable employment outcomes for these groups. Hence, the gap in the existing evidence base.

This gap in the existing evidence base is the primary reason for this research; its main purpose is to examine perceptions of the barriers to workplace participation experienced by public servants with a disability in the APS. The research focuses on the work of seven Commonwealth departments: Agriculture, Attorney-Generals, Foreign Affairs and Trade, Human Services, Industry, Innovation and Science, Social Services and the Australian Taxation Office. The research includes the perceptions of those who disclose disability and those employees who do not have disability as well as managers of people with disability. The project aims to provide an evidence base to inform decision making on workplace participation for APS agencies (if not beyond) and to provide evidence-based recommendations to improve practice.

Five core research questions are tackled:
1. What are the perceived barriers public servants with disability experience and why?
2. How can these barriers be mitigated?
3. In terms of workplace policies and processes – what works and what does not?
4. What does international and domestic best practice suggest to meet those challenges?
5. How can existing practice be made more robust and become embedded in the culture of the organisation?

This research has enabled us to produce the following set of outputs designed to benefit agencies and their employees regardless of whether they do or do not have a disability:

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2. The Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Martin Parkinson announced on 20 April 2016 at The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP, Prime Minister of Australia’s address to the Australian Public Service the Secretaries Board intention to re-establish the Diversity Council.
• A sound evidence-base to inform better decision-making on workplace participation experienced by public servants with a disability.

• Individual departmental reports on our findings in relation to the research and practice questions outlined above that generated a series of local knowledge claims and guidance on change.

• A synthesis report which compares and contrasts findings from the eight participating departments and generates a series of knowledge claims and practice-based recommendations for the service as a whole.

• A repository of best practice to inform continuous improvement drawn from both the practice-based and academic literatures.

• Opportunities for departments to share better practice and identify areas of common concern and action.

It is hoped that people with disability will derive benefits from the above process, greater awareness of the workplace experiences of other employees with a disability as well as the opportunity to broaden the scope of their support networks. Hopefully it will not just be people with disability who derive significant benefits from the above outputs and processes but also other employees will be enabled to have a greater awareness of the views of people with disability around their workplace experiences and in that way derive the benefit of intensifying their support networks. The ultimate aim is to create disability confident organisations.

The seven participating departments in this research have received individual reports that have provided: an enhanced understanding of the barriers, challenges and benefits for employees and managers of people with disability in the Department; an assessment of the effectiveness of existing policies and protocols; the motivations behind an employee’s decision to disclose or not to disclose their disability; and, insights into how better data can be collected on these issues in the future.

1.2. The structure of the report

The report is organized into three substantive sections and a conclusion. Part one reviews the existing academic and grey literatures and identifies some key assumptions for further empirical investigation in subsequent sections. In part two, we provide an overview of the research design informing the development of the report identifying the principles of engagement informing our approach to the research task including operational terms and methods. Part three presents the key findings arising from the quantitative and qualitative research. The conclusion then presents an overview of the barriers and enablers to workplace participation experienced by people with disability, highlighting a set of dilemmas and first steps in policy action for careful consideration by departments in the APS.
2. WHAT THE EXISTING EVIDENCE TELLS US

2.1. How does the Australian Public Service define disability?

Disability, unlike age, is an abstract, relative and socially constructed concept. It is also a condition that can change over time (ARTD 2013:35-36). Hence attempting to define it can be complex and more than one definition may be needed depending on the purpose.

The ABS Household Census uses a definition that focuses on more severe disabilities and for which assistance is required, such as self-care, mobility or communication. In the ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) publication ‘...a person has a disability if they report they have a limitation, restriction or impairment, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months and restricts everyday activities’ (2013). The SDAC approach identifies five separate groups of disability: sensory; intellectual; physical; psychological; and head injury, stroke or brain damage.

In terms of people with disability in the workplace, the ABS definition could be considered too narrow. The definition in the anti-discrimination legislation, the most relevant legislative framework, is somewhat broader and states that disability ‘in relation to a person, means total or partial loss of the person’s bodily or mental functions, or a part of the person’s body’ (Disability Discrimination Act 1992, Section 4). This definition is broad enough to cover ‘disabilities that presently exist, previously existed, may exist in the future, and even those that are ‘imputed to a person’ whether or not they actually exist’ (APSC 2012c:41-42).

The latter and broader definition is used by the APS for the development of recruitment and retention strategies. But because of difficulties in operationalizing this definition at the data collection level, the narrower ABS definition is used for APS statistical purposes (including in its APS Employee Census (2014: 9) and for monitoring and assessing the performance of the APS in relation to the employment of people with a disability (APSC 2012c: 41-42).

Difficulties in defining disability mean that it is hard to get an accurate measure of disability at both a point in time and over time. The ABS definition is too narrow for the types of disability found in the workplace; but the broader definition used in the anti-discrimination legislation, while more relevant in the workplace, suffers from the difficulties that arise when someone has a disability but, for whatever reason, fails to disclose it.

Given that this research is focused on the APS we will adopt the definition used by the seven departments under study. We will, however, evaluate whether this definition is providing sufficient scope to adequately define departmental policies and processes.
2.2. What the data tell us

2.2.1. Disability Prevalence

Over four million Australians reported a disability in 2015 (almost one in five Australians). Of those aged 15-64, there were 2.2 million with disability, with around one quarter of these defined by the ABS as having a severe disability (ABS 2016; Brown 2014). As expected, the proportion of people with disability in employment is relatively low compared to those without disability. Only 53% of people with disability are in the workforce compared with 82% who do not have a disability. These figures haven’t changed much over the last 20 years (AHRC 2016:5). Whereas males without a disability have over 70% of their number in full time employment, the proportion of those with mild or moderate disability is 37.6% and far fewer in cases where the disability is severe. Similarly, while 11.5% of males without a disability were not in the labour force, this figure was 44% for those with mild or moderate disability. For women, around 40% were in full time employment if they had no disability but that proportion halves for women with mild or moderate disability. Correspondingly, whereas 23.5% of women without disability were not in the labour force, that figure more than doubles for women with a disability.

The unemployment rate for people with disability is around 10% or nearly twice the rate for those without disability. Nearly half of men and over 50% of women with disability would like to work more hours compared with one third of men and around 20% of women without a disability (AHRC 2016:16; Brown 2014:18).

Slightly more people with a disability were employed part time (38%) than with no disability (31%) (ARTD 2013:2). The data also show that people with disability need an average of a day a week away from work because of disability; and people with disability working part-time reported use of ‘flexible hours’ as a way of getting the time off they needed (53%), whereas those working full time were more likely to report ‘sick leave’ (35%), (ARTD 2013:2).

In terms of where people with disability are employed, they are far more likely to be found in low skilled occupations than those without disability. For men, the most common occupation grouping was technician or tradesman; for women clerical and administrative or community services and retail (Brown 2014).

There is insufficient data that break down people with disability by type of disability. We do know that in 2012, the highest rates of labour force participation were by people with sensory or speech impairment (56.2%); people with a physical restriction had a participation rate of 47.4% and people with psychological disability had the lowest labour force participation rate of 29.1% (AHRC 2016:6).
Australia does not do well in terms of employment of people with disability when compared with other OECD countries. In 2010, the OECD surveyed its members on employment rates of people with disability. Sweden had the highest rate at just over 60%; Australia was ranked 21 out of 29 OECD countries with 40% (OECD 2010 AHRC 2016:7). The OECD has also found that Australian adults with a disability earn, on average, 70% of the income of those without disability which is the lowest relative income of all OECD countries (Kavanagh et al 2013:2).

Neither the ABS nor recent census data provides a breakdown of whether people with disability are employed in the public or private sectors. What we do know is that employment rates for people with disability are low in the public sector. Whereas people with disability represented 8.8 percent of the overall workforce in the APS in 2014, the figure for those reporting disability in the APS employee census was seven per cent with only three per cent disclosing disability to their agency (AHRC 2016:216). However, a concerning fact is that there has been a downward trend in the proportion disclosing disability; the figure was five per cent in 1999 (APSC 2014a). The figures for the public services of state governments are similar if not lower and all recorded a declining trend over time, except for the ACT (AHRC 2016:217).

Women outnumber men in the APS but there is a greater percentage of men in the APS with disability compared with women; women were also more likely than men to disclose disability (Gray 2014). The age breakdown shows a steady rise of people with disability as they grow older as occurs in the overall employed population. The older cohort of workers is less likely to disclose disability to their agency. In terms of classification level, there is a concentration at the lower APS levels of APS 1-4. Disclosure rates are lowest for entry-level APS employees and higher levels of the SES with the APS 1-2 level showing the highest disclosure rates (Gray 2014).

2.2.2. Evidence of the prevalence of discrimination

The ABS has recently conducted the first survey on the prevalence of discrimination in employment and its initial release of data shows that almost one in 12 Australians with disability reported experience of discrimination or unfair treatment because of their disability. Rates were similar for men and women but reported discrimination was more prevalent amongst the young (AHRC 2016:50-51;187). The most common type of disability reported by complainants is ‘mental health/psychosocial disability’ (AHRC 2016:188). The experience of discrimination by people with disability has been found to be twice that of people without disability (Diversity Council of Australia 2010).

Types of discrimination reported by the AHRC include recruitment bias, accessibility, workplace adjustment and career progression; however, gender, cultural background, sexual orientation and location can also shape the nature and impact of discrimination (AHRC 2016:186ff).
When the focus is on the public sector, the employment experience of people with disability in the APS across several indicators has been found to be consistently less favourable than that for people without disability (APSC 2014b: 212; Gray 2014; Hay Group 2014, for the United Kingdom). For instance, Gray found (as did ARTD 2013) that public servants with disability in the APS are more likely to be bullied as well as more likely to leave their current job as soon as possible:

They are just as likely to have received performance management but are less likely to find it useful. They are less likely to be proud to work in the agency, recommend their agency as a good place to work, be satisfied with their work and life balance and be satisfied with their access to use flexible working arrangements. They are also less likely to view their agency and supervisor as committed to a diverse workforce (Gray 2014).

2.3. Evidence on dimensions of the problem

There is enough data for Australia as well as elsewhere to lead to the clear conclusion that people with disability are poorly represented in the workplace and when they are, they face more discrimination than those without disability. There are compelling reasons why we need more understanding of what is holding back the employment and career progression of people with disability and what is happening to them on the job: low representation of people with disability in the workplace means that the economic and other benefits of a diverse workplace are foregone (both for organisations as well as broader society), not to mention the lack of respect for the human rights of people with disability and related equity and fairness issues. Australia’s Age and Disability Commissioner in her introduction to the AHRC Inquiry on Willing to Work (2016) observes that:

The Inquiry found that too many people are shut out of work because of underlying assumptions, stereotypes or myths associated with their age or their disability. These beliefs lead to discriminatory behaviours during recruitment, in the workplace and in decisions about training, promotion and retirement, voluntary or involuntary. The cost and impact of this is high, for individuals and for our economy (2016: 9).

2.3.1. Implementing basic human rights and fairness

The need to address the workplace issues for people with disability is brought into sharp focus in the context of the 2007 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which Australia ratified in 2008:

Recognizing that disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with other (Preamble section (e)).
In addition, the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 makes it illegal to discriminate on the basis of a person’s disability, including employment. Yet, the AHRC in 2014-15 had more than one third of its disability discrimination complaints related to employment (AHRC 2016:50). Anyone denied the right to work is also denied the independence, dignity and sense of purpose that work brings. The recent AHRC report on Willing to Work (2016) warns that workplace discrimination, conscious or otherwise, can lead, not only to a decline in physical and mental health, but also to reduced self-confidence, self-esteem and motivation to remain in the workforce (2016:16).

The COAG National Disability Strategy (2011) reinforces this: one of its aims is to ‘ensure that the principles underpinning the CRPD are incorporated into policies and programs affecting people with disability, their families and carers’ (2011:16). It points out that the idea that ‘…people with disability can be more disadvantaged by society’s response to their disability than the disability itself’ (2011:16) which gives one compelling reason why there needs to be a greater focus on policies that seek to remove employment barriers. This is in keeping with the observation that too often people with disability are seen as a community ‘problem’ to be overcome rather than a resource for building social capital, cohesiveness and goodwill in the community (COAG 2011:18).

The APS values provide another imperative for action on grounds of fairness. The APS values of particular relevance relate to:

- providing a workplace that is free from discrimination and which recognises and utilises the diversity of the Australian community it serves;
- promoting equity in employment;
- providing a reasonable opportunity for all eligible members of the community to apply for APS employment; and
- making employment decisions based on merit. (APSC 2012c).

2.3.2. Achieving full economic benefits from diversity

Increasing the proportion of people with disability in an organisation is not only the ‘right thing to do’ in terms of fairness and equity but also is increasingly accepted as good economics; not to do so is ‘a huge waste of human capital’ (AHRC 2016:9). In terms of the economy as a whole, modelling by Deloitte Access Economics (Deloitte 2011:19) shows that, if the participation rate of people with disability increased by 10 per cent over the next decade, on alternative assumptions about what happens to their unemployment rate, the numbers of people with disability who would enter the labour force ranges from just under to just over 200,000. The modelling takes into account lower productivity and higher part time work by people with disability. Despite this, it suggests the boost to Australia’s GDP would be over $40 billion over the next decade (2011:22). The economic payoffs are therefore too significant to be ignored.
At the organisational level, the business case is also strong, showing that on balance, organisations with a strong record of hiring people with disability – at least in the private sector – do better. Direct benefits (with appropriate workplace adjustments) include: better retention of valued employees; increased employee productivity (especially from more flexible working); increased employee attendance; benefits arising from increased diversity of the organisation; and, increased government tax revenue with savings in benefits paid (e.g. Canada 2013:17, Deloitte 2011 & 2012).

More indirect benefits include: improved worker interaction; increased overall organisational morale, loyalty and commitment; increased overall productivity; improved customer interaction; improved organisational reputation; increased workplace safety; and increased overall employee attendance. In addition, researchers have noted some correlation with returns on investment; improved innovation; filling labour shortages more easily and reaching new customers (e.g. Canada 2013:15ff; Selvanera and Whippy 2015: 12-13; Disability Rights UK 2015; Deloitte 2012; Melbourne Business School 2015; AND 2015; AHRC 2016).

In the public sector, employing people with disability ensures that the diverse opinion of the Australian community is integrated in the development of laws, policies, and programs and are more likely to take into account the experience of people with disability (APSC 2012b: 25-26). Moreover, if there is a greater tolerance for working flexibly this can benefit the whole of the workforce and not just people with disability. Studies indicate ‘that when employees can manage the demands of their work and personal lives, there are positive effects – such as job satisfaction, productivity and organisational commitments’ (APSC 2012:28).

The ageing of Australia’s population alongside a smaller cohort of younger people replacing them means that employers, including in the public sector, are looking to people with disability to meet anticipated talent shortages (APSC 2012b:26; Lengnick-Hall et al 2008:255). By 2050, it is projected that there will be only three people of working age for every person aged 65 and over, compared with five people today’ (COAG 2011). The Productivity Commission notes that better employment prospects for people with disability can provide an incentive to students with disability to improve their educational outcomes that in turn enhances productivity and that of the economy (AHRC 2016:56). In the APS context, over 40 per cent of ongoing employees are aged 45 and over and eligible to retire in the next ten years or so (APSC 2012b:26). This is concerning given that disability prevalence increases with age.

In overview then, the evidence indicates that the benefits of a workforce that includes more people with disability are significant and, given the low proportion in the APS of people with disability, these significant benefits are presently lost to the APS. If job opportunities with adequate support were available to people with disability and with the right attitudes, behaviours and culture (discussed below), then the APS would be more attractive to people with disability, the capabilities of people with disability would be improved and they would be in a position to make a greater contribution to the APS and the economy.
2.3.3. Evidence on disclosure

One of the most troubling issues for public sector agencies is the lack of disclosure by people with disability. It is also a difficult decision for people with disability. As the recent AHRC report indicates, the decision to disclose – when and to whom – is a ‘deeply personal decision’ (2016:190): fear of the consequences of disclosure in terms of stigma, assumptions and discrimination in employment are weighed against wanting to be honest with their employer and colleagues. Obviously some types of disability are obvious and disclosure is not an option; however, those with a mental health issue are the most fearful of the impact on them of disclosure (AHRC ibid; ARTD 2013: 30). The AHRC usefully distinguishes between disclosure during recruitment (with inaccessible recruitment practices and recruitment bias), disclosure during employment (discrimination, inaccessible workplaces; lack of workplace adjustments) and reduced opportunities for career progression. The AHRC also draws attention to the combination of attributes, such as age, disability, race and gender that can lead to experiences of discrimination (AHRC 2016:190ff).

An American survey of people with disability on the disclosure issue found four main themes in answer to the question on what would make a people with disability disclose or not disclose in the future. Balancing the need for accommodation (adjustments) with the timing of the disclosure; the importance of assessing the workplace climate and relationship to their supervisor prior to disclosure; factors relating to disability identity (being honest reduces stress); and a concern about disparate treatment when disclosing (for example, not being hired or being fired; losing a promotion opportunity and workplace harassment and bullying) (von Schrader et al., 2014: 249-51). Of those who did disclose nearly one quarter reported experiencing long term negative consequences relating to that decision (2014:252).

There are several reasons why agencies want disclosure of disabilities: to prompt a discussion about reasonable adjustments; to prompt an employer to possible future requirements; to improve the workplace culture for people with disability; and to measure disability (APSC 2013a; von Schrader et al 2014:239). In the APS context, wanting to meet disability targets is relevant here. The success of any initiatives to improve workplace culture and practices is very difficult when the data on the number of people with disability and the types of that disability is unknown (ARTD 2013: viii). The findings from an APS survey has found that when those who chose not to disclose when asked the reason for that decision, overwhelmingly (88%) nominated fear of stigma and discrimination (APSC 2012c:Table 6.1). However, as our survey findings also show, there is ‘a chicken and egg’ issue here in that, without an inclusive culture, the environment may not appear safe for disclosure for far too many people with disability: ‘When employees feel comfortable self-disclosing a disability, this can serve as an informal indicator of the employer’s success in achieving a supportive workplace culture’ (Von Schrader et al 2014:239).
2.3.4. The evidence on workforce perceptions of people with disability

Australian as well as overseas literature on attitudes of employers to issues relating to disability in the private sector find a range of negative attitudes and many misconceptions that act as barriers to employment of people with disability. Some of the attitudes include: perceived costs and time involved; fears of saying or doing ‘the wrong thing’ including possible legal implications; and general lack of understanding and confidence (e.g. Deloitte Access Economics 2011:4; Thompson et al, 2011: vii, 15-16; Melbourne Business School 2015; AND 2015; DCA 2015; AHRC 2016). Especially concerning to employers was how to work with people with mental illness (AHRC 2016:206).

The AHRC points to a common response to its Inquiry which was the lack of training for managers about diversity and inclusion (2016:205). Partly as a result, problems were identified at the line-management and leadership levels leading to a gap between policy and practice:

Where there is high level commitment, sometimes the issue is the gap between leadership commitment and line management actions, or between workplace policies and practices (2016:207).

The AHRC cites flexible work arrangements as an example where there may be policies in place and some awareness of them but not a lot of knowledge about how to use them which could lead to lower take up than otherwise of people with disability (2016:207).

In relation to the APS, the APSC has noted:

Heard it all before?.. Agencies post detailed disability action plans on websites and, in many instances, include disability employment in strategic and business plans. And yet the number of individuals with disability in the APS is not what it should be. As stated recently by an APS officer with disability employment responsibilities: “The rhetoric is there but the reality is different” (APSC 2012b:4).

What literature for the APS that does exist mirrors the findings for the private sector and shows that an important barrier to employment of people with disability is that of attitudes. The APSC Employment Strategy for People with Disability, As One, identifies the two main barriers to employment of people with disability as attitudes and the related insufficient demand for people with disability (APSC 2012a: 15). A NSW study, attributes this problem to the attitudes of employers or managers, mainly because of their lack of awareness of what is involved, and unconscious biases about the capabilities of people with disability or actual discrimination (e.g. ARTD 2013). In NSW, lack of knowledge by managers and selection panels about different types of disability was found to lead to, not only unconscious biases but also to distort the view of a potential or actual employees about their ability to do the job. Human resource professionals saw a need for more awareness by managers about different types of disability (ARTD 2013:8-9).
One of the most interesting findings from the NSW study is the importance of language and what is meant by disability. The report concluded: ‘Perhaps the most systemic barrier to a more disability friendly sector is caused by language and the difficulty of obtaining a reliable measure of disability’ (ARTD 2013: viii). The report further observes that when the word ‘disability’ is used, it leads to a focus on what a person might lack, rather than what might be lacking in the workplace. This means that the culture simply reacts to adjustments for the individual rather than be more proactive in attempting to improve on recruitment, retention and career progression measures better suited to a diverse workforce (ibid). International research draws similar conclusions. A recent United Kingdom report, for instance, concludes:

The main barrier is perceived to be a deeply embedded culture, which has the impact of excluding those who are different – not so much overt discrimination or prejudice but more subtle and a less conscious process (2015:15).

2.4. Key assumptions to guide empirical work

Existing disability research domestically and internationally provides us with a series of assumptions to investigate the barriers to workplace participation experienced by public servants with disability (see, for example, ARTD, 2013). These can be summarised (for reasons of simplification) around (a) barriers (actual and perceived) that are the product of the disability being experienced by the employee and the individual’s adaptive capacity or capability set and (b) the inability of the workplace to adapt or to develop a supportive working environment.

By adaptive capacity we refer to the ability of individuals and organisations to recognise barriers, develop coping mechanisms, navigate transition points and maintain progress on an ongoing basis. We also adopt Amartya Sen’s conception of capability as a person’s capacity to use and expand their individual capabilities to meet individual desires and contribute to the betterment of society (Sen, 1999, 2009). In this case we will focus on the relationship between wellbeing and work. Hence the proposition that an individual’s wellbeing is informed by the degree to which they are committed, engaged and fulfilled in their work. This approach enables us to study the individual behavioural insights of people with disability as well as the capacity of organisations to support the capabilities of people with disability.

An individual capability set is potentially associated with the following barriers or facilitators to individual and collective wellbeing for people with a disability:

• The level of personal confidence and autonomy exhibited by employees with a disability which are crucial to adaptive capacity/capability (ARTD, 2013; Fabian et al., 2009; Burchardt et al 2013).
• The nature of the disability and the ability of employees with a disability to adapt, for instance, to assistive technologies which can be crucial to achieving career success (ARTD, 2013; Papakonstantinou et al., 2010).
• The ability of employees with a disability to access support networks matters (AHRC, 2010).
• The nature of the work matters. e.g. is it rewarding? Does it fully utilise the employees’ skills (ARTD, 2013; Butterworth et al., 2011).

• The financial costs of participation matters, e.g. ability to navigate disincentives to work, for instance, low paid jobs and perceptions of lower possibilities for promotion (ARTD, 2013).

• The ability to speak out and articulate needs and aspirations (Von Schrader et al., 2014).

The nature of the working environment or organisational climate also matters. Barriers here tend to crystallise around inadequate workplace policies and processes on workplace participation, individual empowerment and issues of ignorance and cultural bias. For example, in terms of workplace policies and processes on workplace participation:

• The degree to which consistent and strong leadership is exercised on diversity issues (ARTD, 2013; AHRC 2016).

• The extent to which there are equitable and accessible recruitment processes (ARTD, 2013; Perkins et al, 2009; AHRC 2016).

• How difficult it is to physically access the workplace, and get to and from work (AHRC, 2010; ARTD, 2013).

• The extent to which there are reasonable and prompt adjustments to workplace equipment and other adaptations (ARTD, 2013; Papakonstantinou et al., 2010; AHRC 2016).

• The flexibility of working conditions (e.g. hours; place of work) (ARTD, 2013; Disability Rights UK 2015; AHRC 2016).

• The extent to which interesting work is provided (ARTD, 2013; Butterworth et al., 2011).

• Whether there is equal treatment in performance management and equal opportunity for advancement (ARTD, 2013; AHRC, 2010).

• Extent of provision for targeted learning and development opportunities (ARTD, 2013).

• The capacity to affect early intervention (AHRC, 2010; Comcare 2010).

• The impact of an environment of downsizing.

In terms of issues of ignorance and cultural bias:

• lack of knowledge on how to support people with disabilities particularly those experiencing mental illness can lead to stereotyping and exclusion and wasted talent of people with a disability (AHRC, 2010; ARTD, 2013; Balser, 2000; Hernandez et al., 2008; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008).

• The absence of an open and inviting organisational culture can lead to exclusion including the use of language (AHRC, 2010; Kulkarni and Lengnick-Hall, 2011; U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2012; ARTD 2013);

• Stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities – the mobilisation of bias can be both overt or conscious and covert or unconscious (AHRC, 2010; Bruyere et al., 2003; Reavley and Jorm, 2011; AHRC 2016).

• There is a relationship between accessible social events and other forms of engagement and inclusion (AHRC, 2010; Gignac et al., 2009; Kulkarni and Lengnick-Hall, 2011); and,

• there is a relationship between culture and disclosure aspirations (AHRC, 2010; Allen & Carlson, 2003; Brohan et al., 2012; Von Schrader et al., 2014).
In combination, these barriers provide a measure of organisational capability to empower employees and allow them to expand their capabilities.

We will therefore evaluate the existence or relative stickiness of these barriers in an original fieldwork context; the APS. This will also allow us to assess the probity of Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach (CA) which has recently attracted much attention in disability studies (see: Mitra, 2006; Nussbaum, 2006; Terzi, 2005; Trani and Bakhshi, 2008; and, Trani et al., 2011; Burchardt et al 2013). Sen’s theory of value (or justice) proceeds from the argument that in a good society the ultimate goal of public action should focus on the expansion of human capabilities which is consistent with broader societal goals including stronger economic growth (Sen 1999, 2005, 2006, & 2009). Sen emphasises ‘substantive freedom’ which can be constrained in many ways:

*People may be hampered in identifying the things they truly value because, for example, their expectations have become conditioned by enduring years of deprivation. They may be pressurised, oppressed or coerced by others. The public or private resources available to them may be limited, or it may be difficult to convert their resources into the things they want to be and do, as a result or personal characteristics such as impairment or as a result of institutional barriers (Burchardt et al 2013:2)*

Public policies should therefore be designed to remove barriers to the ability of citizens to realise their basic human capabilities. The existing literature on disability is rich in evidence on the barriers to action but it is not rich on perceptions about those barriers and especially not in the public sector. It is also less informed on the implementation process for empowering people with a disability and enhancing workplace participation. Prima facie, this appears particularly pertinent to the APS. In sum then, we will use quantitative and qualitative methods that allow us to assess: a) how successful the APS is in expanding the capabilities of its employees who are experiencing a disability and enhancing individual well-being? And, b) what dimensions of the implementation process for empowering people with a disability and enhancing workplace participation are effective or not?

### 2.5. Organisational capacity to affect change

It needs to be noted at the outset that attaining an inclusive culture in any organisation is a tough task; particularly for organisations that have achieved a cohesive dominant culture with embedded norms and values. It is also important to note there is a danger of building an organisational culture around a concept of high performance that can be perceived by people with disability as exclusionary. The existing evidence suggests that diversity management programs, whether about disability or other aspects of diversity, can easily fail despite the best intentions (see, for example, Canada 2011; NAO 2015;
Ospina 2001; Soni 2000; United Kingdom 2015). The National Audit Office in the United Kingdom, for example, notes that ‘a series of previous strategies have not led to sustainable change to the approach in the civil service, and momentum was lost’ (2015:7). Previous attempts had ‘limited success because they did not address the core issues’ (ibid).

Ospina (2001) argues that an effective diversity management strategy would start with the objective of considering and pursuing diversity (or disability) so that those within the organisation are involved in tasks ‘that help them become aware of the benefits of increased diversity’. Only once some motivation and awareness of pursuing diversity has been achieved can managers then look to create a more diverse workforce by developing a strategy for managing diversity. Managers can then use the workforce strategically to add value to the organisation’s strategic goals by supporting the unique contributions each organisational member brings; thus maximizing diversity (Ospina 2001:16).

Soni (2000:396) discovered that ‘...whether the goal of effectively managing workforce diversity is achieved depends largely on an organisation’s diversity climate which, in turn, influences an employee’s receptivity to diversity and to diversity-management initiatives’. Soni refers to organisational readiness or receptivity as an ‘important and necessary condition for diversity-management initiatives to be undertaken’ and one way to do that is through ‘prior attitudinal work’ (Soni 2000:405). The recent UK Civil Service Refreshed Talent Action Plan (2015, para 20) notes that there is a need for data on perceptions of inclusivity in the organisation as a driver of reform. It is because organisations commonly find it difficult to achieve results despite good intentions that our project has placed emphasis on an initial upfront emphasis on those attitudes or perceptions; on undertaking what can be called a ‘cultural audit’ which is a component of the first part of Ospina’s suggested approach and which provides a baseline measure of ‘organisational readiness’ for change (Soni 2000).

Unless there is comprehensive information about disability, then relevant training, advice and support cannot be planned; initiatives to attract, recruit and retain employees are hindered; the benefits of a diverse workforce are thwarted, and, it is harder to move decisively towards the creation of an inclusive workforce. Despite good intentions and a succession of initiatives over several years, people with disability remain significantly under-represented in the APS workforce. It is difficult at times to understand why this continues to be the case. Research recognises the need for and contribution made by those with disability in the APS. We know the benefits of having a workforce that reflects the community we serve. Agencies post detailed disability action plans on websites and, in many instances, include disability employment in strategic and business plans. And yet the number of individuals with disability in the APS is not what it should be. As stated recently by an APS officer with disability employment responsibilities: ‘The rhetoric is there but the reality is different’ (APSC 2013b).
3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Research design

Our study draws on the participation of seven Australian Commonwealth Government departments:

- Agriculture and Water Resources
- Attorney-Generals
- Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Human Services
- Industry, Innovation and Science
- Social Services
- Australian Taxation Office

This provides us with a broadly representative APS sample that exhibits the following characteristics:

1. Departments/agencies most likely to have an appropriate disability sensitive culture.
2. Departments/agencies least likely to have an appropriate disability sensitive culture.
3. Departments/agencies likely to have embedded norms and values due to longstanding history.
4. Departments/agencies unlikely to have embedded norms and values due to a recent history.
5. Large and small departments.

The study adopts a mixed methods approach to the research, encompassing:

- a rapid review of local, national and international practice-based literature as well as private sector studies on how those barriers are best navigated;
- quantitative analysis of APS data to form a base-line “State of the Service” understanding of people with a disability working in the APS;
- qualitative analysis via the delivery of three focus groups in each of the departments and agencies;
- a quantitative on-line survey of participating departments; and,
- thought leadership events to both disseminate the study findings and promote the APS as an ‘employer of choice’ to the wider community.

In each department/agency three focus groups with up to 12 participants were held: one with SES and EL participants; one with a mixture of staff across departmental functions; and a mixed group of public servants experiencing different types of disability at levels of the organisation. Pilot focus groups were also held in the Department of Industry, Innovat-
tion and Science, the first fieldwork site, to assess the appropriateness of the focus group method and in particular the suitability of the questions in generating credible data. Departmental Coordinators were provided with a Recruitment Guide for Focus Groups. See Annexes A and B.

The purpose of the quantitative surveys was to validate findings emerging from the qualitative work and to identify any inconsistent knowledge claims. The questions largely mirrored those asked in the focus groups although there was a greater focus on evaluating staff awareness and knowledge of departmental policies and protocols regarding disability. The questionnaire can be found at Annex C. The questionnaire explores:

- awareness of barriers to employment/career progression for individuals with disability in the APS
- awareness of support mechanisms/resources for individuals with disability in the APS
- individual perceptions regarding the effectiveness of any resources identified
- suggestions regarding what is working well and what might be improved

The data is used to: 1), to compare levels of participation for those with disability versus those without disability to see if persons with disability have achieved workplace inclusion; and 2), to evaluate perceptions of public servants without disability towards those with disability to ascertain whether a progressive culture for the advancement of a diversity agenda exists. In addition, the data will also be used to monitor prevalence trends for persons with limitations in the particular basic workplace activity domains.

3.2. About the survey participants across Departments

**Online Surveys**

A total of 1862 staff from Departments completed the online questionnaire. The majority of respondents who declared their gender were female (68%). As shown in Table 1, respondents were drawn from across APS levels, with almost a quarter (24%) known to be managers (SES or EL1/2), 23% of whom declared a disability on the questionnaire.

Table 1: Roles and disability status of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Graduate or other Trainee</th>
<th>APS 1-6</th>
<th>EL1-2</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>Not known</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has disability</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not have disability</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>1,208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chose not to disclose</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>889</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>1,862</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of 543 respondents declared a disability (29%), 65% stated they did not have a disability, and 6% chose not to disclose. Of the 543 who declared disability in the survey, just under a quarter (22%) indicated that they had a physical disability (N=120), 96 disclosed mental health problems (18%), 8 disclosed neurological or cognitive difficulties (2%), and over half (52%) reported multiple disability (N=284). Over a quarter of those with more than one disability (27%) disclosed mental health problems (N=77). Thirty five respondents did not disclose the nature of their disability.

Figure 1: Declared disabilities

Focus Groups
A total of 194 staff members participated in the focus groups as follows:
People with disclosed disability, N = 59
APS staff, N = 73
EL 1 and 2, N = 62

It should be noted that during the course of focus groups convened for APS and EL staff, a number of participants disclosed disability. This indicates that the focus groups provided a safe environment in which people felt comfortable sharing personal information.

3.3. Project management

A Project Reference Group (including Departmental Coordinators from all participating departments) was established to co-design the research, monitor progress and evaluate applied lessons. IGPA research and policy work is also guided by our broader Disability Policy Reference Group which includes an expert group of people with disability and leading members of the Community of Practice (see Acknowledgements).
4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings are reported in seven sections that relate to key investigative themes: (1) disclosing disability; (2) barriers and facilitators to disclosure; (3) barriers and facilitators to workplace culture; (4) barriers and facilitators to organisational capability; (5) barriers and facilitators to individual capability; (6) understanding the state of play for people with a disability in the APS; and, (7) achieving progress.

The number of responses for the quantitative survey was small in some departments, thus the views propounded may not be representative of all staff. Numbers in some departments were too small to allow a statistical comparison to be undertaken. Possible reasons for the low numbers include:

- the timing of the survey – the lowest number of responses was received from departments surveyed in late December, just before the Christmas/summer holidays;
- survey fatigue – one department which had a low response had recently carried out a similar survey of staff;
- lack of interest in the topic or a reluctance to consider/discuss diversity issues; and,
- limited distribution of the survey – survey links were sent to departments to be distributed. In many cases the link was distributed through division and section managers, and it is impossible to know how far the original email was cascaded down. Messages may have been lost or overlooked, or a decision may have been made that the survey was not appropriate for the division/section staff.

Despite these limitations the surveys provide data indicative of a range of dilemmas that may need to be considered by the Department. It is notable that survey responses include a disproportionate percentage of the workforce with disability in the APS (29%); according to AHRC 2016 people with disability represented 8.8 percent of the overall workforce in the APS in 2014. This suggests that those responding to the survey had a strong interest in the topic.

4.1. Disclosing disability

Of those who disclosed disability on the questionnaire, 13% had not disclosed disability at work. The majority of those staff (N=492) who had declared disability had informed managers (80%) and co-workers (79%). Over half had disclosed to the Human Resources Department (HR) (59%). This is slightly higher than the 54% disclosure rate reported in the 2014 State of the Service Survey.

Disclosure was most likely to take place after a job had been secured (71% of disclosures across all departments). This figure varied across departments, ranging from just over half (58%) to more than four out of five disclosures (83%). It appeared that timing of disclosure was often considered carefully, and people with disability were often not sure when the ‘right time’ to disclose was:
Sometimes you don’t disclose at the outset then it gets to the point where you kind of need to. Sometimes that can be quite detrimental because the actual act of disclosure…has a bad impact therefore it discourages other people….timing is a tricky one (Public servant with disability).

Just over half of people with disability (57%) believed they would risk being treated differently once they disclosed, although once again this figure varied across departments (43%-75%). Of those who had disclosed, just over a quarter (27%) reported experiencing negative consequences from disclosure. These negative consequences centred on being treated differently following disclosure and included perceptions:

- that they were afforded fewer opportunities;
- that judgments were made about their ability/capacity to take on work;
- that they experienced a change in employment status (e.g. having a permanent position reneged on, or being forced to reduce contracted hours);
- that they had to work harder to prove their worth;
- that they were excluded from the team;
- that they were micromanaged or put on a performance plan;
- that their disability was questioned by management when they were asked to provide evidence of fitness to work, or proof of disability;
- that managers shared information about them without their consent; and,
- feelings of humiliation, embarrassment, or even being bullied by supervisors.

This led to the suggestion that ‘where someone can get away with not disclosing, then they don’t.’

People with disability described similar negative experiences in the focus groups. Many participants felt that disclosure meant they were categorised as less able than co-workers. This was in direct contrast to the way participants viewed themselves: the experience of living with ‘disability’ had enabled them to find alternative strategies of tackling activities so that their ability was not affected:

> We have just come up with different ways to do the same thing. That doesn’t put us at a disadvantage. We just need some understanding that we do the same thing – we just need to do it a little bit different (Public servant with disability).

It was also clear from a number of focus groups that the type of disability was perceived to make a difference in how people were treated, with mental health seen as especially stigmatising:

> I think in some ways it depends of the nature of the disability. I am quite prepared to disclose the injuries that I received in my accident and hesitate to disclose the PTSD…sometimes I have to disclose it, but I find people sit back when you say you have anxiety. I had one supervisor who if he could make me cry then he’d made his day (Public servant with disability).
I didn’t want to tell everyone anything if I didn’t have to for the fear of stigma. It’s a stigma still. Mental health still has that stigma attached to it in some places (Public servant with disability).

It was, however, recognised that disclosure could have both positive and negative results. The positive impact of disclosure was seen as getting the right level of support. Interestingly many of the participants who described positive experiences following disclosure, noted that they were ‘quite lucky, in my workplace they’re quite accepting’. The reference to ‘luck’ in being accepted following disclosure was repeated in a number of departments:

_Luckily, I have really good managers that understand that I do have some limitations but they are equally comfortable for me to say what help I need….if I’m having a bad day I can go back because I need to re-negotiate a deadline. So that takes all the stress or pressure off_ (Public servant with disability).

However, there was recognition that the negative impact was both direct – stigma, lack of opportunity and so on – but also indirect: the temptation to stay with a supportive manager/team was highlighted as an issue that could hold someone back:

_I work quite closely with (someone who) has a disability that she’s disclosed to her manager. The manager is doing a great job of supporting her and understanding her. The problem is she doesn’t want to move anywhere else, and she’s got the skills to move up, but because she’s found a manager who can support her and is helping her with her disability, she’s too afraid of leaving that support to challenge herself or to develop herself any further up_ (Public servant without disability).

Whether the experience was a positive or negative one seemed to be related to individual managers and their understanding of disability. For example, it was noted that experiences could be different in different sectors of an organisation for the same person.

It was noted that there were two types of disclosure – disclosure in the system that identifies the proportion of people with disability, and disclosure because you feel comfortable and able to share personal details in order to get appropriate support. It was noted that disclosure in the system was often very low. However, the important goal was felt to be:

...finding how you help staff become comfortable enough to have that conversation and disclose (Public servant with disability).

There was, however, a perception that people often felt discouraged from disclosure due to concerns that it would lead to prejudice and a lack of opportunity. Managers, in particular, considered the difference in disclosure rates to HR vs. the APS survey. It was suggested that poor disclosure was either because ‘people don’t trust departmental management’ or ‘they believe it will impact on their advancement’.
In overview, it was felt that the goal of the department should be to ensure

The real level of disclosure is matched by the reported disclosure, then we would be seen as an employer of choice for people with disability, and I think it’s an indicator to me of success or otherwise of our culture, to manage disability (APS Manager).

Furthermore, it was suggested that rather than trying to identify people with diverse needs, the systems could be redesigned to be more accessible, which would then remove the need to disclose:

I think a lot of the activity and definitions to allow us to identify people so we can help them, and I sometimes think instead of doing that, why don’t we just design our systems, I work on systems design, to allow equitable access, but I guess we have to recognise that that will have costs, impacts, and things like that. If the system is designed to be equitable, then it allows people to use or participate in our workforce without having to disclose and things like that (APS Manager).

Such a universal design for the workplace would remove the need for ‘special needs’ to be catered for. Reasonable adjustments would still have to be made, but these would be viewed as just an integral part of the workplace.

Although participants in the focus groups without people with disability felt disclosure should be a choice made by the individual, noting that it was important to have respect for the individual’s dignity, they also suggested that non-disclosure could lead to difficulty for the person with disability particularly if they had a hidden disability:

I’ve been in a situation where we’ve got to hire an individual who has told us that they have a disability but have been told by the government doctor that they don’t need to disclose what that disability is. It’s kind of like, “Yes, I’ve got a disability, but I don’t have to tell you.” It’s a whole ... That makes it hard for us, because how can we help you or ... we might be doing something that’s exacerbating (Public Servant without Disability).

Thus disclosure was seen as important as a means to allow appropriate adjustment to be made, but that persons’ right to privacy should also be respected.

Finally, in some departments disclosure was viewed very much as a ‘tick box’ exercise that enables the organisation to demonstrate compliance. However, in overview, it was felt that disclosure should be determined by the person with disability i.e. it should occur when they feel comfortable with disclosure or when there is a need to disclose, for example in terms of requiring reasonable adjustments.
4.2. Barriers and enablers to disclosure

The majority of survey respondents (60%, range 43%-86%) felt they had to disclose because they needed adjustment in order to be able to do their job. Furthermore, as a number of respondents noted, for those with obvious physical disability, disclosure is not an option. A number of barriers to disclosure were described. Less than a quarter (24%, range 14%-50%) had been encouraged to disclose because they knew of other successes in the department resulting from disclosure. A minority (36%, range 26%-50%) felt disclosure should not be necessary, as their disability did not impact on their ability to do the job. A number of other barriers to disclosure were identified including concerns that disclosure would: lead to being fired/not hired (42% range 33%-58%); result in the employer focusing on disability rather than skills and abilities (49% range 41%-67%); limit future opportunities such as promotion (51% range 45%-58%); and, risk losing health care benefits (5% range 0%-14%).

A number of facilitators to disclosure were also described. These included: feeling comfortable disclosing because of a supportive relationship with the person to whom they disclosed (51% range 38%-64%); familiarity of HR personnel with disability and accommodations (48% range 42%-71%); feeling able to disclose because of a perception that the workplace is a disability friendly department (45% range 25%-58%); believing there is a fair system in place to resolve complaints (44% range 26%-64%); active disability recruiting in the department (36% range 17%-55%); recognition of disability in the departmental diversity statement (34% range 17%-57%); and, flexible working practices (25% range 8%-36%).

The barriers and facilitators to disclosure described in the focus groups reflected those listed in the questionnaire. It was however very evident that people felt the way they were treated following disclosure depended on the individual manager:

'It's not fair to say that the organisation is blanket poor. It has real exceptional places where things work really well and we have some of best practice happening in this department, in terms of giving people with disabilities, especially people with severe disabilities, incredible opportunities...but we also have the really thoughtless, almost “devil may care” attitude when we press the productivity button and the people with disabilities, get squeezed out and our statistics show that (Public Servant without disability).

It was noted that disclosure could be advantageous if ‘you find the right manager who is willing to support you’ since ‘If you can find that person, and they are rare people around, working with them is really, really good, a really good experience.’ Thus the importance of having a supportive environment in which it felt safe for people to disclose was highlighted across departments:

As individuals it's all up to us, how much we want to share. However, I think that within your immediate work area, it is good to disclose information but I think that there needs to be that supportive environment that you actually feel comfortable in disclosing (Manager with disability).
As one member of staff noted if people are afraid to disclose then they may not get the support they need, leading to a difficult situation:

*If the person doesn’t want to tell you, then it gets tricky as a manager to know what to do and so you might do a disservice to them* (Manager).

Good managers were seen as a facilitator to disclosure. It was felt that a relationship of trust was the key to enabling individuals to share anything that could impact on the workplace:

*Certainly if people are on medication for mood swings or whatever, I think you still need to tell, “Hey look, if I’m doing something weird, can you tell me? Because I might think it’s completely normal.” Or there’s a change in dosage or whatever...You don’t need to go into the whys, the whos, the whens, just, “Hey look, head’s up.” But I completely agree that it’s about having that level of trust with your manager to be able to confide that* (Public Servant without disability).

**4.3. Barriers and enablers to positive workplace culture**

Only 4% of all respondents felt there were no barriers for people with disability in their department (range 0%-6%). Overall, just under half of the respondents (45% range 32%-57%) thought their organisation was inclusive, whilst 12% (range 7%-21%) were sure it was not. A statistically significant difference in this perception was noted between those with and without disability ($x^2=90.2(1)$, $p=0.0001$), with people with disability being less likely to believe the department was inclusive (23%) compared to those without (47%).

In comparison, 68% of ACT respondents to the 2014 State of the Service Survey agreed or strongly agreed that their agency was ‘committed to creating a diverse workforce (including gender, age, cultural background, disability status, Indigenous status)’. Only 6% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. A statistically significant difference in this perception was noted between those with and without disability ($x^2=163.8(2)$, $p=0.0001$), with people with disability being less likely to agree or strongly agree that their agency was committed to diversity (60%) compared to those without (68%). People with disability were also almost more likely to disagree or strongly disagree with this statement (11%) than people without disability (6%).

Those who thought their department inclusive felt policies were good, and support for people with disability (for example, through the adjustment process) was evident. In a number of departments it was also noted that inclusion was evident because of factors such as: the employment of people with disability; the existence of a disability network; accessible buildings; and, the use of technologies that enable people with different disabilities to work.

Many of those who perceived that their department was not inclusive felt that despite commitments to developing an inclusive workplace being pronounced, very little actual change in behaviour or recruitment was witnessed. Even where
policies and procedures were known to be in place, these were not necessarily being applied. In general, there was a perception that observable physical disability was much better understood and responded to than any other form of disability, particularly mental health.

A number of barriers to workplace culture were described. Only a minority of all respondents believed that barriers to participation for people with disability included workplace harassment (20%, range 13%-26%), bullying (20% range 10%-30%) or the deliberate exclusion of people with disability from networks (24% range 11%-30%). However, unconscious bias towards people with disability was described in all departments. This was demonstrated through issues such as: inflexibility around work requirements; unintentional exclusion of people with disability; lack of representation of people with disability in disability champion roles; and, lack of encouragement to join networks.

It is noteworthy that in the 2014 State of the Service Survey, 16% of all respondents from the ACT reported having been bullied in the past 12 months. A statistically significant difference was noted between those with and without disability ($x^2=425.7(2), p=0.0001$), with people with disability twice as likely to report having been bullied (30%) than those without disability (15%). Just over a quarter of all our respondents (26% range 22%-32%) felt there was an inhospitable culture in the APS departments, which resulted from a lack of knowledge and awareness of disability issues. As noted by one APS respondent: ‘I do not believe this is malicious, just that people are ignorant’.

The inflexibility of working practices deserves further consideration as this issue was raised across all departments. The inconsistent application of flexible working hours was noted by many, and included different practices across sections as well as across departments. Furthermore, it was noted that the policy was applied differently according to the person’s situation. Thus it appeared to be easier for a parent to achieve flexible working than it did for a person with disability. This is perhaps best summed up by one focus group participant who noted that there are:

> Many, many, many, people in the industry who leave at 2:30 to pick up their children and they don’t come back. They work part-time. There are no reprimands for that, nobody looks at them like there’s something wrong with them because they’re doing that...If you said, “I have to pick up my child at 2:30 and I’ll be gone from the office working from home the rest of the day,” they’ll be fine with it. I don’t understand why somebody who has a disability is discriminated against rather than everybody. Nobody should be (Public Servant without disability).

A difference in management attitude to flexible working policies was observed in the management focus groups. For example, one manager described flexible working arrangements as a positive addition to the adjustment process, whilst others remarked that flexible work arrangements were ‘not automatically available to everybody’ and were ‘very difficult’ to manage. As noted by one participant:

> There are some areas in the department that wouldn’t really, certain managers that wouldn’t waste the time or the conversation on flexible working arrangements. It’s just “This is the way we do it, and this is the way we’ve always done it, so if you don’t fit in that’s it” (Public Servant with disability).
In contrast, other managers were very supportive of flexible working and made full use of the policy:

“I’ve had conversations with my supervisor about flexible working. I have days when I’m not well enough to come to work but well enough to work and I’ve had arrangement that I can work from home if I need to. It’s about having those conversations with your supervisor” (Public Servant with Disability).

Other barriers described in the focus groups included:

- poor physical access to some buildings;
- delays with the reasonable adjustment process;
- lack of adjustments in training rooms;
- poor communication between managers/supervisors and workers;
- lack of understanding about disability leading to people avoiding co-workers with disability due to a fear of ‘doing the wrong thing’;
- inflexibility, or a system that isn’t easy to make changes to in order to accommodate people with disability; and,
- attitudes towards disability.

This final observation, although articulated less clearly in some departments than others, is an important one as it reflects a perception that disability is something that must be ‘managed’ or is a ‘problem to be fixed’. This echoes the outmoded medical model of disability that both fails to acknowledge any positive aspects of disability, and presents all the difficulties of disability as centred within the person, rather than within the structures of society:

“The Department is still a long way away from even accepting diversity, let alone celebrating it, even from the language used in the conversation we’re having now. Disability is something that’s perceived as being maybe to be “managed”, as opposed to people with disability having quite unique life experiences that add to this department and the work that we do, and contribute actively to what we do” (Public Servant without disability).

4.4. Barriers and enablers to positive organisational capability

Over half of all respondents (65% range 52%-86%) said they were aware of disability policy and procedures, and the majority believed these policies supported staff needs (67% range 62%-73%). However a smaller percentage of respondents believed these policies were being applied (54% range 43%-80%). A statistically significant difference in this perception was noted between those with and without disability ($x^2=89.4(1)$, $p=0.0001$), with people with disability being less likely to believe the policies were being applied (51%) compared to those without (74%). A number of processes were seen as important to the participation of staff with disability in the department. These include: access to advice and support (73%); annual performance review (57%); assistive technology (74%); communication/information sharing (70%); Information technology (71%); physical environment (74%); policies and procedures (70%); recruitment application process (71%); training and development (72%); Transport (55%); and, working practices such as flexible working (74%).
4.4.1. Recruitment and career progression

Just over half (55% range 49%-61%) of all respondents were satisfied that the recruitment process was appropriate for people with disability, although staff in all departments felt that not enough was done to attract staff with disabilities, and that processes were drawn out and cumbersome. It was even suggested in one department that screening processes could exclude ‘experienced and appropriate staff’ with disability. Other respondents noted that:

*The recruitment process is geared for people that perform and operate in a specific way. That can limit diversity (APS questionnaire respondent).*

This issue was also picked up in the focus groups. A reluctance to employ staff with disability was also noted in some departments, usually because this was seen as falling into the ‘too hard basket’. For example, one participant revealed how a co-worker had stated they would prefer not to employ someone with disability, since this would require ‘dealing with a time-consuming person who could not handle the stress of a high-paced work environment.’ It was suggested that rather than recruiting to a quota, there was a need to provide a clear career path for people with disability that would encourage people to apply:

*It’s not just getting people in the door and satisfying a quota or whatever it might be, it’s actually providing career. I think we’re more at the latest part of that; focused on getting people in the door (Manager).*

However, one department had already taken steps to try and address this issue, although it was early days in terms of seeing an impact:

*We started doing some unconscious bias training for heads of selection panels, but I don’t think we’re anywhere near where we needed to be in terms of flattening that playing field (Public servant with disability).*

Satisfaction with the opportunities for career progression was also noted to differ significantly ($x^2=65.1(2), p=0.0001$) for people with disability in the 2014 State of the Service Survey. People with disability were less likely to agree or strongly agree that they were satisfied with opportunities for progression (27%) compared with people without disability (34%). They were also more likely to disagree that opportunities for progression were satisfactory (48% and 41% respectively).

4.4.2. Training and development

Just over half of the respondents (52% range 43%-56%) also felt that disability training and development was satisfactory. Those who did not, were especially concerned about lack of training for managers. This theme was repeated in the focus groups as well as on the questionnaires, and was common across departments. It was suggested that training should be compulsory, repeated frequently (a refresher course as required for first aid) and carried out in person to ensure full engagement with the process:
Education should be mandatory and it should not be online, because you can click through as many pages as you want (Public servant without disability).

The issue of the limitations of training was also picked up in a number of departments. Training, however good, was not felt to be enough to show people how to behave:

I attended this department training and um it was really...could actually help you to know how to behave with an individual person with disability basis...[then]. I saw someone the other day in the street who was on crutches and I was in my head, do I open the door for them or do they not want me to? Are they going to think that I see them as a person with a disability if I open the door and should they open it themselves because they can do stuff? (Public servant without disability).

It was also noted by some managers that training is not always sufficient to ensure someone has the skills to deal with difference:

Actually managers don’t know how to manage it and I think that’s one of the big problems. I mean we have training courses on dealing with difficult people but you know whether or not there needs to be something else because I think in these days if your depression and things like there is a greater need for targeted ways with deal with people (APS Manager).

It was felt that managers needed to learn how to interact on a personal level with staff:

They are wrapped up in the rules and the regulations to the point where they can’t see you as a person (Public Servant with disability).

A greater focus on training around supporting people with mental health needs was strongly advocated in a number of departments:

They are encouraging more people with mental health issues to come back to work but we’re not providing a packet of education around, what to do if you do have somebody in your area that has a mental health issue or whatever. You may be putting that person there, but we’re not showing people how they should be interacting with that person: not treating them differently, but making adjustments for people (APS Manager).

There were plans in at least one department to roll out a training package developed by the APSC and the Department of Human Services. The training includes a section on disability confidence specifically targeted at managers. Topics include mental health, what to do in terms of reasonable adjustment, how to start a conversation. It was anticipated that this package would address a number of gaps in the education around working with disability.
4.4.3. Working practices

Working practices were seen as satisfactory by half of those surveyed (53% range 47%-63%). One difficulty raised repeatedly in all departments was the inflexibility of working hours, with some managers insisting that staff had to be in work by a certain time and at their desk during particular hours. This was felt to discriminate against people with disability who might find it difficult to get into work early, have their health compromised by staying late, or who needed to be able to move around from time to time for health reasons. In some departments concern was expressed that the classified nature of work in certain divisions made flexible working difficult:

Look at some of the divisions like mine where we’re working on certain problems...that classified network, there is issues of you know, can you do that at home? Work in IT should be addressing this...it’s probably going be a little while before that sort of take home message can be applied (Manager).

However, differences in management practice, and inconsistencies in application of the policy, were described in all departments. For example, in one focus group it was noted that:

Working practices in this department can be very one sided. Some branches are great, while others are horrible. My supervisor is rude, he manifestly plays favourites between staff, affords certain staff flexible workplace opportunities but this is not extended to others, and this seems to be the culture across my branch. Having work/life balance and disability policies is great, but if they aren’t enforced, then what’s the point? I now desperately want to leave this job (Public Servant with disability).

When I was crawling my way back to for find work, when I was on a graduated return to work, I was told that I couldn’t do work from home, because it was against the rules. Once I got back to full time and technically wasn’t sick, then it was going to be allowed (Public Servant with disability).

Some positive experiences of the flexible working initiative were described, although these were in the minority:

Our division is also one of those trialling the flexible work arrangement... and so that’s made a real difference to the way we work, in my area, anyway (Public Servant with disability).

Yeah, it typically happens in our workspace. We have early starters, other people that are late so he doesn’t start until 10:30 because they have difficulty sleeping at night so they don’t start until 10:30 but then they stay until 7 o’clock at night (Manager).

It was proposed that more attention could be given to how job sharing or other flexible work arrangements could increase the participation of people with disability, particularly given the general acceptance that such arrangements should be
available to returning mothers. It was also noted that creating the right space or role for a person could be compromised if full disclosure did not take place by the person with disability, although the importance of identifying all aspects of a job during the recruitment process was also raised.

Satisfaction with access to flexible working arrangements was also noted to differ significantly ($\chi^2=1321.4(2), p=0.0001$) for people with disability in the 2014 State of the Service Survey. People with disability were less likely to state they were satisfied or very satisfied with access to flexible working arrangements (68%) compared with people without disability (74%). They were also more likely to state that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with access to flexible working arrangements (16% and 10% respectively).

Satisfaction with the disability-focused employee network was expressed by 51% (range 41%-58%) of all respondents. Lack of awareness that the network even existed was identified as an issue across all departments:

*Didn’t know that it existed. More awareness could be helpful* (Public Servant without disability).

*I don't know if we have a disability network - certainly our other networks are much more high profile* (APS questionnaire respondent).

In some departments, the network was perceived as lacking a proactive approach to supporting the inclusion of people with disability. There was even a suggestion in one department that the network attracted people with a negative attitude, who followed their own agenda rather than speaking for the majority.

### 4.5. Barriers and enablers to individual capability

#### 4.5.1. Reasonable adjustment process

The “Reasonable Adjustment” process was seen to be a barrier for people with disability by 30% of respondents (range 28%-35%), particularly because of the time taken to make adjustments and in some departments, knowing who to go to for help.

For example, people reported having to wait anything from four to twelve weeks for specialised equipment to arrive and be installed. In general, the processes required for achieving adjustment, whether in terms of procuring equipment, enabling flexible working or securing an appropriate parking space were seen as less than supportive:

*I don’t think it’s easy. I think it could be a lot easier. The amount of red tape that you’ve got to go through to make things happen is, I’d have to say, horrendous. Once you get to the end, it’s easy, but everything you’ve got to go through…I can understand why some managers just don’t want to do it, because there’s a lot of work involved* (Public Servant without disability).
People with disability often talked about having to ‘fight hard’ to get reasonable adjustments made for themselves and for other colleagues:

“I remember having to try and get some equipment for a physical disability and it was very difficult. … Why does this person need this? It was so many questions it became an inordinate task to try and support that staff member (Public Servant with disability)”

As summed up by one manager, the process for dealing with reasonable adjustments for disability was frequently ‘found to be quite alienating and stressful for people with disability.’

Cost was also identified as a barrier to reasonable adjustment in several departments:

“In my Department these is still a disconnect between the Department’s supportive position and the Property sections who should be ensuring our environment can support people with a disability. It has been clear over the years that Property is pressured to save money, not consider staff needs (APS Manager).”

“I think it’s systemic and I think it happens particularly at the middle manager level because the middle manager level is responsible for the outputs of their area, and if they can get it done cheaper, they will. It boils down to that (Public Servant without disability).”

It was suggested that managers need to try to be more creative in their response to adjustment, but that this would require working with the person with disability to find a solution that worked:

“I don’t think we’ve been creative enough about reasonable adjustments … maybe managers aren’t equipped to think about this differently and to sit down and have discussions with staff. I think there is a responsibility on the person with disability to share that information; they want to be able to successfully change the way the workplace interacts with them (APS Manager).”

4.5.2. Lack of self-confidence

Over a third (41% range 37%-48%) also saw a lack of confidence or self-belief by the person with disability as a barrier to success – however it was also noted that this could be caused by the treatment people with disability received from others:

“Prior bad experiences mean that people with a disability are less likely to put themselves out there for fear of the reactions of others (Public servant without disability).”

“They bring personal feeling from their past experiences into the workplace and have feelings of doubt or insecurity towards staff members and management (Public Servant with disability).”
It was also noted that these previous experiences could impact differently on individuals. Hence although some might show a lack of confidence, others who had previously had to stand-up for themselves might present an ‘aggressive’ front because they expected to have the same fight again:

...because where she used to work that’s the fight she’d had, so it’s that perception that identified that fight again, rather than going in thinking ‘Let’s see what happens’ (Public servant with disability).

People with disability agreed that they were not always as good at promoting themselves compared to others:

I guess people with disabilities aren’t necessarily always as assertive and self-promoting, I guess is the term, as far as, “I can do this and this and this and this and this and this.” We just get on with our work and we’re not the greatest at up-selling ourselves (Public servant with disability).

However, it was also suggested that sometimes this was more about being able to articulate your skills, rather than lacking self-belief. As one participant noted, lack of career progression for people with disability was probably related to this issue rather than a lack of skills. A more merit based system it was felt would help overcome this barrier:

Whether you have a disability or not, it’s still very, very competitive to go up, right? You’ve got a disability; it just makes it harder because you’re assessed based on a 15 minute interview. If you are not able to express yourself articulately and within those 15 minutes, you don’t get the job and I do agree that you need to be moved higher based on merit and whether you have the ability to do the job (Public servant with disability).

4.5.3. Other people’s perceptions

Almost two-thirds of those surveyed (60% range 51%-68%) believed other people’s preconceptions about the capability of the person with disability presented another barrier in the workplace. However it was evident from both questionnaire responses and focus group discussions that teams and managers were seen to differ in their acceptance of someone’s disability:

Recently I heard someone saying, “My personal opinion is you shouldn’t be working.” I’ve had three professors and numerous doctors all say that I’m perfectly fine to work. There’s nothing wrong ... There is something wrong with me but nothing wrong with my capacity and I can work full time, but I’ve had similar. People just have their own opinion and they voice it (Public servant with disability).

When I first went into the team I’m in, somebody was talking to me about my disability and what have you. She turned around and she said, “Why are you even working? How are you working?” I went, “My brain is still functional and it still functions at a very high level, thank you very much” (Public servant with disability).
The barriers come down to individuals surrounding the person with a disability. Some people/areas are brilliant. Others just do not give you a chance (APS questionnaire respondent).

Differences in manager style and attitude in particular were noted:

You get a lot of managers and I’m not sure other people experience it as well, but a lot of managers who are actually very interested in their own career, they’re not interested in yours. They will say the right things and they’ll do the right things, to an extent, but they’re not interested in you and they’re not willing to promote “Hey, I’ve got this guy. He’s got a disability, but he’s very good. He can do the job (Public Servant with Disability).

I think there are some managers who, particularly with the invisible disabilities have preconceived ideas about ability. I know of people who’ve got mental health conditions who have ended up being performance managed unfairly. I think that is quite a big issue (Public servant with disability).

It was also observed that a focus on performance management to deal with issues added an additional barrier:

There is a belief I think, particularly, with mental health, that it can be performance managed. They’re not perceived to be working to a level of multi-skill in that team, so they’ve got performance management and everything that brings with it – for example loss of self-esteem (Public servant without disability).

This was a frustration for some managers as well as those employees with disability. In a number of departments an emphasis on productivity was seen as key to the reliance on tracking performance as a management tool. One manager put forward the suggestion that a change in focus was needed:

I think maybe, now we need to turn the dialogue around and see, what’s the value? We’re always looking at, “Oh, you’re not that productive.” As a negative, yeah? [We should ask] what is actually the value of employing people who have some sort of disability? I mean, if you think about ... because we have been subject for such a long time to this way of thinking, where productivity is the most important thing, but actually, for society to function better, maybe inclusiveness is more important (APS Manager).

It was very clear from focus group discussions that people with disability simply wanted to be treated like everyone else. However, in order to be seen as ‘equal’ they often had to do more:

Sometimes you actually try harder but you push yourself a little bit too far because you want to fit in. You want to be the same. You don’t want to be different, but in saying that the team that I’m in are absolutely wonderful. The new team that I’m in, they understand. I work with them and they work with me. It’s very equal in that way (Public servant with disability).
I’ve always been of the assumption you’ve got to be twice as good to be considered half as good (Public servant with disability).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that sometimes, in an attempt to be supportive, team and manager behaviours would actually disenfranchise the person with disability:

We just want you to take it easy so you fit back in” and you’re like, “Well, actually I do fit in and I don’t want to be any different to everybody else. Just let me do what I’m capable.” I think you feel like your independence is taken away a little bit because you know you can do more. You can actually prove that you can do more (Public servant with disability).

4.5.4. Managers and colleagues as enablers

Managers and colleagues were both seen as important support mechanisms for people with disability by the majority of respondents (74% and 73% respectively) and most people did feel they were supported by managers (55% range 47% - 65%) and colleagues (64% range 57% - 71%). However, people with disability were more likely to say they did not feel supported by managers (30%) or colleagues (20%) when compared to those without disability (20% and 7% respectively). These differences were statistically significant with regard to managers ($\chi^2 = 21.1 (1), p= 0.0001$) and colleagues ($\chi^2 = 64.5 (1), p= 0.0001$).

Respondents to the 2014 State of the Service Survey also agreed or strongly agreed that they felt people in their workgroup respected each other (82%) and felt they were often or always encouraged by supervisors (68%). Once again, people with disability were less likely to agree that they felt people in their workgroup respected each other (74%) compared to those without disability (82%) and more likely to disagree (12% and 7% respectively). People with disability were also less likely to state that they felt encouraged by supervisors often or always (62%) compared to those without disability (69%) and more likely to say they were never or rarely encouraged (15% and 10% respectively). These differences were statistically significant with regard to managers ($\chi^2 = 56.4 (2), p= 0.0001$) and colleagues ($\chi^2 = 117.7 (2), p= 0.0001$).

Lack of support from managers was a key issue described by questionnaire respondents and focus group participants in all departments. Whilst in some departments this was viewed as further evidence of unconscious bias, in others overt bullying and harassment was described. However, it was also evident that bullying was not uniquely related to disability, but was an endemic part of the culture in some areas of the APS:

I think workplace harassment and bullying is a big problem within this department. It gets identified in every survey and everything that we do that people witness or experience. It is something that the department is working hard to change that culture (Public Servant without disability).

Whether poor support was deliberate or not, it was clear that the experience of feeling unsupported was distressing for person on receiving end:
Actually, I am just screwed here. I have done the right thing. I have disclosed. I am following the path. I have spoken to HR. I have been stuffed around, had leave cancelled, had my job dismantled. No one wants to listen. No one cares. They only care they if they give you a verbal order that you do it. This place is intensely stressful, emotionally painful, has a clear lack of management, and is probably the worst place to be if you are not ‘normal’. There is nothing I can do but soldier on...The worst part, the absolute worst part, is that I could really do with some help here. I really could. I cannot talk to anyone without it blowing up in my face. I will handle this on my own (Public servant with disability).

Once again it was evident that the amount of support experienced differed depending on an individual’s location within the department. This difference often came down to management style:

*Firstly, I wish to stress that other areas in the department have been very inclusive. Second, harassing supervisors need to be counselled about their behaviour. My branch is so bad that I just want to leave. It is clear to me that no change will occur. Bad supervisors will not be compelled to change and it won’t occur by their good graces (Public servant with disability).*

Thus a good manager was able to set the standard for working with people with disability:

*I think again the leadership of managers is very important. I’ve been very fortunate where I am that our manager is very supportive of the officers in our group that have a disability. He sort of led the way and showed people by his actions how people need to be treated and supported (Public servant without disability).*

*Going back to what I said and even one of the things I said initially about everybody can work to 100% of their ability, but everybody’s abilities are different. When the manager leads I think they set the tone for the group (Public servant without disability).*

In contrast, poor managers were seen to have a negative impact on team morale:

*When the line manager is weak, and doesn’t do his job properly (i.e. doesn’t lead his team at all) then colleagues may be angry about having to pick up extra work when the person with a disability has to have time off. This could be avoided if the line manager was pro-active and basically a suitable manager (Public servant with disability).*

In particular, there was perceived to be a tendency to confound performance with a need for adjustment:

*Disability management in this organisation is comical...I have even seen people performance managed and driven to the point of suicidal ideation as the manager could not make the distinction between performance suffering from mental disability and performance suffering from job incompetence (Public servant without disability).*
I think the performance management system is a big issue. I have seen managers mark down those with a disability at performance appraisal time purely because of their disability, with no reasonable adjustment factored into assessments. This has a negative effect on self-esteem, morale, and pay increments (APS questionnaire respondent).

It was noted that this was often due to limited staff awareness regarding what disability is, and that it is not always visible/immediately obvious. It was noted that sometimes it can be difficult to separate performance issues from the disability. One participant summed the problem-up from a management perspective as follows:

Yes, you have to make allowances and yes, there has to be reasonable adjustment. But if someone’s not performing enough to keep a position, then in that aspect they should be treated like everybody else (Manager).

Managers also expressed concerns about not doing a good job as a manager. Fears ranged from making a decision that would make things worse for someone because they did not understand the person’s disability properly, to worries about paying too much attention to that member of staff and ‘favouring’ them over others in the team.

4.5.5. Performance management

In the 2014 State of the Service Survey just over half (54%) of all respondents from the ACT agreed or strongly agreed that ‘performance management policies are transparent and promote fair and equitable processes’, whilst 14% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. People with disability were less likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement (49%) than those without disability (54%). They were also more likely to disagree or strongly disagree that performance management policies were transparent and promoted fair processes, than people without disability (20% and 14% respectively). These differences were statistically significant ($X^2 = 23.2 (2), p= 0.0001$). There was also an understanding that managers had to work within a system and sometimes the system was the main issue:

I have had to make two personal written submissions on access issues to HR and have never received a reply. On the other hand my manager is very supportive, but he can’t change the frameworks controlled by HR and Corporate Services (APS questionnaire respondent).

This is not about immediate managers; it is about the whole management process. There are flaws in the return to work process when you have been off with an injury. The system does not cater to individuals but applies a one size fits all to deal with us. The issue is about support and respecting a person’s needs and listening to what they want (APS questionnaire respondent).

In my experience, (the Department) creates unreal and demanding expectations of the performance of all staff and then measures where they fall short. Such an environment does not foster an air of inclusivity (Public Servant without disability).
Furthermore, the need to resort to performance management was seen to be driven by the pressure to achieve output which was placed on managers. This was therefore a problem of the system and organisational culture:

*There is pressure on you to make sure that your team is delivering and if you’ve got a person in that team who is somehow different, doesn’t fit the mode and if you’re not especially supported by the system, I guess if you’re expected to make it work, I can see that there is a potential conflict there. I’m not saying that’s right…but there is a tension. It’s the performance culture of the place (Public Servant with disability).*

In overview, it was felt that there was a need to somehow empower managers to make ‘what should be the right decision and not necessarily the decision that the mechanisms in the policy allow for.’

### 4.5.6. Mental health as a barrier

Differences in support depending on the nature of the disability were also described. One aspect of disability in particular – mental health – was perceived as lacking support and understanding. Mental health issues were thought to be ‘shoved in the too hard basket’.

*Mostly physical disability that can be seen, is quite easy to understand, but there are the disabilities, mental disabilities and things of that nature, which might not be so obvious and just aren’t understood by a lot of people (Public Servant without disability).*

It was frequently asserted that mental illness was sometimes confused with lack of commitment to work and a bad attitude. However, the difficulties for managers were also acknowledged and the limited support for supervisors of staff with mental health difficulties was observed. Perhaps the biggest challenge, particularly around mental health, was knowing how to distinguish between serious mental health problems such as depression and non-clinical emotional responses by staff:

*I don’t feel that I have the tools and maybe I should be reaching out more between determining is that a behaviour that needs to be addressed and trying to provide some support and sort of bring awareness to that (Manager).*

There was a general perception that mental health problems such as depression and anxiety were still associated with such stigma in the community at large, that it remained difficult for individuals to talk about their diagnosis in the workplace without fear of being judged. Furthermore, some managers felt that a fear of intruding on people’s personal business prevented more discussion about mental health problems at work. Managers themselves also often felt they were not properly equipped to support people with disability, particularly those with mental health problems:

*I think there is quite a difference between physical and mental disability. With physical, I think everyone understands, is happy to talk about things and be open, and generally it’s handled okay. With mental disability, there is less openness and*
as a manager I am not as confident that I can provide the support that the person needs. In part this is because I can’t talk to others about the disability so can’t get them to understand why we are doing certain things (Manager).

One manager, who also had disability, noted that understanding disability often came with personal experience; understanding how to support others with disability was therefore only possible through direct communication with each individual:

Having a visible disability, which is very noticeable, doesn’t give me a pathway to understanding everybody else and everyone else’s disability. So even for us there’s still that element of needing to talk to people to understand things that you don’t know. I probably five, six years ago, I knew very little about mental health issues. Before I came to meet actual people, so it is interesting to look on that for all of us (Manager with Disability).

This highlights a point raised in a number of the focus groups, regarding the importance of treating people with disability as individuals each with different needs, not as a ‘condition’ with a set solution. There was an assumption made by some participants that certain disabilities (particularly physical ones) were easier to deal with, the view that if a person has condition ‘X’ then they must need software ‘Y’ or adjustment ‘Z’:

...they think it’s easier when you can put somebody in a box instead of acknowledging each person individually (Public Servant with disability).

4.6. Understanding the state of play for people with disability

During the focus groups staff were asked how they would summarise the current situation for people with disability in their Department (see Annex D). It was noted across most departments that the experiences of people with disability differed a great deal depending on a number of factors including:

- type of disability; with better outcomes perceived for those with more visible physical disabilities;
- the section in which the person worked;
- the capacity/understanding/flexibility of individual line managers;
- whether or not disability is confused with a performance deficit;
- the restrictive nature of some policies which are not necessarily inclusive (e.g. ‘Return to Work’, ‘Working from Home’); and,
- the strength of the individual’s advocacy skills; with those who are able to communicate their support needs being seen to have better outcome than those who are not able to articulate their needs.

In the main, however, for the majority of participants in this research achieving an inclusive organisational culture remains a significant challenge particularly for those departments and agencies that have achieved a cohesive dominant culture with embedded norms and values.
4.7. Achieving progress

Focus group participants were also asked to identify the one thing that could be changed in their organisation to improve the experience of those with disability (see Annex D). Across all departments better disability awareness training was seen as critical and education for all staff was seen as paramount to enabling cultural change. It was often noted across the sample that this should be mandatory. However, the principal feature of this education should be a focus on people, not policy. Thus an emphasis on what people with disability can achieve and how best to help them be productive in the workplace was seen as important, along with education on specific disabilities, particularly those related to mental health. Other changes identified in different departments included:

**Enhancing workplace culture**
- changing Departmental culture to one that was more person-centric and no longer saw people with disability as a separate section of the workforce;
- enabling people to feel that disclosing disability would result in support rather than being discriminated against;
- reducing fear and increasing confidence – both for people with disability and their managers;
- increasing the number of employees with disability through the recruitment process, and promoting individuals with disability into higher level roles.

**Enhancing organisational capability**
- develop a communications strategy for supporting behaviour change;
- mandatory ‘people’ training for middle managers;
- providing more information to explain to people what ‘ticking the disability box’ means;
- employing an independent intermediary (sitting outside of HR) with specific expertise in non-medical models of disability and reasonable adjustments to support managers and people with disability develop sustainable working situations together; and,
- including people with disability on recruitment panels.

**Enhancing individual capability**
- people with disability should be given mentors to support their progress in the department;
- better use of flexible working and greater consistency in approach was seen as providing a positive way forward.

In overview then, respect, tolerance and engagement with others were seen as key components of the process of change, along with making disability more visible. As one focus group participant put it:

> It really shouldn’t matter if you’re disabled or not. If that’s what you need, that’s what you need (Public servant without disability).
5. IN CONCLUSION – DOING IT DIFFERENTLY

5.1. Focus areas for improvement

Our research identifies three dilemmas which should provide focus areas for improvement in the APS. As Figure 2 illustrates, these can be organised around cultural, organisational capability and individual capability barriers. In practice, these barriers interact with one another in a dynamic way and impact directly and indirectly on the implementation of departmental policies, and processes, the wellbeing of people with disability and the overall health of the service itself.

Dilemma 1: cultural alienation

The existing definition of disability (which is based on a deficit model) disempowers rather than empowers people with disability, particularly those suffering from mental illness and/or requiring organisational support for assistive technology. Lack of empowerment leads to low levels of employee confidence and organisational trust. Trust remains the key to enhancing disclosure.

Unconscious bias is often reflected in general staff and managerial behaviour towards people with disability and is reflected in negative preconceptions of their capability and perpetuated through a top-down conception of high performance which serves to disempower rather than empower people with certain disabilities.

It should be recognised that people with disability simply work differently.

Dilemma 2: managerial capability and support

Managers are seen as an important support mechanism for people with disability by the majority of our respondents but on average just under half felt supported by managers. Inconsistent managerial practices create a significant implementation gap in disability policy. Managers require significant upskilling particular in people management skills. At the same time, it is equally evident that managers need to be incentivised to take the time to think about how to work differently to accommodate (and benefit from) diversity. There is also an urgent need for more HR expertise in disability to support management. Moreover, there can be no doubt that the APS would benefit from role models at the senior management levels. Executive voice is critical to the achievement of a diverse and progressive culture.

Dilemma 3: implementation and learning

The APS needs to see like people with disability. Significant barriers persist in working practices that serve to exclude rather than enhance workplace participation in areas such as recruitment, career planning, reasonable adjustment, flexible work, and performance management. Although the majority of respondents said they were aware of disability policy and procedure, and believed these policies supported staff needs; most respondents felt these were not being applied effectively. The quality of learning and development was viewed to be poor especially for managers and largely based on E-learning without fundamental human interaction. In many departments training was not mandatory.
Figure 2: Barriers to workplace participation experienced by people with disability

**Cultural barriers and triggers**

1. Unconscious bias is often reflected in general staff and managerial behaviours & preconceptions of capability
2. Unsupportive culture – the majority perceive that the APS is exclusive
3. High stress environment
4. Paternalistic value system

**Individual barriers and triggers**

1. Lack of empowerment, leads to low levels of employee confidence and organisational trust
2. Absence of appropriate but fulfilling work
3. Humiliating case management processes
4. Slow reasonable adjustment processes
5. Inflexible working practices
6. Uninformed performance review processes

**Organisational barriers and triggers**

1. The existing definition of disability disempowers rather than empowers people with a disability, particularly those suffering from mental illness or other cognitive barriers and/or requiring organisational support for assistive technology
2. Lack of empowerment, leads to low levels of employee confidence and organisational trust. Trust is the key to enhancing disclosure
3. Poor disability training and development
4. Limited people-management skills exhibited by some middle managers
5. Absence of role models at the senior level
6. Insufficient recruitment and advancement of staff with disability
7. Limited HR expertise in disability
8. Little incentive to take the time to think about how to work differently to ‘accommodate (and benefit from) diversity’

**Impacts on departmental policies, processes and culture**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability policy outputs</th>
<th>Problematic compliance with outputs by target groups</th>
<th>Actual impacts of outputs</th>
<th>Perceived impacts of outputs</th>
<th>Identification of implementation gaps</th>
</tr>
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</table>
5.2. New policy directions

5.2.1. Principles

Any causal theory of cultural change has to be founded on strong evidence of how target groups are currently behaving and what new behaviours are necessary to make a difference. In the case of public servants with disability this involves recognition by public servants without disability that they do things differently but no less effectively. Hence a fundamental starting point to cultural change in this context has to be the adoption of a definition of disability that empowers rather than disempowers people with disability. We therefore propose the 2007 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which Australia ratified in 2008 as an empowering alternative:

The right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities (Article 27).

Five operational principles for Strategic HR emanate from this definition and should inform progressive practice.

- Firstly, departments should focus on interventions for achieving a healthy workplace. A healthy workplace requires that employers help their employees achieve their aspirations and be the best that they can be.

- Secondly, co-design policies and processes with public servants with disability by default to “see like people with disability” and build trust and confidence.

- Thirdly, co-design “strength-based” career pathways with and for people with disability in appropriate areas.

- Fourthly, think carefully about issues of strategic sequencing to ensure that the organisation is ready for change to avoid adverse unintended consequences.

- Fifthly, use progressive language to underpin the change process (e.g. “sharing” rather than “disclosure”)

5.2.2. Actions to enhance individual capability

- The co-design of “strength-based” career pathways requires an evidence-based approach – hence the need for a “light touch” APS capability review in this area.

- To meet the short-term imperative of increasing the visibility of senior role models, co-design a fast track emerging leaders program benchmarked against best international practices.

- To meet medium to long-term imperatives for maintaining senior role models co-design a talent management program (including mentoring, learning and development and appropriate knowledge base) benchmarked against best international practices.

- Co-design a developmental performance review system to support public servants with disability to be the best that they can be.

- Introduce a passport system to ease system navigation of the reasonable adjustment process.
✓ Co-design conditions determining workplace flexibility.
✓ Co-design interventions to help identify and diffuse best practices (e.g. blogs written by public servants with disability Or ‘Talking Head’ video clips describing coping mechanisms that have held them in good stead).
✓ To enhance capability and expand opportunity for exciting work deploy team engineering models (e.g. 6plus6 and 10plus10 models).

5.2.3. Actions to enhance organisational capability
✓ Short, medium and long-term targets should be established for recruitment of public servants with disability to the SES.
✓ An action-based capability review should be conducted to define the diversity challenge for APS HR management systems and the professional skills and resources required to meet them.
✓ Given the scale of the challenge, mental health should form a central component of this review.
✓ A review and subsequent reform of performance standards should be initiated crystallised around a developmental rather than judgemental philosophy.
✓ An ‘Ask the person’ approach should be used in all service interactions with public servants with disability.
✓ Exemplar managers and divisions should be identified to distil and diffuse better practice.
✓ APSC Management Helpline/Employee Assistance Program could be established to augment capability and support for both managers and public servants with disability.
✓ Mandatory face to face learning and development should underpin core disability awareness training and education.
✓ Talking Heads best practice interviews with exemplar public servants should be conducted and widely promoted and distributed.
✓ Outcome based monitoring, evaluation and learning systems should be established in this area with direct reporting to the Secretary
✓ We would recommend exploring the use of Washington Group questions to inform APS data collection on disability issues.
6. REFERENCES


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ANNEX A: RECRUITMENT GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUPS

For those with staff with no disclosed disability we would like focus groups to be:
• Mixed gender
• Representative of your department
• One should comprise APS, the other ELs
• Please avoid individuals being in the same group as their managers as this can make people reluctant to participate/talk honestly
• Ideally the EL group should have a mix of people with and without experience managing individuals with disability

For the group with staff with a disclosed disability we would like it to be
• As representative of the Department as possible

For both groups please try to avoid mobilisation of bias – that is individuals with extreme views who are likely to dominate the group, resulting in a data set that is not truly representative of the departmental context.

Suggested wording for recruitment email:
The University of Canberra, through its Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis (IGPA), is undertaking a study looking at disability and employment within the APS. This research aims to understand the organisational norms and values that affect employees with a disability, so as to support the development of relevant policies and actions which will allow the APS to improve on the career progress and experiences of employees with a disability. In order to capture the perceptions and experiences of staff in (insert departmental name) the team from IGPA will be carrying out a series of focus groups on (insert date). The focus groups will explore both the barriers to the employment and career progression of people with disability, and the resources that are available to support people with disability in (departmental name). Each focus group will last for up to one and a half hours and are open to all staff; however numbers are limited. Any information provided during these groups will be treated with the utmost discretion and confidentiality by the research team. If you would be interested in participating please reply to this email by (insert date). If you have any questions please contact Dr Penney Upton: penneyupton@canberra.edu.au
ANNEX B: FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULES

1. Focus Group Schedule (APS/EL1&2)

Introduction

Include acknowledgement of Country
Welcome the group: thanks for agreeing to be part of the focus group. We appreciate your willingness to give up your time etc.

Facilitator and observer introduce themselves and explain their respective roles

Explain purpose of focus group: The reason we are having these focus groups is to find out about disability and employment in your organisation as it is currently—we would like to focus on the barriers to the employment and career progression of people with disability as you see it, and any relevant experiences you might have had over the past 6-12 months.

Introduce: Ground rules

1. We want you to do the talking
   o We really need your input and would like you to be honest and open with us. The Chatham House Rule applies today
   o No right or wrong answers.

2. Respect for other people and their opinions
   o We would like everyone to participate as everyone’s experiences and opinions are important
   o Other people’s opinions must therefore be respected
   o So please say whether you agree or disagree with others, but be polite and respectful and keep the APS values in mind

3. Respect for co-workers
   o Please try and avoid naming colleagues (we will of course anonymise everything later)
   o Must not turn into a discussion about specific staff and their practices, the focus is the organisation as a whole not individuals (not a witch hunt)

4. Confidentiality and anonymity
   o We will be tape recording the group so we can capture everything you have to say (check everyone is ok with this) BUT you can be assured that:
   o We won’t identify anyone by name in our report. You will remain anonymous
   o What is said in this room stays here – everyone must agree this (link back to rule 3)
   o Ask everyone to introduce themselves (first name and APS level only for the benefits of the tape, reassure re anonymity)
**Engagement question**

What do you think we mean by disability? How is it understood in the work place?

**Exploratory questions**

1. Do you have/know of protocols in place on how to interact with people with disability?
2. Do you know/are you aware of individuals in your organisation who have disability? (remind about not naming colleagues as already stated in the intro) (If ‘no’, ask about awareness of individuals with disability)
   a. Probe: how well they know these individual(s)
   b. Probe: what disabilities individuals have
   c. Probe: what sort of jobs/level individuals hold
   d. Are they particularly successful/have a very difficult time
3. How does this person (people with disability) manage in your organisation – are you aware of any barriers to their success/progression?
4. Do you think people with disability are equally valued in your organisation?
   a. Probe: do they feel a part of the organisation
   b. Probe: are they valued more/less/about the same as employees in the organisation who do not have a disability?
   c. Do they feel comfortable/trust others?
5. Do you think the experiences of those with disability are different to other employees in your organisation who do not have a disability? In what way?
   a. Probe: how do you think this affects people emotionally, personally, practically etc
   b. Do you feel your organisation is inclusive?
6. Is there anything about the work you do in your organisation that makes it more challenging for someone with disability?
   a. Probe: If yes identify what these are, get examples
   b. Probe: if no ask why not, get examples
7. How easy do you think it is to make reasonable adjustments for someone with disability in your organisation?
   Probe: examples of adjustments made and the process e.g. were individuals consulted/included in the decision making
   Probe: do you think adjustments mainly concern the physical environment? What about flexible working arrangements re time/place etc?
8. Do you think people feel able to disclose their disability in this organisation? Are there any perceived/observed advantages or disadvantages of disclosure?
   a. Probe: why do staff feel this way? Is there any tangible evidence that this is the case?
   b. Probe: what sort of support or resources are available/general culture/training re equality

**REVEAL LIST OF BARRIERS AND ASK:**

From this list, what do you believe are the barriers to advancement for people with disability in this organisation?
9. Do you think people with disability are treated fairly/equally in your organisation?
   a. Probe: why do staffs feel this way? Is there any tangible evidence that this is the case?
   b. Probe: what sort of support or resources available/general culture re equality

10. Are you aware of any (positive) discrimination in your organisation including by having any reasonable adjustments made? (examples if needed include preferential parking, mentoring introduced by banks to support with interviews, job applications etc)
   a. Probe: what do they think about this, get examples

11. What do you know about hidden disabilities?
   a. Probe: what do they believe these to be? Are they aware of anyone in the organisation? What do they think the approach to non-disclosure of such a disability should be?

12. Do you feel more comfortable supporting/making reasonable adjustments for people with certain types of disability than others?
   a. Probe: which disabilities they feel comfortable with and why – e.g. are these ones they have experience with?
   b. Probe: what makes them unsure/uncomfortable – what might help this?

13. What is working well in your organisation with regard to ensuring equality for employees with disability?
   a. Probe: what lessons can we learn from this?

14. What isn't working well?
   a. Probe for examples
   b. Probe: What's getting in the way?
   c. Probe: How can we make progress?

Exit questions

How would you sum up the current situation for people with disability in your organisation?

If there were one thing you could change in your organisation what would that be?
2. Focus Group Schedule (Disclosed disability)

Introduction

Include acknowledgement of Country

Welcome the group: thanks for agreeing to be part of the focus group. We appreciate your willingness to give up your time etc.

Facilitator and observer introduce themselves and explain their respective roles

Explain purpose of focus group: The reason we are having these focus groups is to find out about disability and employment in your organisation as it is currently—we would like to focus on the barriers to the employment and career progression of people with disability as you see it, and any relevant experiences you might have had over the past 6-12 months.

Introduce: Ground rules

1. We want you to do the talking
   - We really need your input and would like you to be honest and open with us. The Chatham House Rule applies today
   - No right or wrong answers.

2. Respect for other people and their opinions
   - We would like everyone to participate as everyone’s experiences and opinions are important
   - Other people’s opinions must therefore be respected
   - So please say whether you agree or disagree with others, but be polite and respectful and keep the APS values in mind

3. Respect for co-workers
   - Please try and avoid naming colleagues (we will of course anonymise everything later)
   - Must not turn into a discussion about specific staff and their practices, the focus is the organisation as a whole not individuals (not a witch hunt)

4. Confidentiality and anonymity
   - We will be tape recording the group so as to capture everything you have to say (check everyone is ok with this) BUT you can be assured that:
   - We won’t identify anyone by name in our report. You will remain anonymous
   - What is said in this room stays here – everyone must agree this (link back to rule 3)
   - Ask everyone to introduce themselves (first name and APS level only for the benefits of the tape, reassure re anonymity)
Engagement question
What do you think we mean by disability?

Exploratory questions
1. How satisfied are you with your experience of working in the department?
2. Do you think the experiences of those with disability are different to other employees in your organisation who do not have disability? In what way?
   a. Probe: how does this affect you practically, personally, emotionally etc
   b. Do you feel your organisation is inclusive?
   c. Do you feel you have been successful/have you had a particularly difficult time?
3. What do you feel has been the most positive aspect of your working experience, and why?
4. What do you feel are the biggest barriers to equal participation in your workplace for people with disability, and why?
5. Do you think people with disability are valued in your organisation?
   a. Probe: do you feel a part of the organisation
   b. Probe: do you feel valued more/less/about the same as employees in the organisation who do not have disability?
   c. Do you feel comfortable/trust others?
6. Is there anything about the work you do in your organisation that makes it more challenging for someone with disability?
   a. Probe: If yes identify what these are, get examples
   b. Probe: if no ask why not, get examples
7. How easy do you think it is to make reasonable adjustments for someone with disability in your organisation? If you are happy to share the information, what adjustments (if any) were made for you?
   Probe: examples of adjustments made and the process e.g. were individuals consulted/included in the decision making?
   Probe: do you think adjustments mainly concern the physical environment? Are you aware of any other types of adjustment being made (get examples). What about flexible working arrangements re time/place etc?
8. Do you think people feel able to disclose their disability in this organisation? Are there any barriers to disclosure?
   a. Probe: why do staff feel this way? Is there any tangible evidence that this is the case? How did they feel?
   b. Probe: what sort of support or resources available/general culture re inclusion
REVEAL LIST OF BARRIERS AND ASK:
From this list, what do you believe are the barriers to advancement for you/other people with disability in this organisation?

9. Do you think people with disability are treated fairly/equally in your organisation?
   a. Probe for examples

15. Are you aware of any (positive) discrimination in your organisation? (examples if needed include preferential parking, mentoring introduced by banks to support with interviews, job applications etc)
   a. Probe: what do they think about this, get examples

10. What do you know about hidden disabilities?
   a. Probe: what do they believe these to be? Are they aware of anyone in the organisation? What do they think the approach to non-disclosure of such disability should be?

11. Do you think people in your organisation feel more comfortable supporting/making reasonable adjustments for people with certain types of disability than others?
   a. Probe: which disabilities people are believed to feel comfortable with and why – e.g. are these ones they have experience with?
   b. Probe: what makes them unsure/uncomfortable – what might help this?

12. What is working well in your organisation with regard to ensuring inclusion for employees with disability?
   a. Probe: what lessons can we learn from this?

13. What isn’t working well?
   a. Probe for examples
   b. Probe: What’s getting in the way?
   c. Probe: How can we make progress?

Exit questions
How would you sum up the current situation for people with disability in your organisation?
If there were one thing you could change in your organisation what would that be?
ANNEX C: QUANTITATIVE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Introduction

We are an independent research team from the University of Canberra currently undertaking research to understand the organisational norms and values that affect employees with a disability.

The purpose of this work is to support the development of relevant policies and actions, which will allow the APS to improve on the career progress and experiences of employees with a disability.

This short survey aims to find out about disability and employment in your organisation. The following questions concern both the barriers to the employment and career progression of people with disability, and the resources that are available to support people with disability in your organisation.

All responses are anonymous and any information provided will be treated with the utmost discretion and confidentiality by the research team. None of the information you choose to share with us will be disclosed to your employer. There are no right or wrong answers, we are simply interested in your perceptions and would like you to answer honestly.

The survey should take around 10-20 minutes to complete. Please try to answer all the questions presented to you and provide as much information and detail as you can, however, if you feel any of the questions are not appropriate, please just leave the question blank and move onto the next one. All your responses will be saved automatically. You can also leave the survey and return to complete it at a later date, as long as you return within the next seven days. The survey will be open until (insert date)

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire – your help is much appreciated.

1. In the ‘As One’ Strategy, the APSC recognises two definitions of disability. The first, is that provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ Disability, Ageing and Carers (2003) according to which “… a person has a disability if they report that they have a limitation, restriction or impairment, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least 6 months and restricts everyday activities”. The second definition is that of The Disability Discrimination Act 1992, section 4, which states that “disability”, in relation to a person, means total or partial loss of the person’s bodily or mental functions, or a part of the person’s body.

Having read this do you consider yourself to be covered by the definition?

Yes
No. [filter will take respondent to Q8]
Choose not to disclose [filter will take respondent to Q8]
2. If you would like to, please indicate (using the boxes below) the nature of your disability (tick as many as are applicable):
   • Blind/partially sighted
   • Deaf/hearing loss
   • Mobility (physical disability)
   • Mental health
   • Autism spectrum disorder
   • Progressive disability/chronic illness (e.g. MS, Cancer)
   • Learning (e.g. Dyslexia, Dysgraphia)
   • Intellectual
   • Other (please explain)

3. Have you disclosed your disability:
   In the HR system: Yes/No
   To a manager or supervisor: Yes/No
   To a co worker: Yes/No

4. When did you disclose?
   During recruitment/Interview/After being hired

5. Did you experience any negative consequences of disclosure?
   Yes/No
   If yes: What negative consequences did you experience? _________________________________________

6. To what extent do you agree with the following statements (tick all that apply):
   I was able to disclose because I work in a disability friendly department
   My need for adjustment meant I had to disclose
   I felt comfortable disclosing as I have a supportive relationship with this person
   I am aware of active disability recruiting in this department
   I risk being treated or viewed differently if I disclose
   My employer has a fair system in place to resolve complaints
   I do not need to disclose because my disability does not impact on my ability to do my job
   Are you aware of the specific policies, guidelines or procedures relating to disability in your organisation?
   I am confident HR personnel in this department are familiar with disability and accommodations
   I disclosed because my department offers flexible working practices
   I worry that disclosing will lead to being fired/not hired
   I know of other successes in this department resulting from disclosure
   I know of other successes in this department resulting from disclosure
   I am concerned that disclosing means my employer focuses on my disability rather than my skills and abilities
   I did not disclose as I was concerned to do so would risk loosing health care benefits
   Disclosure limits my future opportunities such as promotion
7. Did any other factors influence your decision whether or not to disclose?____________________

8. Do you manage anyone with a disability?
   Yes
   No

9. Are you aware of the specific policies, guidelines or procedures relating to disability in your organisation?
   No
   Yes: Do you think these policies are being applied?

10. Do you feel your organisation is inclusive?
    Yes (Please explain_________________)
    No (Please explain_________________)
    Not sure (Please explain_________________)

11. To what extent do you agree that the following support the needs of staff with a disability?

    | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
    |----------------|-------|----------|------------------|
    Departmental policies and procedures
    SES
    Human Resources staff
    Equal Opportunity and Diversity Co-ordinators
    Disability co-ordinators
    Line managers
    Work colleagues
    Please give details of how and why they are not supportive.

12. How important do you feel the following are to the participation of staff with a disability?

    | Not at all important | Unimportant | Important | Extremely important |
    |----------------------|-------------|-----------|---------------------|
    Recruitment application process
    Training and development
    Working practices (e.g. flexible working)
    Physical environment
    Assistive technology
    Transport
    Policies and procedures
    Communication/information sharing
    Annual performance review process
    Information technology
    Access to advice and support
    Support from managers
    Understanding of Colleagues
13. **How satisfied are you with your experience of the following?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment process</td>
<td>Training and development</td>
<td>Working practices</td>
<td>Disability-focused employee network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please give details of how and why you are dissatisfied

14. **Do you believe any of the following are barriers to the participation (or employment) of people with disability?**

- There are no barriers
- Preconceptions about ability
- Reasonable Adjustment process
- Exclusion from networks
- Lack of confidence/self-belief
- Inhospitable culture
- Workplace harassment
- Bullying
- Other________________

15. **Do you feel supported, respected and valued by your colleagues?**

Yes

No: what could they do to make you feel even more supported and valued?

16. **Do you feel supported, respected and valued by management?**

Yes

No: What could they do to make you feel even more supported and valued?

17. **Are there any other important issues or topics with regards to the experience and participation of staff with a disability that you think we should be made aware?**

**DEMOGRAPHICS:**

How long have you worked for the APS

Which department do you work for?

What is the operational classification of your job?

Are you Male/female

Age group

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire; your help is much appreciated. If you have been personally affected by any of the issues raised in this questionnaire, or have any other concerns you would like to discuss then please contact (insert name and contact number for the disability co-ordinator or other agent as relevant to each department).

If you have any further questions about this project then please contact Penney Upton at the University of Canberra: penney.upton@canberra.edu.au
ANNEX D: FOCUS GROUP PERCEPTIONS OF THE STATE OF PLAY AND THE WAY FORWARD

Verbatim reporting of written answers to two questions at the end of focus group deliberation: How would you sum up the current situation for people with disability in your organisation? If there were one thing you could change in your organisation what would that be?

How would you sum up the current situation for people with disability in your organisation?

- Inflexible.
- There is a good awareness that we should be supporting and encouraging people with disability. However there is a lack of awareness and understanding of how to support people.
- The organisation pays up service to encouraging the inclusion of disabled people in the workforce. However, management is not trained to make adjustment for workers who are not parents or outside the norm.
- Discriminatory (to a degree)
- I can only comment in respect of my own personal experience. The current situation for myself is good. I have been lucky in that I have very supportive colleagues and supervisor who understand the challenges I face. I am able to work flexibly and do what I need to do.
- The policies and frameworks are there, but enforcing them or making them work seamlessly is making things hard.
- The department as with other departments has a fair way to go in the disability area.
- Awareness is good, however from a practical perspective, staff are not aware how to deal effectively with disabled staff. Also I have found that since I identified as disabled (12 months ago), all acting Executive positions have stopped that may be coincidental or not.
- From a personal perspective there is no opportunity for career progression (even if you disclose). It is a positive that X now has a Disability Champion/Disability Workforce Action Plan, so at least we are moving forward. Difficulty in getting ‘reasonable adjustment & special equipment’. This needs to be addressed.
- For people with physical disability there is a reasonable adjustment policy in place which is useful to help you fight to get your adjustments. For people with invisible disability: (mental illness, chronic fatigue, etc.) asking for a flexible working arrangement might be quite challenging due to lack of understanding/seriousness about this disability. I personally would not feel comfortable asking for a reduced hours even when I’m experiencing pain or fatigue.
- People with disability are limited by restrictive policies. Sure, we may have the disability workforce action plan and other documents specific to people with disabilities but there is a lack of inclusion in general documents (eg. Return to work, working from home policies). There is also a lack of understanding form managers, with a person’s rights being essentially determined by their manager.
- Disability is an ongoing issue for those who have one. Manager/colleagues most often prefer that it isn’t an issue and prefer to either forget or wilfully ignore it, to the point where something I get asked to do things that are physically impossible. A minority of colleagues/managers go so far as to treat it like a trade situation where they’ll say “I’ll acknowledge and adjust for your disability it you do xxx in addition to your work role”.


• Based on my experience – I have being employed within this organisation for almost 3 years – the help & support I have received the whole time is above exceptional! To the point where my managers have been outstanding and I have not accepted offers of promotion from other area’s both externally and internally.

• I would say interesting.

• Valuable – it depends on where you work and with who.

• I think we are going ok. Some training knowledge sharing would be helpful. Better understanding of individual’s needs such as parking.

• Moderately good – people and the Executive are receptive to the needs to people with disability and are willing to make adjustments. Therefore, some invisible barriers remain, eg. Workplace culture and a tendency for able-bodied people to overlook (not intentionally) the needs of people with disability.

• Respective as Managers of a person with a disability – lower level worker.
  - Conscious of disability & flexible in approach to work standard & work laws
  - Supportive & proactive in finding work
  - (X department) supports the disability part of the workforce but more action needs to be taken to support managers.
  - Good intent for a good work environment e.g. Implement relevant Acts, etc. correctly.
  - Strategies need to follow appropriately, from the good intent.
  - Many people don’t disclose because of perception of supervisor/team reactions – with training perhaps.
  - X has been very supportive Department.
  - Meets requirements for APS – more need to be done. – Diversity group & Disability Champions to improve awareness.
  - Slowly but surely improving. Still a lot of room for improvement, but I know (department x) is one of the more “disability friendly” organisations.

• More awareness of people with disabilities. Equal opportunities. Things are changing slowly.

• Not enough opportunity for engagement of people with disability. More education required for all layers of workforce.

• Generally it’s quite good in my area. There is always room for improvement. May be through technology, Education, etc.

• I think our executive have made disability a priority in our Department. However, there are large pockets in the organisation which need a cultural shift around:
  - Knowledge on general disability
  - More flexibility & understanding of individual circumstance
  - Fitting people in jobs that aren’t right for them just to get numbers!
  - I don’t know anything about it, so that an issue in its self.
  - Changing slowly in some areas.
  - Healthy – but always room for improvement.
  - Very variable – but always room for improvement.

• The department has a broad and inclusive policy framework to help people with a disability perform their role optimally. The way in which the framework is implemented by business areas is disparate and therefore can be ineffective. Culturally, the organisation is inclusive, and recognises the ability of people with a disability.
• I think it is good but need to educate staff to focus on abilities.
• The current situation requires ever evolving education.
• I think we are lacking information for those with a disability i.e. support and guidance for employees.
• Not a person-centric culture and practices. Too inflexible in staff management – culture of seeking written ‘policy’ and guidelines rather than problem solving collaboratively and in a participative manner to find solutions.
• A hidden area. All people are people. Disability or ability. Take time to find out who your people are.
• Under development. Work in progress. There is support at high level but more training in uptake in particular for managers who need to deal with people with mental health issues would be recommended.
• Stigma and judgement that mental illness can impact on your opportunity for a promotion or posting.
• I believe it is improving as more awareness is raised about looking at ability, rather than disability. But there is still a long way to go in ensuring disability does trigger discrimination (direct or indirect cf) in terms of the departments reward + recognition structures.
• Somewhat isolating, and possibly misunderstood and underestimated with a bewildering amount of strategies, guidelines, manuals, and groups to navigate.
• Limited but improving. On the individual level acceptance/recogniton is good but corporately there can be improvement. Our technology is a limiting factor. Awareness + education in this area would seem a anyway.
• Disabled officers are represented mostly at junior and administrative levels. X makes reasonable efforts to adapt to disabled officers’ needs but the low numbers of officers, particularly in the policy stream, show problems in attracting meritorious candidates.
• I believe that staff with a disability who are open and disclose are reasonably satisfied with the working environment. Issues relate to lack of manager awareness, ongoing concern about stigmatisation and time it takes to make IT reasonable adjustments.
• Daunting but improving. I really think the majority of the workforce want to do the right thing but may not have the knowledge or skills. I also think on the mental health front that people are “using” mental health on stress as an excuse is damaging to legitimate cases.
• Reasonable – could be better – but is improving with current leadership. Internationally Australia (and X) is seen as a global leader on disability inclusion but we could do better internally.
• People with a disability are caught between wanting to disclose their disability and wanting to progress/go on posting/adjust work environment’s perception of them amongst their peers and management. Highly complex very individual issue.
• Varied. There are many supportive people, work areas and practical assistance available – and this has overwhelmingly been the prevailing nature of my own experience. However, the nature of X is fast paced, high performance culture (with a fairly narrow set of measurements of what a high performing officer looks like) is a major problem.
• Patchy and inconsistent. I know some people with a disability thrive here, but I have no idea if it was because of their disability or in spite of it. Certainly, I find the low number of people with disability in my organisation quite worrying – it suggests to me that there isn’t an obvious path to success here if you have a disability.
• I think there is improvement in awareness about staff with disabilities but still there are unconscious bias from managers about the abilities the staff members with disabilities may have and that leads to some exclusions from networks that affect promotions, postings, transfers or giving the staff member to have more opportunities and a more rewarding career.
• It’s not great, but is getting better. The organisation is slowly making changes. And there seems to be clear intent to do better.
• Ability to perform is prejudged as being inadequate with a poor understanding of the value of varied experience, skills etc contributes to the organisation. X is about 10 years behind other agencies I’ve worked, in its appreciation of a diverse workforce + support for people with disability.
• It’s getting better! We have a supportive SES who drives the agenda constantly. If he were to move things may stagnate. Positive things are happening & HR are trying make changes. This will take time as “X” culture is deeply embedded.
• Difficult to disclose a disability and be accepted
• Too homogenous an organisation. Physical disability more accepted than mental health issues. Stigma associated.
• Low visibility of people with a disability at X, and issues related means that it is difficult to assess situation. Very positive that there is a disability network, u/ FAS level support + regular meetings u/ staffing. Also positive that we have action strategy. Culture of X still needs significant shifts before diversity + disability are celebrated + embraced. Leadership on this needs to be at SES level.
• Slowly improving. There seems to be a greater awareness, but I don’t know how much of this is genuine!
• Physical access appears to be acceptable. “soft” disability is condoned/compartmentalised into p/t work, women, indigenous backgrounds are considered to be in the ‘too hard basket.
• Increasing profile of issue in department allowing for dialogue.
• I believe there is support and a good reasonable adjustments for people with disability policy. However, people don’t know where or who to go to for advice.
• Staff understanding. Promotion and information for staff to be aware of cultural differences.
• I attended the Disability Training for Managers which was a good start.
• Lack of understanding, knowledge + complete lack of diversity.
• There is a lack of understanding from Management +/ Supervisors / team leaders on how to manage people with disability. This could be due to fear of the unknown, lack of life skills and lack of management / leadership skills.
• Their experience would be highly variable based on: a) their individual manager’s ability and desire to make any necessary adjustments. b) The extent to which their disability affects their ability to do their job compared with a person without a disability. c) How visible and obvious their disability is.
• They are behind the eight-ball in any situation requiring subjective managerial judgement, especially where the disability is not obvious or impacts their social functioning at work. We in the APS are very god at being tolerant of the obvious forms of disability, but subtle discrimination is widespread. The problem is probably APS wide.
• More people acquiring a disability due to age or circumstances that get technical assistance. ‘Pockets’ of good places for them to work a those less tolerant. Physical needs taken care of. Small amount of specialised disability recruitment.
• Status quo and corporate structures are fairly fixed, so difficult to manage for unique/different circumstances (i.e. unique needs)
• I think the place could be a lot more welcoming of people with disability. Having said that, if we are already welcoming of people with disability, I think we need to be much more open about it & tell everyone what a good job their doing.
• Improving but we have a long way to go to become an employer of choice for people with a disability. If we can become that employer of choice we can access the talents of people with a disability and improve our performance as an organisation.
• Varied. As discussed the support, understanding, and level of empathy of immediate team and supervisors defines the situation. In many cases I am aware of this means people with disabilities are well supported. Sometimes however, when routines are disrupted and a lot of extra work and decision making is required the outcome is not good.
• Hopeful. Although we not near where we need to be I think certain things are in place to provide a workplace that is accepting of disability. The APS allows us to employ people with intellectual disability outside of the merit process and we need to tap into this more. We just need to sell the benefits of employing people with a disability more broadly.
• It really depends on the particular work area, and how ‘enlightened’ the manager is. Difficult to generalise. However, overall I would say that people with disability are generally well supported by the dept to perform at their best. However, they face possibly more challenges climbing the career ladder.

If there were one thing you could change in your organisation what would that be?
• Better understanding of physical, visible disability;
• The value of empowering people with disability not realised at org. level and not emphasised
• Not enough people with disability
• It is patchy; some areas do well, others have ‘room for improvement’
• Inconsistent. Pockets were handled well, others where it’s not. Still need to fight. Lack of general awareness.
• Variable depending on where the individual person with a disability & the culture of their immediate workplace. This includes the supervisor/staff of local management in supporting people with disability.
• A struggle. More awareness is needed to push the focus on people’s ability.
• I’m not sure. I haven’t worked closely with someone with a disability. Where I have funding for support has been an issue or disclosure has been avoided (mental health).
• A mixed bag. Some really good managers & staff doing really good things to support an inclusive & productive workforce BUT… A mechanistic & underscored HR team providing not very helpful advice to managers & staff with particular reasonable adjustment needs.
• Not sure. Before this session I thought X was pretty good at integration & support. But now hearing others perspectives, I’m not so sure. Physical disabilities are easier to see, usually easier for the person to disclose. But mental disabilities are harder to see, and I think harder to manage. Current situation ……it’s working for some, and not for others.
• The culture looks right on paper, but the reality and ‘operationalisation’ of policies to support people with disability is very different. This is not just a department issue, it stems much wider across the whole of the APS.
• If Senior Executives can openly ridicule or ‘make light’ of a persons’ situations – this has immense implications for the people who witness this behaviour.
• Not sufficiently supported either in terms of the individual; nor for the manager & peers. Specifically the lack of effectiveness in delivering of reasonable adjustment.
• I believe that the department is fully supportive of employees with a disability.
• I don’t think there is need to change anything.
• Current situation in Department:
  o is supportive in practice & has support mechanisms
  o However, lack of manager capability & awareness to deal with situations
  o Certain type of disability can have a stigma e. g. mental health
• Better awareness and full inclusion provision of support by managers & Div Heads.
• I would like to see all managers trained (formally or informally) on disability awareness so they understand the barriers that exist for some of their staff.
• Great formal support and corporate structure
• Could be better awareness of rules & rights beyond disabled employees
• Mental illness is much quieter and discussed less. Positive and flexible work arrangement opportunities are greater & more accessible. In the main I believe we have a very positive & inclusive organisation.
• Well managed when/if advised about the need for help with good support networks available
• I think the department has great people in the roles for Diversity & WHS. They are knowledgeable, approachable & passionate. I think we struggle w/staff identifying as having a disability
• Good, inclusive culture
• I’ve come across one person with a disability working in the Department and believe their situation is good
• They are highly valued and have extensive knowledge to perform their job at a high level.
• Cannot be sure, difficulty with exposure.
• On a general basis there seems to be minimal provision made it some allowance for physical needs (desks, scooters, ramps) but not much drive for additional support.
• On a personal level, I don’t feel as though I could adequately manage a member of staff with a disability – support and training could be more visible?
• Not having a lot of exposure to people with a disability, I think there is support for people with a physical disability because it is easier to manage. Support for mental illness is probably not as adequate – partly because there is less disclosure and partly lack of cultural acceptance of mental illness and the support those people need.
• We still have a long way to go to create an environment where people with disability felt included and supported. There’s issues with -----, Who’s problem is it? Budget constraints.
My observation/belief is that people with an obvious physical disability are treated well, but less so for hidden disabilities, whether they be physical or mental.

OK- depending on the level of confidence, empathy, emotional intelligence of the individuals manager/co-workers in supporting/growing a positive active approach for the individual with the disability to experience.

I would not assess the current situation as being fair on the grounds that there are actions which border on harassment. I have seen people with disabilities being questioned on the sole basis of previously agreed flexible working arrangement and being asked to/forced to justify their disability by not one but two independent medical assessments.

The lack of managerial flexibility & incorrect assumption that a disability is fake or something that shouldn’t be accommodated has exacerbated that employees feeling of belongings mental health & self-esteem.

I do not feel sufficiently aware of the department wide to make any ground summary. From my experience in the department after eight years I would say that the situation for disabled persons is very much dependent on individual managers. I have found the department willing to accommodate physically disabled people well and with no fuss. I am not aware of a pro-activeness within the departments & not sufficient support of managers in dealing with mental-health issue, but I think this is a very difficult area.

I have not become aware of any negative ‘gossip’ & so would I give the department an ‘Above average’ but could do more.

I don’t know many people in the department with a disability (that I know of) so it seems to me it’s considered a problem that needs to be managed.

X has a positive and proactive approach to assuring and supporting our staff with disabilities.

Personally I haven’t seen issues within X. However, I have noticed middle management do appear un-prepared for handling sensitive issues.

It is reasonably sound. The environment is generally supportive, although there are few people who obviously have a disability. The culture is much more towards accommodating disability, permanent or temporary and facilitating people’s ability to work rather than punishing failure to perform. Workstations etc. are reviewed at the drop of a hat.

After hearing the stories of other people’s experiences here today and think the overall situation is good but can be improved.

There needs to be more support available across the department; the x model is admirable.

Mixed – some people seem to have fine experiences, others experiences difficulty. This may relate to reasonable adjustments, attitudes or other issues.

Physical disabilities are treated with a bit more ‘experience’ & discretion.

People who have an invisible illness are treated with judgement & are made to prove it.

Summary: HR – the head who signs offer everything – are part of the problem.

More support is required for those with a disability/psychological injury.

They are well supported where the disability is identified and acknowledged by the person with the disability.

On balance, the Department actively promotes inclusion of people with disabilities in a public sense, but the actual experience of individuals – especially those subject to case management – is incredibly varied and in may experience, tends to result in more negative than positive outcomes. Focus needs to be on ability. Disability should not be confused with performance.
• Disclosed – it comes down to just to trust + whether you have a good productive relationship with your manager – if you do + you disclose a disability I believe the ‘system’ will kick in well advance for you.
• Non-disclosed – if you have not disclosed I believe it because person does not perceive (rightly or wrongly) that they have support.
• Upper SES does a great job at promoting the cause but on the ground for managers on a daily basis – this support + does not trustable. You are left to your own devices/expected to work ---- on your own.
• I believe there is a positive attitude to employing people with disability at X, though supportive managers, executive champions, HR support (case management).
• Mixed. Traumatic physical injury as acute illness are dealt with well. Complex classic physical injury and mental health issues are frequently dealt with poorly and have led to poor disclosure adjustments for and retention of people with those forms of disability.
• It varies, on a case by case basis, but it is improving.
• I believe there is a great deal of good will and support available for people across the ability spectrum in this department. At the same time, I recognise that people who are articulate and well organised and seek out the support if they need it have better outcome than those who are not able to articulate their needs as clearly.
• Generally positive – organisation demonstrates ------ to accessibility & support for people with disabilities at the senior management level.
• Once people are in the organisation, I think that there is a culture of inclusion for people with a disability. There is more we ca do, but the ‘consciousness raising’ events led by the X Disability Champion + the Disability Network are doing a good job to foster a positive culture that is inclusive for people with a disability.
• I think there are good support mechanism in place that work well. However people have to use them and sometimes they may not know how to proceed – sometimes it can be a matter of look – talking to the right person. The department needs to provide support to managers to effectively managing people who disclose.
• Working in a small team it appears that people with a disability can access the appropriate response when needed.
• From a strategic view – the top of the hierarchy appears to have taken the lead where the middle managers do not champion the cause – noting the lack of person attending today especially male.
• There is an overarching sense of disability being supported and a sense of “it should be better understood”, but this is not fully achieved in reality. It’s more of a governance issue than anything.
• X is the best agency for disability and for me. However, I think people with invisible disability have a harder time. My disability is very visible & support is generally great. Also I am long time disabled so more used to it.
• Overall my experience as a person with a disability have been relatively positive due to having managers who are supportive but it is hard to feel confident in moving to other roles because of that risk that new managers won’t be.
I need more work in Account team & need support training about forecast & TM1. Suit for my level APS4. My manager is good and understands that I am deaf. I get on well with my team. I would like to change to a different work role not in the accounts team. Like to move to different Department & closer to home.

My personal experience is I feel the department could have a more open way of communication so that I can get the best assistance & feel free to be open without fear of being judged.

I’m doing my job well. I’m left alone. If I need anything I am strong enough to fight my own battles, fortunately.

I feel valued & supported in current role, which has helped me accept my disability and move on. The dept still makes me fight to get things/access/products/opportunities that could be made a lot easier with real support & understanding. Listen to what I say.

Lack of understanding on how to effectively manage my work & me as I progress.

I believe the Department is evolving but is early in its maturity when dealing with disability. Too many people make assumptions when dealing disability we need to break this barrier. Me personally, I have received both good & bad assistance but there is always stigma attached. More awareness, coaching & mentoring is needed to champion the cause.

I believe my needs for my disability are met. But at times it feels like I get excluded from performing my job as X. It feels like my Team Leaders take over my duties and don’t communicate back to me. I am also respected by my peers.

Help is disjointed and the process to have my reasonable Adjustment ’approved’ has taken nearly 2 months already.

Valued for the work I do but I still have to push to get more tasks that use my brain & I am looking at having the work I do validated by having a positional upgrade or have I backed myself into a corner by taking on the role I have where there isn’t much opportunity for advancement.

X talks a lot about being the fore runner of disability awareness. They are working towards change.

It is a scary place for people to disclose right now across the APS. I feel that people with intellectual disability staff members struggle due to the lack of education of staff & most importantly management. And as a result lack the confidence to disclose and be themselves – which can only be detrimental to themselves and the department.

The Dept has a good idea/policy to assist with disabilities – the issue is filtering the information & training the people that have to manage staff with a disability. The dept is also very heavily stat driven which doesn’t help people with a disability. The ideas are good.

The experience of staff with a disability varies significantly depending on the level of awareness, skill and knowledge their manager has regarding how to interact, support & create a climate of acceptance. Also how well that manager knows the organisation and can access relevant supports.

There is a way to go for workplace culture! Workplace culture is a reason for people to join an organisation and to leave an organisation. Needs to be wider acceptance of disability and then wider ability for flexible work arrangements to take place.

There is a huge lack of knowledge for people to access services which they or their colleagues may need access to. The department has all of these policies/guidelines etc. available but they are completely ineffective if people don’t know how to access them, who they’re for or what they need to do.
• Nightmare. In 3 months – 2 suicides, a woman in jail and 5 photos of former staff members behind the reception desk who prompt a ‘000’ call. How many have a disability? I know at least 1 has a disability.
• Other people’s preconceptions about ability; exclusion from networks; inhospitable culture; workplace bullying (ticked options from a PowerPoint).
• People are aware there are people in the dept with a physical disability, but maybe not mental disability & may not understand that some mental disabilities have the same impact as a physical disability. With all the change happening in the dept, & uncertainty, it can be difficult for people to manage. I am in a supportive team, but in my current role – working with people all across the dept – it is evident that people don’t feel supported.
• There is an awareness of disability however there needs to be more work e.g. visible disability is better managed than invisible disability. No mandatory training. Culture is unaccepting of mental health disabilities. Managers are unaware/have no knowledge on how to support employees with a disability.
• Those with invisible disabilities are not supported enough. I believe managers especially the line managers need more education to learn how to be supportive.
• Is individualised and often withheld from those around them. People feel that if they disclose disabilities they will be judged based on their disability rather than who they are as a person, both in a professional context and in an informal sense.
• Semi-supportive.
• Not enough knowledgeable employees in leadership positions. Lack of compulsory education.
• I feel that people with a visible disability are treated more compassionately than those without. I feel there is a lack of knowledge with regards to information regarding mental health disorders in the department.
• Better education and support for managers to empower people with disabilities to do the best job that they can do.
• More education for managers and supervisors.
• Training of managers to be flexible with workers with disabilities.
• Implement a compulsory disability-education course for APS employees all.
• I think everyone in the Department needs to participate in mandatory disability awareness training.
• IT systems need to improve and work proactively with being accessible.
• Awareness needs to be raised. More training at the middle management level. Work on culture/interactions.
• Mandatory manager training/raising awareness, practical examples perhaps? (Covering your ears/eyes for an hour to see how you cope).
• More opportunities should be offered for carer progression, the only way I see this changing is by supervisors & Management being more educated/trained & communicating with staff.
• Just like how Indigenous Cultural training are compulsory for all staff member in the Department, Disability awareness training should be compulsory for all staff and disability awareness training for managers should be compulsory for all managers. You just never know what the person next to you are dealing with (esp. mental illness) therefore everybody should be made of the concept of working with disability.
• More inclusive policies and better trained managers.
• Education and awareness.
• That discrimination is not acceptable, even if it is just a simple comment. Bullying/harassment should not be swept under the carpet.
• May be get into a bigger leave easier.
• Attitudes & awareness of managers.
• Have SES support for people with disability
• Train all levels of the department to better identify people with disability + then training on how to best manage.
• Consistent advice from HR.
• More flexible and tailored support from people Branch where we need it, & with a more practical focus.
• Better training & support for all employees.
• Centralised funding for disability support.
• Provide HR with a set of trained resources to provide both managers and staff with tailored support for individual reasonable adjustments.
• Awareness training for Managers to allow them to identify and deal with disabilities.
• Change culture.
• Introduce an integrated system of Reasonable Adjustment with Performance Management
• Educating from top down on disability. Mandatory training.
• More mandatory training on working with people with disability.
• Support for managers
• Mental health & performance management. HR practice - improved natural justice for worker
• Better parking and access to buildings for people with mobility issues.
• Need to work – the work more intent not always followed through to action
• All equipment to assist to hear in rooms and/or conferences always work!!
• To give people with a disability a chance.
• Compulsory attendance of “Awareness Training”, excellent intro (2 hr) run by Australian Network on Disability called “Disability Confidence”
• Topped up by articles case studies in STAFFNET
• Better department-wide application of, and acceptance of flexible working conditions.
• Better communication, better resources for people working with people with disabilities.
• I don’t think anything was missed in the forum/discussion
• Increase manager capability and awareness
• Encouraging X as a Disability friendly organisation & actively promoting or offering more prescribed positions i.e. those specifically targeting PWD
• Communication and knowledge base of issues/barriers/opportunities to be inclusive need to be increased to ALL staff.
• Build greater awareness across department
• Appointment of SES/prominent leader with a personal success story living with a disability (FYI—not from HR, not disabled)
• May be more communication/awareness?
• More information provided to people around what ‘ticking the box’ means/where does that info go?
• The one thing to change would be people with disabilities knowing that disclosing it will not impact on them in the workplace.
• Improve communication.
• More encouragement to disclose disability knowing they will be supported rather than discriminated against. Strategy for more info about disclosing?
• I don’t see any changes required based on my experiences in the Department thus for however there could be more communication about how the Department incorporates people with a disability.
• Greater focus on recruiting people with disabilities, creation of identified recruitment option
• I would like to remove the fear and uncertainty from people with a disability, and from the people interacting with them. I think people are generally concerned about getting involved and fearful they’d make it worse – but then nothing gets better.
• More education and awareness for staff generally about types of disabilities and how to seek help.
• Raise awareness.
• Explore current practices.
• Difficult because I think it comes down to the attitude of general population and managers. People create the culture – and there needs to be an openness and willingness to take on people with different experiences and --- whether they have a disability or not. How to change this? Who knows? Probably requires some people to lead by example --- good experiences might help to quell fear.
• Provide ongoing guidance/tools to managers/staff to become more confident, less fearful of dealing/working with a person who has a disability.
• Dispel the myths around people with a disability in the workplace.
• Having regular conversation about what we covered today was great to participate, thanks.
• Other think that could not be covered?
• Training from inception for managers on dealing with employees with disabilities.
• More robust/diverse HR systems to handle employee’s needs. For example informal systems that allow an employee with a disability to be heard rather than having to justify/defend their personal circumstance.
• Celebrating people with disabilities & their success.
• Mental-health support & more concrete, the actionable toolkit to assess managers.
• I think there are lots of opportunities in getting people with disabilities into the right roles. Although there are challenges there are often unique skills people with disabilities have that could be leveraged. For example, our mailroom has an employee with an intellectual disability but he knows the name and desk position of every person in the building. Our corporate directory can’t do that.....
• A dedicated disability officer and funds to provide more sophisticated programs
• Mandatory ‘people’ training for middle managers
• More support for HR to provide better programs
• I think it is really a matter of more education about matters such as mental illness, standing at work, etc.
• Provide more opportunities for awareness information to be disseminated to all levels of staff across the Dept.
• Also the ‘passport’ theory sounds ideal.
• I’d like to see more role models in high levels disability lived experience in relation to disability.
• Policy regarding leave when you have a disability.
• Providing training to whole of staff regarding disabilities.
• Cultural change – of more focus on the human level and what people can achieve and how people can be productive in the workplace.
• I’m sure there are many people that want to work and will be productive that match their skillset/ability.
• A buddy system for those experiencing a disability.
• Introduce a value creation workshop.
• Thinking about the concept of change on those people with a disability as part of the change management process.
• I like the idea proposed today of an individual who would sit between HR and the employee with a disability as an independent intermediary.
• Encourage employees who have had a positive experience of disability in the APS to speak about it.
• Encourage managers to share their difficulties with their peers.
• Speaking more frankly about the issues.
• Continue to publicly support people with disability & support managers to retain + employ people with disability.
• Employ a person with specific expertise in disability and reasonable adjustments, with a strong understanding of non-medical models o disability, in HR to support managers and people with disability develop sustainable working situations.
• Organisational culture
  • Promotion of managers and leadership skills and emotional intelligence.
  • I would like everybody in this organisation to realise and understand that support and help is available and they are working in a place with good intent – but they may need to seek the help and articulate their needs to those around them.
  • Greater support & training for middle managers (ie. EL1/EL2) is managing people with disabilities, preferably ------ issues.
  • Greater training / awareness raising for APS staff – what is disability & services /supports available for them if they are living with a disability
  • Recruitment of people with disabilities.
  • Offer more regular training for managers on dealing with mental illness/depression/anxiety. Beyond some training I did years ago in AGD was excellent but I’ve not seen it offered for a while.
• That disability would not be seen as a barrier that disability would be ‘normalised’ that what people would not be afraid to disclose that they had a disability.
• Education is essential. Take time to listen and get off the mobile phones more.
• Integrate a culture of excellence & achievement into disability instead of set up against it as if you either: a) have a disability and is accommodated, or b) do not have a disability and is normal. To achieve that there probably needs to be a deeper understanding of disability and various differences.
• Adopt more aggressive selection policy to have more people with disability in higher roles & in more <blank>. In the short terms giving preference to PWD when skills are similar should be considered.
• One thing I would change in X is to reduce the barriers for people with a disability to make accessibility a priority in our IT systems instead of feeling like having access to Assistive Technology is supposed to be enough.
• One thing I would change is for the reasonable adjustments to be holistic, because accommodation & transport are essential for me to be able to come to work & perform my duties. To have a social virtual network so that we can share ideas or have support for each other.
• Disability flag in essentials used for meaningful outcomes for staff with disability rather than just stats & security/roles. Every staff member’s disability is different. One size doesn’t fit all. Saying you are on strategy does not mean you are pro-active in disabilities. How about CEO visits like PM does in far north Oz, not just sleepouts.
• Lift ICT barriers to systems & access. Ensure disability is included in future products & systems. Do not assume what I can & cannot do.
• Mandatory training for all staff with line management responsibilities about working with people with disabilities.
• A constant approach – come up with a strategy to be consistent. Make a suite of available tools to enable better participation from the disabled. Possibly some workshops etc. Improvement in the mental health side is required.
• More training for managers/team Leaders to have a better understanding of people with a disability and Raise more awareness to ensure that all employees with a disability are treated equally.
• Have more Advocates available to help with my situation.
• I would like to change the perceptions of other people as to what my capabilities are. Have more information about the supports that are out there & how to access them. I’m lucky in my role as I have all this information to hand but I know lots of people don’t have it.
• I’d like to see them keep up to date with support for all disabilities. Change the culture of those who have silent disabilities. Have training as a mandatory component as we do (CAT) Cultural Awareness Training.
• Education of senior management. Like Indigenous cultural training, disability training needs to be made mandatory. I also think pay structure. Not putting a ceiling on the levels. People with disability can then become subject matter experts at what they know, reducing the stress of “climbing the ladder”.
• Change the level of training/awareness.
• Increase awareness through promoting successes.
• Mandatory training for all managers in disability & mental health awareness.
• We need more knowledge of specific and common mental health issues so we know what to do, how to react and where to go.
• Mass culture change, less focus on things that don’t matter – re, acknowledging the traditional owners of the land, more focus on things that do – mental health, domestic violence, homelessness, bullying. X has a long way to go.
• Support.
• Mental Health First aid should be mandatory. Managers need to make more time for their staff.
• Increase awareness by making training mandatory.
• I feel that the culture of bullying no matter how insignificant it appears should be taken seriously having experienced it myself. Taking responsibility of the wellbeing of the team as a whole can help ease the anxiety levels of those with the invisible disabilities which in turn will lead to a more cohesive and productive team.
• I would change the IPA (performance assessment process) to reflect personal circumstances.
• Build a culture of caring for all staff members first & then look after the outputs & outcomes on the basis of supported staff.
• Make education about disability mandatory, which would improve manager’s support, knowledge, culture & understanding.
• Every day could be sunny-happy days, all good ones.
• Awareness – Acceptance – fairness. More consolidated, informed approach to providing the right technology & systems that support everyone’s needs.
• It’s a long haul but we can change perceptions towards “disability”. Not dump everything into the “It’s a disability” bucket. Maybe we are the ones with a disability.
• Increase awareness throughout the organisation of what is already in place.
• A clear framework (guidelines) to follow and which are enforceable i.e. so there is no choice but to comply. This should be audited and findings published i.e. incentivising the executive to ensure an inclusive workplace.
• Compulsory training of TL face to face, not online training.
• Funding for disability specific programs …. Mandatory disability training for all staff.
• Should be awareness for managers and employees.
• Further develop a management system and practices and learning to instil a person-centric approach to management (for all staff, but that would also benefit staff with a disability). Key diversity/disability message – aim for the department’s workforce to reflect the community it serves.
• More communication around disability & support networks. Emotional intelligence training & support by managers. Mentoring & coaching sessions for people with disclosed disability.
• Stronger policy, guidelines for managers, better ways in finding placement in other teams if bullying occurs or if job placement isn’t working well or is a bad fit.
• Perceptions – educate staff on measures that people with disabilities already use to get by to dispel myths.
• The perceptions that someone with a disability can be treated equally with others or is undervalued by the organisation.
• The disclosure rate + the residual stigma that is allied with declaration of disability.
• The employment of more people with a disability.
• To “own them” but ensure the advances continue.
• Greater cultural awareness of the contribution that disabled officers can make beyond clerical works.
• Greater management understanding of the issues faced by people with disability and how as a manager they can make improvements.
• For the rumours and urban myths that constantly go around to be positive, i.e. ‘did you hear about that person who disclosed their disability and now they are doing great and didn’t lose their clearance and are going on a posting.’
• Increased awareness of the abilities and human rights of people with disabilities and how X can better engage with people with disability.
• I think we are moving in the right direction in regards to Diversity. I would introduce an education program through posters, video in the café, screen messages or the positive opportunities.
• Role models – and recognition of them – who show how disability and high performance can go together. I am in EL2 and I try to model that in my own work area. But I don’t see any role models more senior than me – and this makes me hesitate to seek promotion to the SES.
• Professional, permanent HR officers – not generalists who do an HR job for a few years (perhaps with little or no previous HR experience) then move on.
• More flexible policy than the one described and defined in the HR manual.
• There is a need for stronger leadership at the senior level to address the issues + to make the workplace more disability inclusive.
• Create a culture that rewards care for each other rather than one that rewards “performance”.
• That ALL staff have diversity training. That accepting diversity becomes the norm. & that ongoing events/awareness raising etc happens to support this.
• Build awareness by FAS CMO, speaking to all managers
• Acceptance & commitment to diversity. Inclusion of disability in strategic plans for department. Declaring champion. More talk about disability @ senior levels.
• Celebration rather than mere acceptance of disability + other diversity
• Real effort by the department. Inclusion in women in leadership etc.
• Management/communication on at SES level could be greatly improved.
• Better understanding that people with a disability can be and already are high performers, and should be fostered, not a problem to be managed.
• Increase communication channels, & increase communication skills particularly for managers.
• Cultural change and education of staff at all levels.
• Mandatory training for Managers ELI upwards. To include regular of Managing People skills including people with disabilities/disease backgrounds etc.
• Better leadership skills in managers & supervisors
• I would implement anonymous 360° feedback for all staff with people management responsibilities.
• Where a job applicant declares a disability, require a trained HR rep on the panel. Better yet, take recruitment off the line areas entirely and have it all done by a dedicated HR group – as occurs in the private sector.
• Larger recruitment of trainees with a disability – at least one recruit per division per year with appropriate training for those managing. Perhaps for some roles must consider someone with a disability/indigenous first.
• Staffing levels and resourcing that allow for creative approaches, more time spent on people, teams and workplace structure, rather than outputs. Recognition that everyone has unique skills + abilities (rather than interchangeability). Need to reflect this in recruitment too!
• Expand the people with disability stepping into programs to a level possibly according the graduate program. We get a lot from these people & we will get a lot more if we invest.
• A training program for managers that better prepares them to identify, on-board and embrace the skills of people with a disability.
• Including disability in our work culture. Selling peoples abilities, building understanding of benefits of workplace diversity.
• Senior leadership driving more initiatives to include people with disability in the workplace.
• Progressing manager education about the benefits (and building awareness of + the tool support) to employ people with disability, with the broader objective of building a more tolerant, flexible and inclusive workplace culture.