



REPORT ON THE DISABILITY ASSEMBLY WA (DAWA) SUMMIT HELD ON 31 MARCH 2025

Disability Employment Pathways, Creating more certain Bridges and Pathways



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Foreword

The vision of Disability Assembly WA (DAWA) is to unify, support and champion a thriving disability ecosystem in WA to ensure world leading and sustainable outcomes for people with disabilities, their families and carers.

A key initiative to achieve this vision is through convening a number of 'Summits' each year, bringing together people with disability, families, carers, peak bodies, advocates, providers and experienced stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to generate informed, impartial discussion and debate 'the big issues'.

The 2025 DAWA Summit program is focusing on the topic of **"Creating more certain bridges and pathways for the employment of people living with disability, particularly those with intellectual disability."**

In doing so, it builds on the inaugural DAWA Employment Summit in 2022, titled 'Improving employment outcomes for people with disability', and involves three components between March and August 2025, in collaboration with Inclusion Solutions (IS) and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIWA). These components include the DAWA Summit 31 March, a CCIWA and IS 'Inclusive Employment Forum' on 8 April and a combined event to be scheduled in August.

Together, we aim to explore what is possible to deliver equal opportunity in the employment of people with disability.

The first component, the 31 March DAWA summit, attracted 96 invited guests in Perth and an additional 16 participated online in the Kimberley, in Broome and Kununurra. The participants in the Perth forum included 28 people with disability and family members/carers, around 18 representatives from training organisations (including Training providers, Industry Training Councils, RTOs and school education officers/equivalent), 23 from disability services providers, 6 from government bodies (state and local), 10 from a mix of peak bodies, and 11 from small to large businesses.

This report provides the findings from the 'Disability Employment Pathways, Creating more certain Bridges and Pathways' summit. It represents the key priorities for action identified by the disability ecosystem in Western Australia and will be presented for consideration by governments, employers, peak bodies and industry groups. It will also be utilised, in conjunction with the findings from the CCIWA and IS 'Inclusive Employment Forum' to help focus the combined August event on achievement of real and lasting outcomes.

Sally Hollins

Chair, Disability Assembly WA



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31 March 2025 Summit
Disability Employment Pathways
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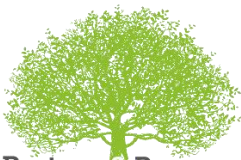


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Disability Assembly Western Australia (DAWA) is a Collective Voice comprised of Western Australians with disability and their families, carers and people from the broader disability sector who volunteer their time to improve the connectedness of the disability ecosystem.

Our vision is to unify, support and champion a thriving disability ecosystem in WA to ensure world leading and sustainable outcomes for people with disabilities, their families and carers.

A major initiative of DAWA is bringing together people with disability, families, carers, peak bodies, advocates, providers and experienced stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to generate informed, impartial discussion and debate 'the big issues'.

Providing a safe place for meeting and sharing real life experience, knowledge and expertise, a key pillar of DAWA's approach to fulfilling its purpose, is through convening a number of 'Summits' each year. By invitation, DAWA assembles and connects people from across the disability ecosystem to discuss and debate a priority topic at each Summit.

The 2025 DAWA Summit program aims to address a critical issue in Western Australia: **'Creating more certain bridges and pathways for the employment of people living with disability, particularly those with intellectual disability'**.

The comprehensive program builds on the inaugural DAWA Employment Summit in 2022, with three components between March and August 2025, in collaboration with **Inclusion Solutions (IS)** and the **Chamber of Commerce and Industry WA (CCIWA)** - DAWA Summit 31 March, CCIWA and IS Inclusive Employment Forum on 8 April and a combined event to be scheduled in August.

Together, we aim to explore what is possible to deliver equal opportunity in the employment of people with disability, through identifying existing gaps and challenges, and proposing solutions to ensure a more inclusive and supportive employment landscape.

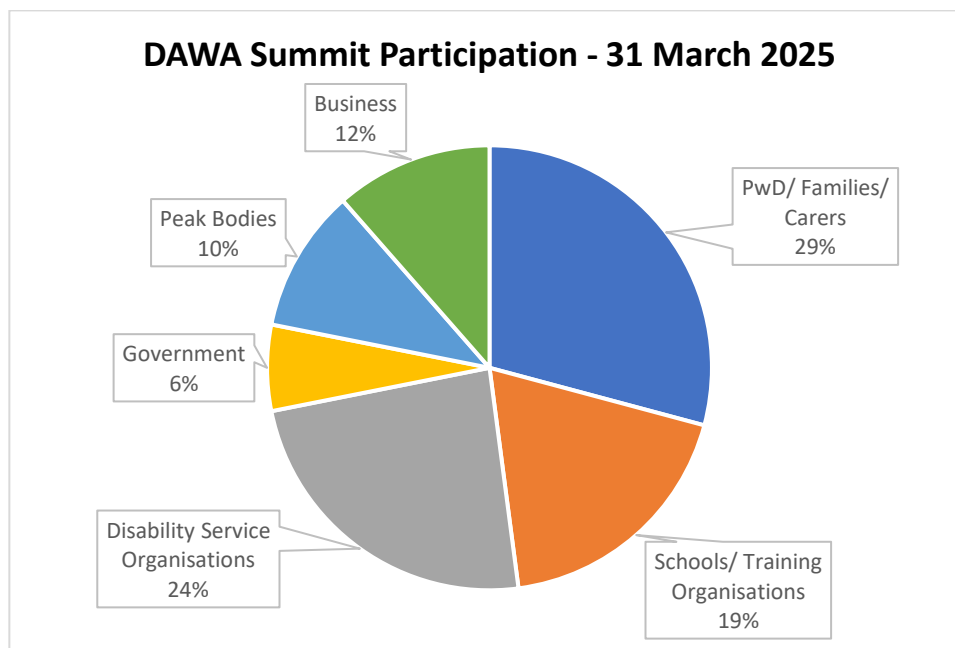
The selection of this topic for the 2025 program reflects its strategic and state-wide importance, the potential to impact on a significant number of people with disability, and the alignment with the Commonwealth and State Disability and Workforce Strategies. Importantly, the timing also reflects the apparent increased priority currently being directed by Commonwealth and State Governments to making a difference in the employment of people living with disability.

The first part of the program was held on Monday 31 March at the Telethon Speech and Hearing Function Centre, 36 Dodd Street, Wembley.

96 invited guests attended in Perth and an additional 16 participated online in the Kimberley, in Broome and Kununurra. The participants in the Perth forum included



28 people with disability and family members/carers, around 18 representatives from training organisations (including Training providers, Industry Training Councils, RTOs and school education officers/equivalent), 23 from disability services providers, 6 from government bodies (state and local), 10 from a mix of peak bodies, and 11 from small to large businesses. Some participants could be classified in more than one category (e.g., a family member who is also part of a Peak body), but were included only once.



The morning session included 40 minutes for three brief speaker presentations by:

1. **Lena Constantine, Associate Director, Chamber of Commerce and Industry WA (CCIWA)** – providing detail on the GROW WA initiative, through which Inclusion Solutions, in partnership with CCIWA, is working to empower and equip businesses, organisations and individuals to champion social inclusion in the workplace and create more welcoming and accessible spaces for West Australians living with disability.
2. **Mike Rowe, Director General, Department of Communities** – providing an overview of the current public sector data concerning the employment of people with a disability in the public sector, and an outline of initiatives underway, with support from the State Government, to improve employment outcomes for people with a disability within both the public and corporate sectors.
3. **Alex Buckley, Branch Manager, Disability Employment Policy Branch, Department of Social Services** – providing information on current and planned Commonwealth Disability Employment Reforms. These include the establishment of a Disability Employment Centre of Excellence to develop best practice, evidence-based information to help providers deliver high quality effective employment services and supports to both participants with disability and employers, to improve disability employment outcomes; and



the planned implementation by the Department of Social Services of a new specialist disability employment program later in 2025.

These 'spotlight' presentations aimed to provide summit participants with the most up to date context on the priority placed by the Commonwealth and State Governments and by Industry on improving employment outcomes for people with disability.

This contextual information was then considered alongside the perspectives of summit participants within small working groups – named 'PODs' – over the course of the day.

To ensure the individual perspective and lived experience was front-and-centre for each discussion, each of the ten (10) PODs comprised up to ten (10) Summit participants and included at least one person with disability (and a support person/family member/carer, if required).

Each POD held three workshop discussions following the opening presentations. Each discussion lasted 50 minutes and was facilitated by a passionate DAWA volunteer - not necessarily a 'professional facilitator' but a person with a range of involvement in the sector, briefed and provided with facilitation tips to manage the process of discussion and ensure all voices were heard.

The facilitator was supported by a nominated 'scribe' to ensure each group's discussion was fully and accurately recorded (for later collation) and to help summarise the three key messages from each discussion that stood out most in the group conversation.

The broad discussion topics for each of the PODs were:

POD Focus Group (1) | Reflecting on your own experience and knowledge, are the featured items in the Summary of Overarching Messages from 2022 still valid?

Note: to prepare for this POD discussion, participants were provided with the Executive Summary from the 2022 DAWA Summit as pre-reading for the day, and a one-page summary was available at each table (Appendix 2 to this report)

POD Focus Group (2) | What is required to make enduring progress and more jobs for people with a disability, including school leavers and people with more complex needs, a reality in today's more conscious world?

POD Focus Group 3 - How do we ensure the aspirational endeavours of the State, Commonwealth and Industry combine for measurable gains in jobs and job satisfaction?

A number of sub points were included by the facilitators to draw out participant feedback and are included in Section 2 of this report.



Following the three POD Focus Group discussions, participants regrouped to receive an initial consolidation of the broad feedback from each of the PODs.

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

DAWA Summit on Disability Employment Pathways, Creating more certain Bridges and Pathways – the major themes:

1. Key themes from the inaugural Disability Assembly WA (DAWA) summit held in July 2022 – “Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disability” – are still valid.

Overwhelmingly, participants at the 2025 Summit on “Disability Employment Pathways, Creating more certain Bridges and Pathways” agreed that the key themes identified in the 2022 Summit “Improving employment outcomes for People with Disability” are still relevant. Those themes (detail provided in Appendix 2) were:

- *Action is needed now!*
- *Must focus on the person.*
- *Real Government, Public Sector and Industry Leadership is required.*
- *Consistent support is required at the school to employment transition point.*
- *There is a real need for Training and Capacity Building of Employers.*
- *There is also a need for Inclusive Recruitment Practices.*
- *Address other Gaps, Disconnects, and Barriers.*
- *Funding Support is required*

2. Progress has been slow, but there is cause for some optimism

Also overwhelmingly, participants felt little, at best slow, progress has been made since the 2022 summit, with measurement of progress hampered by a lack of data on the employment of people with disability.

While the state government public sector data presented suggested a small increase since 2022 in the public sector workforce reporting having a disability (1.7% in 2025 compared with 1.5% in 2022), many participants actually felt things had gone backwards in general.

Others felt there was much more awareness, but this was yet to transition to more people with disability in jobs.

Notwithstanding the concerns about slow progress, a number of positive examples of advancements were cited by participants. These examples included:

- New training programs e.g., the Australian Medical Association (AMA) looking at training for people with disabilities as a new business opportunity,
- Establishment of new micro enterprises,



- Some employers being more open to job 'carving' to assist people with disability to be matched to suitable roles,
- Increased engagement of some schools, leading to a number of school leavers transitioning to employment, and some smaller businesses actively engaging,
- The work of the CCIWA and Inclusion Solutions (GROW WA initiative) to encourage and support the engagement of more employers,
- The Hospitality Disability Network, considered to be changing the narrative,
- Developments in the tertiary education system e.g., the development of an 'Integrated Success Employment Tool' as a new resource for employers about recruiting people with autism; and some new TAFE courses available e.g., Cert 1 and 2 in Work Skills, which teach many of the foundational skills previously taught in Business Colleges,
- Roll out of a new employment framework by the NDIA,
- For some, there is now access to foundational support funding for projects to look at employment,
- Establishment of a National Autism Strategy First Action Plan that includes 'Economic Inclusion' as key outcome area.

When participants were asked whether they remained optimistic about progress in the future, the majority expressed that they were. The primary reasons for this optimism were:

- Increased dialogue and apparent commitment at government and industry levels,
- Recent and anticipated changes in government policies (e.g., the establishment of a new Disability Centre of Employment Excellence),
- More connection and collaboration in the ecosystem,
- Increased engagement of new and potentially influential stakeholders, e.g., Industry Training Councils and Training providers.

Indeed, a few of the participants in the summit (e.g., businesses and training organisations) said they had no real knowledge about this topic, but came to learn.

3. Many barriers to employing people with disabilities still need to be addressed

Consistent with the messages from participants in the 2022 summit, the lack of real leadership shown to date by government(s), employers, and industry was identified as the main barrier to achieving better employment outcomes for people with disability.

The most frequently expressed barriers that continue to impact on the employment of people with disability were:



- 'Fragmentation' in the system, including a lack of a central hub where people can access resources, a lack of navigation support and a fragmentation in funding to support both potential employers and employees,
- The lack of understanding among employers about the benefits of employing people with disability (e.g., enhanced diversity, building a company's capacity, culture, and performance, lower absenteeism and employee turnover and improved punctuality). Indeed, many employers were thought to still be fearful and risk averse, about the potential implications of employing a person with disability,
- Recruitment 'bias' and the recruitment processes of many potential employers, including the public service, were often prohibitive. Participants elaborated that the recruitment and employment language is too complicated, and many of the processes required to apply for a job are at best 'difficult' for many people with disability,
- The lack of a person-centred approach that places the job-seeker at the centre of conversations. Employers need to see the person, rather than the disability. The family and lived experience voice is also still missing,
- At best, inconsistent school to employment pathway, with a lack of resources (including specialist roles) in or working with many schools to support students to explore employment opportunities and prepare them for the world of work.

As a result of the POD discussion on barriers, many participants reiterated a key message from the 2022 summit that '*Action is needed now!*' and suggested a number of short-term priorities that should be implemented (see section 3).

These and other priorities are expanded in the themes that follow.

4. Real Government, Public Sector and Industry Leadership and Accountability is required and is a cornerstone for success

The available data suggests that people with disability represent just 1.7% of those employed within the WA public sector and, three years ago, just 1% within the private sector.

Australia's employment rate for people with disability compares unfavourably with countries such as Norway, Switzerland, Germany, and Canada, where the gap between the employment rate for people with disability and those without disability lies at around 20%, compared with around 30% in Australia. Key to their success has been the leadership shown by governments and the private sector.

All POD conversations highlighted that a lack of real leadership and accountability shown by both state and federal government, employers, and industry leaders was the main factor impacting on progress in Australia and WA.



All participants agreed that the government needs to lead by example, with key leaders considered to include the Premier (and Cabinet), the Minister for Disability Services, the Public Sector Commissioner and the Director Generals of the Departments of Premier and Cabinet, Communities (which houses the Office of Disability), Education and Training and Workforce Development (DTWD).

Some participants called for a distinct government program, with its own measurables, to be established to drive progress.

Within the public sector, a range of 'carrot and stick' approaches were considered essential to hold government departments accountable and to support them to achieve targets for the employment of people with disability.

Summit participants felt strongly that 'stick' approaches should include:

- Mandatory (real, rather than 'aspirational') targets for each government department or agency, and with the target relating to employment of people with disability separate from broader diversity targets,
- Targets specified as a priority and enforced within Director General (or equivalent) performance agreements, with progress against the KPI to be transparent through department Annual Reports, and consolidated in an across-government Annual Report to Parliament,
- Enforcement of existing government tools, such as Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs), through Outcome 7 – Reducing barriers to people with disability obtaining and maintaining employment (ideally strengthened in the Legislation) within government departments and agencies, including local governments,
- Using Government contracts, service agreements and grants tools to drive employment outcomes beyond the public sector, through the inclusion of a commitment to employ people with disability as part of tender processes.

Regulatory bodies such as ASIC and the ACNC were raised as bodies that potentially could play a role in the corporate, small business and community services sectors, though the majority of the POD conversations acknowledged that their focus was more on compliance. Therefore, suggestions focused more on 'carrot-based' approaches to encourage and support progress, including:

- Governments supporting departments through targeted sector training and workforce development (through the PSC or DTWD),
- Introducing and promoting 'achievement of disability employment outcomes' as a key category in public sector and Industry awards,
- Publicly celebrating and promoting successes, small and large, when employment objectives or targets are achieved,
- Considering an employer disability 'employment/inclusion friendly' accreditation system to acknowledge those employers that are making a



difference, and promoting those organisations e.g., via a top 10 ladder or similar mechanism.

The need for an independent body charged with oversight of progress towards improving disability employment outcomes was discussed by summit participants, with support for the establishment of a distinct oversight body, with influence.

Suggestions generally favoured a combination of:

- Expanding on the role of the recently established 'Disability Centre of Employment Excellence', funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services and hosted at Swinburne University. Under this model, the monitoring and oversight function would be added to the Centre's role to 'develop best practice, evidence-based information to help providers deliver high quality effective employment services and supports to improve disability employment outcomes' and,
- Establishing a similar oversight, monitoring and support body in WA, with a local focus and influence.

The need for consistent and accurate data was also identified by participants as a genuine gap, but urgently required to measure progress and the real impact of increasing the employment of people with disability.

Key success measures proposed included, but were not limited to:

- Number of people with disability in the workforce - casual or permanent, by business sector/type and appropriately broken into categories of disability to recognise that disability is not homogenous,
- Number of people with disability who want to work, but are unemployed,
- Length of tenure in a role – recognising that maintaining employment is important,
- Hours of employment (noting that this might need comparison with desired hours of employment, as for some a few hours or a couple of days per week is still beneficial and others want or need to start with less and build up to more hours over time),
- Employee satisfaction/fulfilment, including from the perspectives of being in their job of choice, being listened to and heard, and having social connection,
- Impact on employers, including on culture, broader employee satisfaction, business benefits and productivity, and readiness to employ more,
- Impact on families and carers, including measures of wellbeing and satisfaction,
- Economic benefits, which could include reducing the number of people requiring the disability support pension.



5. Training and Capacity Building is needed for Employers; and employers need to offer a range of employment opportunities

The evidence is clear that many employers continue to be fearful, risk averse, or genuinely have no understanding of the capabilities of people with disability or how best to go about recruiting and supporting the employment of people with disability. Summit participants were therefore united that capacity building for organisation leaders, HR practitioners and managers is essential to increase disability awareness and confidence among employers, including in the regions.

Training and capacity building should focus on:

- Raising disability awareness (including potential benefits to the business),
- Debunking a number of the myths that continue to act as a barrier to employer engagement,
- What's required to be a disability-inclusive employer,
- Providing practical tips and assistance with matters such as best practice recruitment policies and procedures (potentially providing template/sample policies co-designed with people with disability),
- Person-centred and relationship-based approaches to recruitment, recognising the need to really understand the person,
- How to be more welcoming and supportive in the workplace – both peers and management,
- Customised employment options, including strengths-based job designs to meet individual needs and capabilities.

Education of HR practitioners or hiring managers was seen as the highest priority, although summit participants noted that leadership 'from the top' was essential to drive the commitment to employ more people with disability, and commit to more inclusive recruitment policies and procedures, and flexible job designs.

The preferred option proposed to provide disability awareness and capacity building and promote disability employment inclusion within the private sector was through providing funding to bodies such as CCIWA (to build on their current GROW WA initiative), SBDC, WALGA, and other industry Peaks/Associations.

To get the ball rolling, many summit participants also recommended the identification of a number of 'champions' within the private sector (Chairs, Boards and CEOs of large and small businesses) prepared to 'show the way'.

Other employer-related suggestions to achieve some 'quick wins' in the employment of people with disability included:

- Increasing employer engagement directly with schools,



- Making specialist disability recruitment expertise available to employers, e.g., engagement of in-house job designers, to help customise job roles and assess workplace adjustments,
- Establishing a WA register of employers who are willing to take people with disability for work experience, traineeships, holiday jobs, part-time roles - post school and for all ages. This would provide capacity building and experience for both the employer and potential employee, and potentially feed into longer term employment,
- Providing direct support to a range of selected small to medium enterprises, acknowledging they are often more agile and can make adjustments more readily than big corporates.

6. Improving the school to employment transition pathways is vital

A focus area for all POD discussions concerned participants' experiences when transitioning from school and seeking employment opportunities. All agreed that education systems need to be set up to enable all school students with disability to succeed and that improving the pathways for school leavers will pay dividends in the longer term, including changing the expectations of employers.

Many participants cited positive personal experiences e.g., where the school engaged well with an ADE, the provider had good connections with community employers, and ten of the school leavers obtained jobs when they left school.

Notwithstanding the successes, all PODs felt that the school to employment transition process needed to be more consistent in all schools across the state including in relation to resourcing to meet the mandate to help students explore work options.

To provide consistency, participants suggested a model pathway should be co-designed with young people with disability, their families and the Department of Education, and then be published as the 'standard'.

All PODs also agreed that the preparation for employment process should start much earlier than currently, with the majority feeling it should commence in years 8/9 at the latest (many students look for part time jobs from this age), and some feeling it should be even earlier (e.g., provision of information about the transition when a student commences high school).

The keys to success for the person are:

- Support through the entire schooling journey, with a 'long runway' provided to ensure an employment connection by the end of year 12,
- The full involvement of families, carers, teachers and other close stakeholders in the student's life, who have a wealth of knowledge and experience and know the person best. Building family capacity, ensuring the



timely dissemination of information, and connecting them to the supports and opportunities available is considered vital, including on matters such as funding support transition mechanisms such as the School Leaver Employment Supports under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS),

- Ensure the process is person-centred, involves visioning and open dialogue to help the student to identify what they want, and thinking about what happens after school.

Many summit participants felt that the standard school curriculum does not necessarily benefit the person with disability and should include a greater focus on life and work skills to ensure individuals have the core skills to be able to enter the workplace. In addition, more co-curricular options were encouraged as options to help boost personal confidence, that can later translate socially and ease the transition into employment.

Many also considered that schools needed to cultivate better relationships with employer networks, including employment services (DES) and employment providers, engaging early to develop and use work experience options, trials and pilots as part of the pathway process.

The need for consistency was also called for in the VET/TAFE, university and private RTO systems, with a number of participants highlighting the differences in options (and supports) available in different locations. These participants identified the need for an increase in the number of roles in the post-secondary system to support students and aid transitions into employment (e.g., more client engagement officers or specialist support roles), and felt all TAFEs should offer Certificate 1 and 2 qualifications, as a minimum, with more flexibility in course delivery.

7. The pathways to employment would be significantly helped by Navigation Supports or Connectors

In many of the POD discussions system disconnects were identified by participants as barriers to achieving the desired step change in improving employment outcomes for people with disability.

The system disconnects related to areas of 'fragmentation' in the system, causing significant frustration to families of people with disability, e.g.,

- fragmentation of funding, exacerbating the difficulties in identifying available funding support,
- in relation to helping to connect people with disability with job opportunities and employers, and employment providers with 'interested' companies. In this respect, many summit participants were highly critical of DES providers



and hoped that the Commonwealth employment reforms would provide for a much better system,

- between schools, employment services providers in their catchment and potential employers.

With the system seen to be so disjointed, summit participants identified an urgent need for 'navigators' and 'connectors' to work alongside people with disability and their families, and mechanisms akin to a one-stop shop or central hub, where they could go for employment advice and assistance.

The central hub could play a role in the promotion of suitable employment opportunities and provide a centralised way of accessing employers. Participants also suggested the hub could provide 'job matching days', where employers would showcase the jobs available and potentially even be provided with assistance and training themselves in how to enable more inclusive employment practices.

8. We need more mechanisms for showcasing success stories

Linked to the theme of training and capacity building of employers, many of the PODs identified the need for mechanisms for employers to come together to share and showcase examples of 'what works.'

The recently established Disability Centre of Employment Excellence and CCIWA/IS GROW WA initiatives were acknowledged as solid examples to fill this void, with other suggestions to provide a platform for leadership engagement, including:

- A media campaign to support the charge, promoting individual and employer success stories, e.g., 'we thought this was going to be a challenge, but then this was what we found', or 'how I got into mining',
- Expos and Leadership breakfasts as an avenue to share experiences,
- Association bodies such as CCIWA, SBDC and WALGA hosting networking functions of disability-friendly employers, with the will and skill to collaborate and even share IP,
- Establishing a central website to share stories, videos and resources,
- Twice yearly summits involving people with disability, their families and employers, to provide a platform to share successes and discuss 'what next?',
- Engaging Industry Training Councils to spread success stories across their stakeholder networks.

Regional summit participants reminded the summit not to forget the regions when discussing mechanisms to improve the information flow to people with disability, families and employers, noting the need for more localised and place-based approaches for sharing stories and experiences, and information about the employment opportunities available.



9. Focus on the person

A common thread across all POD discussions throughout the day was that the failure to be mindful of different disabilities, abilities and capabilities means that many people with disability are missing out on potential employment opportunities.

Participants consistently reminded each other that jobs and careers are by definition 'personal' and employment approaches need to be as individualised as possible. Success depends on relationships, which involve open dialogue and a holistic approach, actively listening to truly understand the person and their individual ambition, and focuses on employing people for their strengths, interests and skills, rather than on their disability.

10. Funding support will be required

While pleasingly the POD discussions focused almost entirely on strategies required to create more certain bridges and pathways to employment for people with disability, many of the themes and calls for action may require funding support if they are to be realised.

The primary areas for funding consideration may include:

- To support the capacity building of more employers, e.g., the development and delivery of training and support packages,
- To support the engagement of mentors to work with/walk alongside employers to support the change needed,
- To improve the collection of meaningful data against which to measure progress,
- To establish and support mechanisms to improve the sharing of information and success stories,
- To expand resources in schools to achieve consistent transition pathways from school to employment,
- To support the establishment of connectors and navigators,
- To assist employers with exploring the potential engagement of people with disability.

Funding priorities were not discussed at the March 2025 summit, but may form a component of the follow up event in August 2025, in partnership between DAWA, CCI WA and Inclusion Solutions WA.



Summary of overarching messages from the DAWA 2025 Summit - "Creating more certain bridges and pathways for the employment of people living with disability, particularly those with intellectual disability."

- In 2018, 53% of people aged 15–64 with disability were in the labour force, compared with 84% of those without disability. In addition, 10% of employed people aged 15–64 with disability were underemployed (worked part time and wanted to, and could, work more), compared with 6.9% of those without disability.
- The key findings from the 2022 DAWA Summit 'Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disability' remain valid:
 - Must focus on the person,
 - Real Government, Public Sector and Industry Leadership is required,
 - Consistent support is required at the school to employment transition point,
 - There is a real need for Training and Capacity Building of Employers,
 - There is also a need for Inclusive Recruitment Practices,
 - Address other Gaps, Disconnects, and Barriers,
 - Funding Support is required.
- Progress in increasing the employment of people with disability is far too slow and reflects the lack of a genuine commitment from governments and many employers.
- People with Disability remain an untapped resource, particularly at a time of workforce shortages, but a range of barriers need to be addressed.
- The fragmentation in the system in areas like funding, access to resources, and help to connect people with disability with job opportunities and employers, suggest an urgent need for 'navigators' and 'connectors' to work alongside people with disability and their families.
- Measuring progress is hampered by a lack of consistent and accurate data, including in relation to the number of people with disability in the workplace, length of tenure in the role, employee fulfilment and the impact on employers.
- Person-centred approaches are vital to really understand the person with disability, their individual aspirations, strengths, interests and skills.
- Despite the slow progress, recent glimmers of hope (e.g., the increased dialogue, recent and anticipated changes in government policies, and planned employment reforms) mean that many people with disability and their families remain optimistic that things will improve.
- There are some simple changes that can occur now to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities – we don't need any further research or pilot programs. Action is needed now!



Messages for the Commonwealth and WA State Governments

- The most recent available data suggests that people with disability represent just 1.7% of those employed within the WA public sector against a target for 2025 of 5%.
- Real change will only be achieved if governments show real leadership by example, utilising a carrot and stick approach.
- Review and update the Action Plan to improve [WA Public Sector Employment Outcomes 2020-2025 for people with disability](#), with consideration to the recommendations from the Disability Royal Commission.
- Consider legislation and regulations that mandate the employment of people with disability within the public sector and local governments.
- Governments must establish specific employment targets and pathways for people with disability, including people with cognitive disability (Disability Royal Commission recommendations 7.18 and 7.19).
- Director Generals need to be held to account on their performance against mandatory targets, with performance made transparent through department annual reports. As part of this, departments should deliberately plan for people with disability in workforce and diversity planning activities, and link strategies to business and operational plans.
- Review and implement flexible work options such as customised employment, job redesign and workplace adjustments to enable accessible and inclusive workplaces for people with disability.
- Involve people with disability in co-design of recruitment policies to ensure they are accessible, inclusive, and non-discriminatory.
- Give guidance and provide training and workforce development to public sector departments on contemporary workplace flexibility practices such as customised employment, job redesign and workplace adjustments to increase employment of people with disability and create workplace cultures that embrace disability employment.
- Make better use of existing government tools such as Disability Access and Employment Plans (DAIPs): Outcome 7 to ensure a greater focus on, and monitoring of, progress with people with disability obtaining and maintaining employment.
- Introduce a social procurement policy that favours suppliers which provide employment and training opportunities to people with disability, including people with intellectual disability or cognitive impairments (DRC recommendation 7.23). Victoria's social procurement policy can be drawn upon as national best practice.
- Where possible, use disability social enterprises to deliver contracted services.
- Build on initiatives such as the establishment of the Disability Centre of Employment Excellence to provide an oversight and monitoring role, with some independence from governments.



- Provide adequate funding to education departments to ensure a consistent employment transition pathway from school to employment in all schools across the state. To support this, work with people with disability, families and employers to co-design a model pathway.
- When designing foundational supports, invest in programs and initiatives to support the transition from school to work (NDIS Review action 1.13).
- Review the school curriculum to include a greater focus on life and work skills to ease the transition into employment.
- Implement initiatives to encourage, support and reward employers for achieving disability friendly workplaces.

Messages for Industry Groups and Peak Bodies

- Advance conversations with your members about the benefits of employing people with disability, including in relation to capacity, culture and performance.
- Facilitate or provide training for your members about how to become a disability-inclusive employer. This should include providing example recruitment policies (co-designed with people with disability), practical tips, and direct assistance with the customisation of employment options and job designs.
- Encourage your members to engage with schools and employment services providers, and to introduce work experience options to help with the school to employment transition for students with disability.
- Introduce mechanisms to celebrate, showcase and share member successes, e.g., expos, employer breakfasts, networking functions, industry awards.
- Engage with the new Disability Centre of Employment Excellence to share evidence-based information and good/best practice that can be disseminated more broadly.
- Lobby the State and Commonwealth Governments for effective supports and information for industry that will lead to an increase in participation for people with disability in the workforce.

Messages for Employers

- By opening employment opportunities to people with disability you can widen your recruitment pool to meet your specific business needs.
- People with a disability often have the lowest absenteeism and turnover of any category of staff.
- Leadership is required from the top (Boards and CEOs) to drive the commitment to employ more people with disability, and to insist on more inclusive recruitment practices.



- Support your employees, particularly HR practitioners and hiring managers to attend training and workforce development opportunities to raise disability awareness and confidence.
- Engage in 'job carving', examining the work you need doing and see what can be done to match the skills and strengths of a person with a disability.
- Introduce more flexibility into your recruitment practices – traditional methods can often disadvantage a person with disability.
- Put your hand up to be a champion and ambassador for the employment of people with disability by reviewing, promoting and sharing your practices.
- Increase your engagement directly with schools and employment services providers to facilitate the transition of students with disability into employment.
- Involve people with disability on recruitment panels.



Section 1 – Disability Assembly WA, its Summit Program and the 2025 Summit, “Disability Employment Pathways, Creating more certain Bridges and Pathways”

About the Disability Assembly Western Australia

Disability Assembly Western Australia (DAWA) is a Collective Voice comprised of Western Australians with disability and their families, carers and people from the broader disability sector who volunteer their time to improve the connectedness of the disability ecosystem.

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

Over the past few years, DAWA has become a local community of local people who know disability. Supported by more than 400 advocates reflecting the diversity of our State, we are a team of diverse perspectives and innovative thinking. DAWA is a safe place for meeting and sharing knowledge and expertise to gather data and opinion and to work together to contribute real life experience with local ownership and respect.

Our vision is to unify, support and champion a thriving disability ecosystem in WA to ensure world leading and sustainable outcomes for people with disability, their families and carers.

About the Disability Assembly WA Summit Program

A major initiative of DAWA is bringing together people with disability, families, carers, peak bodies, advocates, providers and experienced stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to generate informed, impartial discussion and debate ‘the big issues’.

A feature of DAWA’s approach is a program of ‘summits’ tackling topics of scale and concern for people with disability.

Each summit is invitation-only to ensure a cross section of people with disability, families, carers, peak bodies, advocates, service providers, experts and government representatives. Attendees contribute their experience, understanding, expertise and research to the key issues and topics under discussion.

Throughout each summit, attendees generally hear briefly from experts on the topic, and then participate in a DAWA ‘POD’ (focus group) to explore the topic in detail. Findings, preferences and recommendations are collated, and a report prepared, to be presented to government representatives and other influencing bodies that are empowered to make change for good.



Selection of the 2025 DAWA Summit Topic

The 2025 DAWA Summit program aims to address a critical issue in Western Australia: 'Creating more certain bridges and pathways for the employment of people living with disability, particularly those with intellectual disability.'

The selection of this topic for the 2025 summit program reflects its strategic and state-wide importance, the potential to impact on a significant number of people with disability, and the alignment with the following Commonwealth and State Disability and Workforce Strategies:

- **Employ My Ability – the Australian Disability Employment Strategy 2021-2031**, developed in conjunction with **Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031**. The Employ My Ability Strategy presents a 10-year commitment to improving employment opportunities for people with disability,
- **WA State Disability Strategy 2020-2030**, the vision of which is that 'People with disability, and those who share their lives, are engaged and feel empowered to live as they choose in a community where everyone belongs.' One of the strategic priorities in the Strategy is that people with disability have opportunities for meaningful and inclusive employment and economic independence.
- Public Sector Commission (PSC) **Workforce Diversification and Inclusion Strategy for WA Public Sector Employment 2020-2025**. Aligned with the Strategy is the **PSC People with Disability Action Plan to improve Public Sector Outcomes**, highlighting the aim to increase the representation of people employed within the public sector to five per cent and support inclusive workplaces.

Importantly, the timing of the 2025 summit also reflects the apparent increased priority currently being directed by Commonwealth and State Governments to making a difference in the employment of people living with disability.

The comprehensive program during 2025 builds on the inaugural DAWA Employment Summit in 2022 ("Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disability"), with three components between March and August 2025 in collaboration with Inclusion Solutions (IS) and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry WA (CCIWA). The three components include the DAWA-hosted Summit on 31 March, a CCIWA and IS Inclusive Employment Forum on 8 April and a combined event to be scheduled in August.

Together, we aim to explore what is possible to deliver equal opportunity in the employment of people with disability, through identifying existing gaps and challenges, and proposing solutions to ensure a more inclusive and supportive employment landscape.

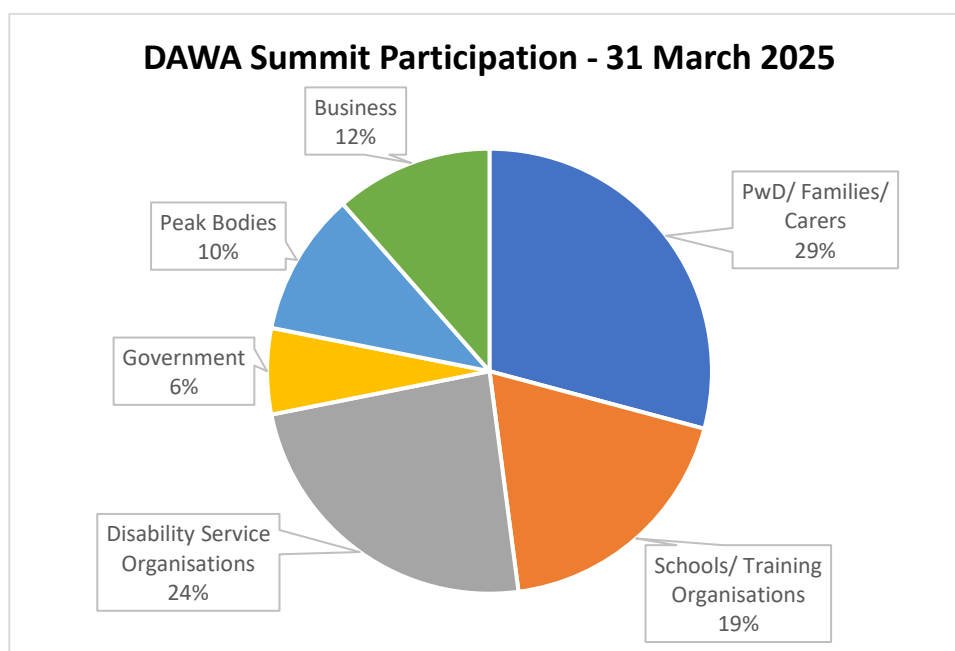


Section 2: Summary of the process and proceedings

The DAWA summit on 'Creating more certain bridges and pathways for the employment of people living with disability, particularly those with intellectual disability', was held on Monday 31 March at the Telethon Speech and Hearing Function Centre, 36 Dodd Street, Wembley. The venue was selected because of its ability to meet parking and other accessibility requirements for people with disability and because of the range of conference and 'break out' rooms available.

96 invited guests attended in Perth and an additional 16 participated online in the Kimberley, in Broome and Kununurra.

The participants in the Perth forum included 28 people with disability and family members/carers, around 18 representatives from training organisations (including Training providers, Industry Training Councils, RTOs and school education officers/equivalent), 23 from disability services providers, 6 from government bodies (state and local), 10 from a mix of peak bodies, and 11 from small to large businesses. Some participants could be classified in more than one category (e.g., a family member who is also part of a Peak body), but were included only once in the summary above.



The agenda for the summit was designed to include three brief 'spotlight' presentations to provide summit participants with the most up to date context on the priority placed by the Commonwealth and State Governments and by Industry on improving employment outcomes for people with disability, followed by the engagement of participants in in-depth discussions within small working groups – named 'PODs' – over the course of the day.



Disability Employment Pathways, Creating more certain Bridges and Pathways **DAWA Summit Program** **Monday, 31 March 2025**

8:30am	Doors open
9:00am	Registrations open
9:30am	Acknowledgement of Country & Introduction Bruce Langoulant, DAWA Board Director Welcome to regional participants online and in-person attendees
9:40am	Spotlight Speaker Lena Constantine, Associate Director, Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIWA)
9:50am	Spotlight Speaker Mike Rowe, Director General, Department of Communities
10:00am	Spotlight Speaker Alex Buckley, Branch Manager, Disability Employment Policy Branch, Department of Social Services
10:15am	How the PODs will work Tom Tolchard, Consultant
10:30am	Morning Tea - mini break
10:55am	POD Focus Group (1) Reflecting on your own experience and knowledge, are the featured items in the Summary of Overarching Messages from 2022 still valid? What progress has been made over the past 3 years and what has been left behind? The good, the bad and the ugly. What evidence is there to show that the environment has really changed for the better for achieving more jobs?
11:45am	Comfort Break
11:55am	POD Focus Group (2) What is required to make enduring progress and more jobs for people with a disability, including school leavers and people with more complex needs, a reality in today's more conscious world? • What quick start initiatives are needed for this? • How do we ensure a consistent pathway from school to employment? • From prospective employers, what else needs to happen in addition to training of HR Practitioners?
12:45pm	Lunch and networking
1:40pm	POD Focus Group (3) How do we ensure the aspirational endeavours of the State, Commonwealth and Industry combine for measurable gains in jobs and job satisfaction? • Do we need an independent body to continually promote and demonstrate the opportunities, variety and successful examples? • Who should be responsible and how should we measure success, given the numerous high-level influencers and the history of limited leadership in this area? • What gives you hope? Is it a collaboration?
2:30pm	Recapping summit findings Tom Tolchard, Consultant
2:50pm	Conclusion and next steps Bruce Langoulant. DAWA Board Director
3:00pm	Day concludes



The three spotlight speakers during the morning session were:

1. **Lena Constantine, Associate Director, Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIWA)**, who has been driving workforce development policy and initiatives for WA industry for over a decade. Lena provided the summit with an overview of the state government funded GROW WA initiative, through which Inclusion Solutions, in partnership with CCIWA, is working to empower and equip businesses, organisations and individuals to champion social inclusion in the workplace and create more welcoming and accessible spaces for West Australians living with disability.
2. **Mike Rowe, Director General, Department of Communities**, who provided an overview of the current public sector data concerning the employment of people with a disability in the public sector, and an outline of initiatives underway, with support from the State Government and being led by the Department of Communities, to improve employment outcomes for people with disability within both the public and corporate/private sectors.
3. **Alex Buckley, Branch Manager, Disability Employment Policy Branch, Department of Social Services**, who spoke about the range of current and planned Commonwealth Disability Employment Reforms. These include the establishment of a Disability Employment Centre of Excellence to develop best practice, evidence-based information to help providers deliver high quality effective employment services and supports to both participants with disability and employers, to improve disability employment outcomes; and the planned implementation by the Department of Social Services (DSS) of a new specialist disability employment program later in 2025.

These introductory presentations were followed by facilitated participant discussion in 'PODs', the composition of which was designed to include a mix of stakeholders and experience, placing the person(s) with disability at the centre.

In all, there were ten PODs in the Perth forum and two PODs in the Kimberley (Broome and Kununurra). Each POD comprised up to ten (10) Summit participants and included at least one person with disability (and a support person/family member/carer, if required) and a mix of employment providers, disability services providers, training providers, businesses/employers, advocates, peak bodies, government, and other subject expert representatives.

Each POD held three workshop discussions during the day. Each discussion lasted 50 minutes and was facilitated by a passionate DAWA volunteer - not necessarily a 'professional facilitator' but a person with a range of involvement in the sector, briefed and provided with facilitation tips to manage the process of discussion and ensure all voices were heard.

The facilitator was supported by a nominated 'scribe' to ensure each group's discussion was fully and accurately recorded (for later collation) and to help



summarise the key messages from each discussion that stood out most in the group conversation.

The broad discussion topics for each of the PODS were:

POD Focus Group (1) | Reflecting on your own experience and knowledge, are the featured items in the Summary of Overarching Messages from 2022 still valid?

- What progress has been made over the past 3 years and what has been left behind? The good, the bad and the ugly.
- What evidence is there to show that the environment has really changed for the better for achieving more jobs?

Note: to prepare for this POD discussion, participants were provided with the Executive Summary from the 2022 DAWA Summit as pre-reading for the day, and a one-page summary was available at each table (Appendix 2 to this report).

POD Focus Group (2) | What is required to make enduring progress and more jobs for people with a disability, including school leavers and people with more complex needs, a reality in today's more conscious world?

- What quick start initiatives are needed for this?
- How do we ensure a consistent pathway from school to employment?
- From prospective employers, what else needs to happen in addition to training of HR Practitioners?

POD Focus Group 3 - How do we ensure the aspirational endeavours of the State, Commonwealth and Industry combine for measurable gains in jobs and job satisfaction?

- Do we need an independent body to continually promote and demonstrate the opportunities, variety and successful examples?
- Who should be responsible and how should we measure success, given the numerous high-level influencers and the history of limited leadership in this area?
- What gives you hope? Is it a collaboration?

Following the three POD Focus Group discussions, participants regrouped to receive a recap of some of the broad feedback and messages gathered from the POD discussions during the day. Participants were then advised that the next steps would involve consolidation of all the POD discussions into a report on the summit, which would be provided to key stakeholders and form the basis for a final event to be held in collaboration with CCIWA and Inclusion Solutions, in August 2025.



Section 3: Key Themes from the DAWA Summit on Disability Employment Pathways, Creating more certain Bridges and Pathways

This section of the report provides a consolidated documentation of the key themes that arose within the POD group discussions. While the flow of the discussion differed to reflect the composition and individual experiences of each group, the key themes arising from the discussions were generally similar.

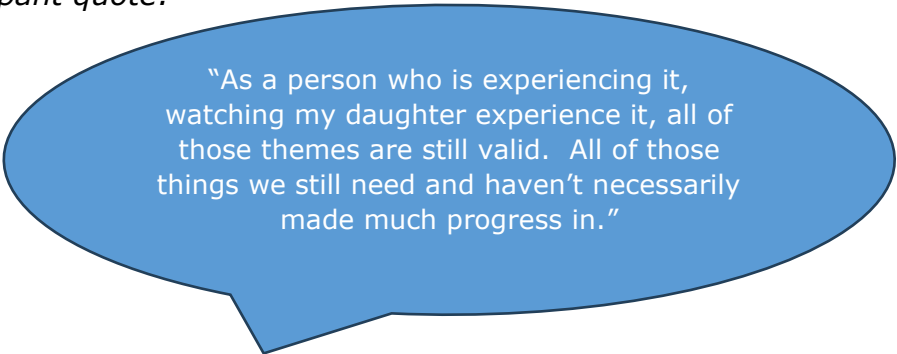
The key themes that arose within the POD discussions were:

1. Key themes from the inaugural Disability Assembly WA (DAWA) summit held in July 2022 – “Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disability” – are still valid.

Overwhelmingly, participants at the 2025 Summit on ‘Disability Employment Pathways, Creating more certain Bridges and Pathways’ agreed that the key themes identified in the 2022 Summit ‘Employment for People with Disability’ are still relevant. Those themes (detail provided in Appendix 2) were:

- Action is needed now!
- Must focus on the person.
- Real Government, Public Sector and Industry Leadership is required.
- Consistent support is required at the school to employment transition point.
- There is a real need for Training and Capacity Building of Employers.
- There is also a need for Inclusive Recruitment Practices.
- Address other Gaps, Disconnects, and Barriers.
- Funding *Support is required.*

Participant quote:



“As a person who is experiencing it, watching my daughter experience it, all of those themes are still valid. All of those things we still need and haven’t necessarily made much progress in.”

2. Progress has been slow, but there is cause for some optimism

Also overwhelmingly, participants felt little, at best slow, progress has been made since the 2022 summit, with measurement of progress hampered by a lack of data on the employment of people with disability.



Participant quotes:

"Limited progress has been made, perhaps because the job seeker has not always been at the centre of the conversations, including a lack of understanding of their needs, interests and skills."

"In terms of actually getting people jobs I don't know that I've seen a lot. I can't understand, even if you have a job ready and it's all lined up, and the manager was on board and still after a year nothing has happened."

"The bad includes employers who are still discriminatory due to lack of understanding during recruitment."

While the state government public sector data presented suggested a small increase since 2022 in the public sector workforce reporting having a disability (1.7% in 2025 compared with 1.5% in 2022), many participants actually felt things had gone backwards in general.

Participant quote:

"It was disheartening to hear one of the speakers talk about the 5% state public sector target being aspirational. Community understanding was that it was a commitment. If the public sector can't achieve the modest target, then the private sector will not follow."

Others felt there was much more awareness, but this was yet to transition to more people with disability in jobs.



Participant quote:

"You can hear people saying the right stuff, but I don't know that we have actually moved forward on a lot of action."

Notwithstanding the concerns about slow progress with increasing the employment of people with disability, a few positive examples of advancements were cited by participants. These examples included, but were not limited to:

- New training programs e.g., the Australian Medical Association (AMA) looking at training for people with disabilities as a new business opportunity,
- Establishment of new micro enterprises,
- Some employers being more open to job 'carving' to assist people with disability to be matched to suitable roles,
- Increased engagement of some schools, leading to a number of school leavers transitioning to employment, and some smaller businesses actively engaging,
- The work of the CCIWA and Inclusion Solutions (GROW WA initiative) to encourage and support the engagement of more employers,
- The Hospitality Disability Network, considered to be changing the narrative.
- Developments in the tertiary education system e.g., the development of an 'Integrated Success Employment Tool' as a new resource for employers about recruiting people with autism; and some new TAFE courses available e.g., Cert 1 and 2 in Work Skills, which teach many of the foundational skills previously taught in Business Colleges,
- Roll out of a new employment framework by the NDIA,
- For some, there is now access to foundational support funding for projects to look at employment,
- Establishment of a National Autism Strategy First Action Plan that includes 'Economic Inclusion' as key outcome area.

Participant quotes:

"Many employing businesses are smaller, and generally these are more flexible and employ quickly. Bigger companies seem more hesitant to employ".



"I've enjoyed some real work in a supportive environment - it built my confidence and skills."

When participants were asked whether they remained optimistic about progress in the future, the majority expressed that they were. The primary reason for this optimism was the increased dialogue and apparent commitment at government and industry levels, though a range of other reasons were expressed, including:

- Industry, State and Commonwealth Governments speaking up more openly about what they are doing and shining a light on some of the good things happening,
- Changes in Commonwealth Government policy, including the establishment of a new Disability Centre of Employment Excellence, and the planned implementation of a new specialist disability employment program later in 2025,
- Seeing success in individuals,
- More like-minded people in leadership roles, and an increase in the number of 'disability-confident' employers,
- Young people (emerging leaders) considered a lot more open minded and accepting, and the community seeming more ready for change,
- There appears to be more connection and collaboration in the ecosystem,
- Events such as the Summit, enabling good conversation among people with a common objective and passion, and collaboration to share knowledge, e.g., with CCIWA and Inclusion Solutions,
- The fact that some of the participants in the summit had no idea about this topic (e.g., some businesses and training organisations), but came to learn,
- Increased engagement of Industry Training Councils and Training providers, including the implementation by Can Do Training of a 'Get that Job' package, accommodating and accepting students' learning styles.

Participant quote:

"We are all doing good work and starting to achieve some great individual outcomes."



3. Many barriers to employing people with disabilities still need to be addressed

Consistent with the messages from participants in the 2022 summit, the lack of real leadership shown to date by government(s), employers, and industry was identified as the main barrier to achieving better outcomes in the employment of people with disability.

In addition, in the POD discussions in 2025, the most frequently expressed barriers that continue to impact on the employment of people with disability were:

- 'Fragmentation' in the system, including a lack of a central hub where people can access resources, a lack of navigation support and a fragmentation in funding to support both potential employers and employees. Some participants remarked that the bureaucracy is overwhelming and intimidating for families, with multiple departments with different rules and a lack of communication,
- The lack of understanding among employers about the benefits of employing people with disability (e.g., enhanced diversity, building a company's capacity, culture, and performance, lower absenteeism and employee turnover and improved punctuality). Indeed, many employers were thought to still be fearful and risk averse about the potential implications of employing a person with disability. Examples included concerns about the costs of 'reasonable adjustments' required to enable the employment of the person, the levels of support required in the workplace, and believing, falsely, that they would need additional and specific insurance because of the greater liability and risks associated with hiring people with disability,
- Recruitment 'bias' and the recruitment processes of many potential employers, including the public service (despite recent policy changes introduced by the Public Sector Commission), were often prohibitive. Participants elaborated that traditional merit-based selection processes may not always provide the level playing field intended (not strengths-based and iterative), the recruitment and employment language is too complicated, and many of the processes required to apply for a job (application forms, on-line applications, formal interviews) are at best 'difficult' for many people with disability,
- The lack of a person-centred approach that places the job-seeker at the centre of conversations, acknowledges that people are individuals, that disability is not a homogenous group, and that people with different disabilities have differing and unique capabilities and interests. Employers need to see the person, rather than the disability. The family and lived experience voice is also still missing,
- At best, an 'inconsistent' school to employment pathway, with a lack of resources (including specialist roles) in or working with many schools to



support students to explore employment opportunities and prepare them for the world of work.

Other less frequently expressed barriers included:

- Competition between employment agencies, which can create a barrier for collaboration,
- The inconsistency of support for people with disability within the TAFE system, including suitable offerings in regional WA,
- Knowledge of both Commonwealth and State government disability employment reform initiatives being very low,
- Failure to engage the 'Family Voice', e.g., in mentoring/training education providers and employers, especially for people with Intellectual Disability,
- Disincentives in moving/transitioning people with disability from supported employment to low wage employment. More generally, in relation to supported employment, participants acknowledged that while opinions differ on employment directions generally, for some people with disability, open employment is not always the better option.

Participant quotes:



"Our organisation doesn't know where to start! People hear the word disability and think of a universal barrier as a stereotype."



"Four applicants were interested in a casual role with Australia Post. All ticked the disability box and were linked to the organisation. All were rejected with no feedback or engagement from the inclusion team."

As a result of the POD discussion on barriers to obtaining employment, many participants reiterated a key message from the 2022 summit that '*Action is needed now!*', with a range of possible short-term opportunities immediately identified, including the need for more:

- Meaningful targets with greater accountability,
- Employer awareness / education,
- Support and training to be provided in mainstream schools, enabling better supported pathways from school to employment,
- Ambassadors and champions,
- A public education campaign, along the lines of the former "See the person, not the Disability" campaign, which would highlight the value of people with



disability in employment as an investment and benefit for business, not a cost,

- Flexible recruitment processes,
- Funding support for employers to 'dip a toe in the water', to build on and promote initiatives that work, e.g., Customised Employment options, and 'connectors' e.g., between school, employment providers and employers.

Participant quote:

"We need to identify a few true leaders to drive outcomes and not be hindered by process."

These and other priorities are expanded in the themes that follow.

4. Real Government, Public Sector and Industry Leadership and Accountability is required and is a cornerstone for success

The available data suggests that people with disability represent just 1.7% of those employed within the WA public sector and, three years ago, just 1% within the private sector.

Australia's employment rate for people with disability compares unfavourably with countries such as Norway, Switzerland, Germany, and Canada, where the gap between the employment rate for people with disability and those without disability lies at around 20%, compared with around 30% in Australia. These countries have improved the integration of people with disability through a range of initiatives e.g., their legal frameworks and support systems that promote inclusion in the workplace, but key to their success has been the leadership shown by governments and the private sector.

Consistent with feedback in the 2022 Summit, POD conversations highlighted that a lack of real leadership and accountability shown by both state and federal governments, employers, and industry leaders was continuing to impact on progress in Australia and in WA. They again called for a greater commitment to actively drive and demonstrate the changes required to improve employment outcomes for people with disability.

Participant quote:

"We need more accountability to meet employment targets, either being enforced or incentivised at both the organisational and individual level."



All participants agreed that the government needs to lead by example, with key leaders considered to include the Premier (and Cabinet), the Minister for Disability Services, the Public Sector Commissioner and the Director Generals of the Departments of Premier and Cabinet, Communities (which houses the Office of Disability), Education and Training and Workforce Development (DTWD). Some participants called for a distinct government program, with its own measurables, to be established to drive progress.

Within the public sector, a range of 'carrot and stick' approaches were considered essential to hold government departments accountable and to support them to achieve targets for the employment of people with disability, including people with an intellectual disability, who are over-represented in the unemployment statistics.

Summit participants felt strongly that 'stick' approaches should include mandatory (real, rather than 'aspirational') and measurable targets for each government department or agency, and with the target relating to employment of people with disability separate from broader diversity targets. The targets should be clearly specified as a priority and enforced within Director General (or equivalent) performance agreements, with progress against the KPIs to be transparent through department Annual Reports, and consolidated in an across-government Annual Report to Parliament.

Participants also suggested that existing government tools, such as Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs), through *Outcome 7 – Reducing barriers to people with disability obtaining and maintaining employment* (ideally strengthened in the Legislation) should also be enforced within government departments and agencies, including local governments.

Government contracts, service agreements and grants were also considered by summit participants to be a tool that governments could use to drive employment outcomes beyond government (corporate, business and community sectors), through the inclusion of a commitment to employ people with disability as part of tender processes.

Regulatory bodies such as ASIC and the ACNC were raised as bodies that potentially could play a role in the corporate, small business and community services sectors, though the majority of the POD conversations acknowledged that their focus was more on compliance. Therefore, suggestions focused more on 'carrot-based' approaches to encourage and support progress, including:

- Governments supporting departments through targeted sector training and workforce development (through the PSC or DTWD),
- Introducing and promoting 'achievement of disability employment outcomes' as a key category in awards e.g., Premier's Public Sector Awards, Local Government Awards and Industry category awards,



- Publicly celebrating and promoting successes, small and large, when employment objectives or targets are achieved,
- Considering an employer disability 'employment/inclusion friendly' accreditation system to acknowledge those employers that are making a difference, and promoting those organisations e.g., via a top 10 ladder or similar mechanism.

Participant quote:



"Most industries have industry associations that could take some responsibility and champion collective action."

The need for oversight of progress with improving employment outcomes for people with disability was also discussed by summit participants, with support for the establishment of a distinct oversight body, with influence. Opinions varied as to whether it needed to be entirely independent of government, though agreed it should be independent of the NDIA and NDIS.

Suggestions generally favoured a combination of the first two options below:

- Expanding on the role of the recently established 'Disability Centre of Employment Excellence', funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services and hosted at Swinburne University. Under this model, the monitoring and oversight function would be added to the Centre's role to 'develop best practice, evidence-based information to help providers deliver high quality effective employment services and supports to improve disability employment outcomes,'
- Establishing a similar oversight, monitoring and support body in WA, with a local focus and influence,
- An oversight body independent of government and the NDIA/NDIS.

A spin off from the discussion about oversight and monitoring of progress was how best to measure success, with the **need for consistent and accurate data** identified by participants as a genuine gap, but urgently required to measure both the quantitative and qualitative success, including the real impact of increasing the employment of people with disability.

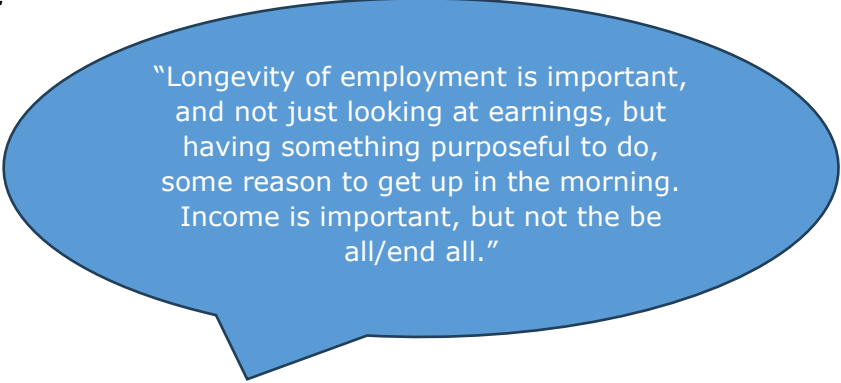
Key success measures proposed included, but were not limited to:

- Number of people with disability in the workforce - casual or permanent, by business sector/type and appropriately broken into categories of disability to recognise that disability is not homogenous,
- Number of people with disability who want to work, but are unemployed,



- Length of tenure in a role – recognising that maintaining employment is important,

Participant quote:



“Longevity of employment is important, and not just looking at earnings, but having something purposeful to do, some reason to get up in the morning. Income is important, but not the be all/end all.”

- Hours of employment (noting that this might need comparison with desired hours of employment, as for some a few hours or a couple of days per week is still beneficial, and others want or need to start with less and build up to more hours over time),
- Employee satisfaction/fulfilment, including from the perspective of being in their job of choice, but also being listened to and heard, and having social connection,
- Impact on employers, including on culture, broader employee satisfaction, business benefits and productivity, and readiness to employ more,
- Impact on families and carers, including measures of wellbeing and satisfaction,
- Economic benefits, which could include reducing the number of people requiring the disability support pension.

5. Training and Capacity Building is needed for Employers; and employers need to offer a range of employment opportunities

The evidence is clear that many employers continue to be fearful, risk averse, or genuinely have no understanding of the capabilities of people with disability or how best to go about recruiting and supporting the employment of people with disability. Summit participants were therefore united that capacity building for organisation leaders, HR practitioners and managers is essential to increase disability awareness and confidence among employers, including in the regions.

Training and capacity building should focus on:

- Raising disability awareness (including potential benefits to the business),
- Debunking a number of the myths that continue to act as a barrier to employer engagement,
- What’s required to be a disability-inclusive employer,



- Providing practical tips and assistance with matters such as best practice recruitment policies and procedures (potentially providing template/sample policies co-designed with people with disability),
- Person-centred and relationship-based approaches to recruitment, recognising the need to really understand the person,
- How to be more welcoming and supportive in the workplace – both peers and management,
- Customised employment options, including strengths-based job designs to meet individual needs and capabilities.

Participant quotes:

"People with disability can tell when an employer is uncomfortable and not confident in employing them."

"A committed supervisor or colleagues is essential because the system can be challenging and time consuming to navigate, and the person with disability may require additional training and investment to succeed."

Education of HR practitioners or hiring managers was seen as the highest priority, though summit participants noted that leadership 'from the top' was essential to drive the commitment to employ more people with disability, and commit to more inclusive recruitment policies and procedures and flexible job designs.

Participant quote:

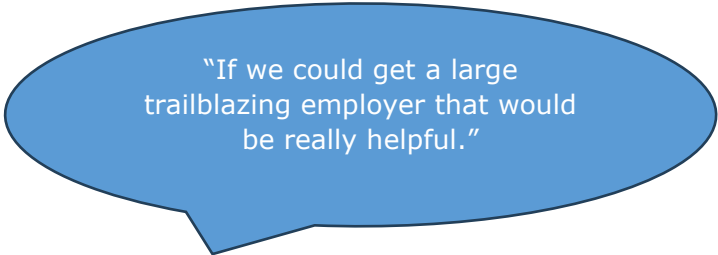
"It needs commitment and accountability from the top of the tree, filtered with targets throughout the organisation."



The preferred option proposed to provide disability awareness and capacity building and promote disability employment inclusion within the private sector was through providing funding to bodies such as CCIWA (to build on their current GROW WA initiative), SBDC, WALGA, and other industry Peaks/Associations.

To get the ball rolling, many summit participants also recommended the identification of a number of 'champions' within the private sector (Chairs, Boards and CEOs of large and small businesses) prepared to 'lean in' and show the way. This would provide evidence of what can be done and how best to do it, that could then be shared more broadly.

Participant quote:

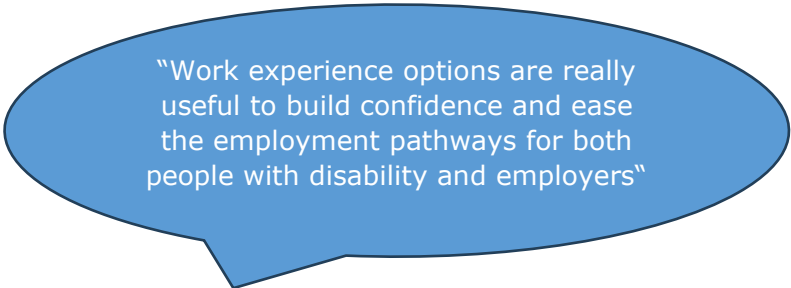


"If we could get a large trailblazing employer that would be really helpful."

Other employer-related suggestions to achieve some 'quick wins' in the employment of people with disability included:

- Increasing employer engagement directly with schools,
- Making specialist disability recruitment expertise available to employers, e.g., supporting selected employers to engage in-house job designers, to help with the customisation of job roles and the assessment of workplace adjustments,
- Establishing a WA register of employers who are willing to take people with disability for work experience, traineeships (including school-based), holiday jobs, part-time roles - post school and for all ages. This would provide capacity building and experience (a learning package) for both the employer and potential employee, and potentially feed into longer term employment,
- Providing direct support to a range of selected small to medium enterprises, acknowledging they are often more agile and can make adjustments more readily than big corporates.

Participant quote:



"Work experience options are really useful to build confidence and ease the employment pathways for both people with disability and employers"



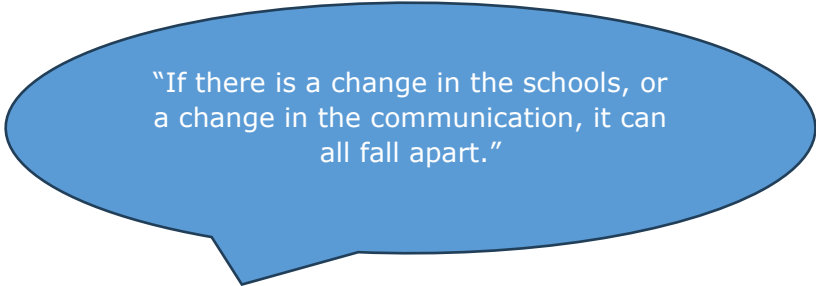
6. Improving the school to employment transition pathways is vital

A focus area for all POD discussions concerned participants' experiences when transitioning from school and seeking employment opportunities. All agreed that education systems need to be set up to enable all school students with disability to succeed and that improving the pathways for school leavers will pay dividends in the longer term, including changing the expectations of employers.

Many participants cited positive personal experiences e.g., where the school engaged well with an Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE), the provider had good connections with community employers, and ten of the school leavers obtained jobs when they left school.

Notwithstanding the successes, all PODs felt that the school to employment transition process needed to be more consistent in all schools across the state, including in relation to resourcing to meet the mandate to help students to explore work options.

Participant quote:



"If there is a change in the schools, or a change in the communication, it can all fall apart."

To provide consistency, participants suggested a model pathway should be co-designed with young people with disability, their families and the Department of Education, and then be published as the 'standard'.

All PODs also agreed that the preparation for employment process should start much earlier than currently, with the majority feeling it should commence in years 8/9 at the latest (many students look for part time jobs from this age), and some feeling it should be even earlier (e.g., provision of information about the transition when a student commences high school). The keys to success for the person are:

- Support through the entire schooling journey, with a 'long runway' provided to ensure an employment connection by the end of year 12,
- The full involvement of families, carers, teachers and other close stakeholders in the student's life, who have a wealth of knowledge and experience and know the person best. Building family capacity through drip feeding from entry into high school, ensuring the timely dissemination of information and connecting them to the supports and opportunities available is considered vital, including on matters such as the availability of funding support, through employment transition mechanisms such as the School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES) under the NDIS,



- Ensure the process is person-centred, involves visioning and open dialogue to help the student to identify what they want, and thinking about what happens after school.

Many summit participants felt that the standard school curriculum does not necessarily benefit the person with disability and should include a greater focus on life and work skills to ensure individuals have the core skills to be able to enter the workplace. In addition, more co-curricular options were encouraged as options to help boost personal confidence, that can later translate socially and ease the transition into employment.

Participant quote:

"We need to acknowledge the importance of confidence for a person with disability, particularly if you have a negative experience early on. Co-curricular experiences can really help to build this confidence and resilience."

Many also considered that schools needed to cultivate better relationships with employer networks, including disability employment services (DES) and employment providers, engaging early to develop and use work experience options, trials and pilots as part of the pathway process.

The need for consistency was also called for in the VET/TAFE, university and private RTO systems, with a number of participants highlighting the differences in options (and supports) available in different locations. These participants identified the need for an increase in the number of positions in the post-secondary system to support students and aid transitions into employment (e.g., more client engagement officers or specialist support roles), and felt all TAFEs should offer Certificate 1 and 2 qualifications, as a minimum, with more flexibility in course delivery.

Participant quote:

"Often there's a lack of support for people with disability in TAFE. However, it can be great, depending on individual people e.g., CY O'Connor TAFE in Northam."



7. The pathways to employment would be significantly helped by Navigation Supports or Connectors

In many of the POD discussions, system disconnects were identified by participants as barriers to achieving the desired step change in improving employment outcomes for people with disability.

Participant quote:

"The whole system can be challenging and time consuming to navigate."

The system disconnects related to areas of 'fragmentation' in the system, causing significant frustration to families of people with disability, e.g.,

- Fragmentation of funding, exacerbating the difficulties in identifying available funding support,
- In relation to helping to connect people with disability with job opportunities and employers, and employment providers with 'interested' companies. In this respect, many summit participants were highly critical of DES providers and hoped that the Commonwealth employment reforms would provide for a much better system.

Participant quotes:

"DES is so useless. DES providers are certainly not meeting the needs of people with intellectual disability. I know an example where an employer employed a person's daughter privately through her, rather than going through DES because of the obstacles."

"You can go online and a DES provider has a 5-star rating, but that doesn't mean anything either."

- between schools, employment services providers in their catchment and potential employers.



Participant quote:

"DES providers should be connected to schools long before students are due to leave, even providing career counselling. Ideally this should be early on so they can help inform what skills they need to develop whilst at school."

With the system seen to be so disjointed, and the number of examples discussed in relation to finding employment and funding support opportunities, summit participants identified an urgent need for 'navigators' and 'connectors' to work alongside people with disability and their families. Some proposed mechanisms akin to a one-stop shop or central hub, where they could go for employment advice and assistance.

The central hub could play a role in the promotion of suitable employment opportunities and provide a centralised way of accessing employers. Participants also suggested the hub could provide 'job matching days', where employers would showcase the jobs available and potentially even be provided with assistance and training themselves in how to enable more inclusive employment practices.

8. We need more mechanisms for showcasing success stories

Linked to the theme of training and capacity building of employers, many of the PODs identified the need for mechanisms for employers to come together to share and showcase examples of 'what works.'

The recently established Disability Centre of Employment Excellence and CCIWA GROW WA initiatives were acknowledged as solid examples to fill this void, with other suggestions to provide a platform for leadership engagement including:

- A media campaign to support the charge, promoting individual and employer success stories, with a focus on themes such as 'we thought this was going to be a challenge, but then this was what we found', or 'how I got into mining',
- Expos and Leadership breakfasts, including an avenue to share experiences,
- Association bodies such as CCIWA, SBDC and WALGA hosting networking functions of disability-friendly employers, with the will and skill to collaborate and even share IP,
- Establishing a central website on which to share stories, videos and resources,
- Twice yearly summits involving people with disability, their families and employers, to provide a platform for sharing success and discussing 'what next?',



- Engaging Industry Training Councils to spread success stories across their stakeholder networks.

Regional summit participants reminded the summit not to forget the regions when discussing mechanisms to improve the information flow to people with disability, families and employers, noting the need for more localised and place-based approaches for sharing stories and experiences, and information about the employment opportunities available.

Participant quote:

"We need more organisations who are doing this work well to share their success strategies and start working to shift the culture at a more systemic level."

9. Focus on the person

A common thread across all POD discussions throughout the day was that the failure to be mindful of different disabilities, abilities and capabilities means that many people with disability are missing out on potential employment opportunities.

Participant quotes:

"There is a total difference between physical and intellectual disability and we need to stop referring to these two disability types together as one."

"The voice of the most vulnerable people with disability, those with intellectual disability, continues to be overshadowed by broader disability. We must acknowledge that disability is not homogenous and must not lose the voice of the more vulnerable."

Participants consistently reminded each other that jobs and careers are by definition 'personal' and employment approaches need to be as individualised as possible. Success depends on relationships, involves open dialogue and a holistic



approach. This means actively listening to truly understand the person and their individual ambition, and focusing on employing people for their strengths, interests and skills, rather than focusing on their disability.

These participants requested that this message be included in the final report as a reminder that it remains a critically important factor for success, and one which unfortunately is often overlooked.

10. Funding support will be required

While pleasingly the POD discussions focused almost entirely on strategies required to create more certain bridges and pathways to employment for people with disability, many of the themes and calls for action may require funding support if they are to be realised.

The primary areas for funding consideration may include:

- To support the capacity building of more employers, e.g., the development and delivery of training and support packages,
- To support the engagement of mentors to work with/walk alongside employers to support the change needed,
- To improve the collection of meaningful data against which to measure progress,
- To establish and support mechanisms to improve the sharing of information and success stories,
- To expand resources in schools to achieve consistent transition pathways from school to employment,
- To support the establishment of connectors and navigators,
- To assist employers with exploring the potential engagement of people with disability.

Funding priorities were not discussed at the March 2025 summit, but may form a component of the follow up summit in August 2025, in partnership between DAWA, CCIWA and Inclusion Solutions.



Section 4: Overarching messages from the DAWA 2025 Summit - "Creating more certain bridges and pathways for the employment of people living with disability, particularly those with intellectual disability."

- In 2018, 53% of people aged 15–64 with disability were in the labour force, compared with 84% of those without disability. In addition, 10% of employed people aged 15–64 with disability were underemployed (worked part time and wanted to, and could, work more), compared with 6.9% of those without disability.
- The key findings from the 2022 DAWA Summit 'Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disability' remain valid:
 - Must focus on the person,
 - Real Government, Public Sector and Industry Leadership is required,
 - Consistent support is required at the school to employment transition point,
 - There is a real need for Training and Capacity Building of Employers,
 - There is also a need for Inclusive Recruitment Practices,
 - Address other Gaps, Disconnects, and Barriers,
 - Funding Support is required.
- Progress in increasing the employment of people with disability is far too slow and reflects the lack of a genuine commitment from governments and many employers.
- People with Disability remain an untapped resource, particularly at a time of workforce shortages, but a range of barriers need to be addressed.
- The fragmentation in the system in areas like funding, access to resources, and help to connect people with disability with job opportunities and employers, suggests an urgent need for 'navigators' and 'connectors' to work alongside people with disability and their families.
- Measuring progress is hampered by a lack of consistent and accurate data, including in relation to the number of people with disability in the workplace, length of tenure in the role, employee fulfilment and the impact on employers.
- Person-centred approaches are vital to really understand the person with disability, their individual aspirations, strengths, interests and skills.
- Despite the slow progress, recent glimmers of hope (e.g., the increased dialogue, recent and anticipated changes in government policies, and planned employment reforms) mean that many people with disability and their families remain optimistic that things will improve.
- There are some simple changes that can occur now to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities – we don't need any further research or pilot programs. Action is needed now!



Messages for the Commonwealth and WA State Governments

- The most recent available data suggests that people with disability represent just 1.7% of those employed within the WA public sector against a target for 2025 of 5%.
- Real change will only be achieved if governments show real leadership by example, utilising a carrot and stick and approach.
- Review and update the Action Plan to improve [WA Public Sector Employment Outcomes 2020-2025 for people with disability](#), with consideration to the recommendations from the Disability Royal Commission.
- Consider legislation and regulations that mandate the employment of people with disability within the public sector and local governments.
- Governments must establish specific employment targets and pathways for people with disability, including people with cognitive disability (Disability Royal Commission recommendations 7.18 and 7.19).
- Director Generals need to be held to account on their performance against mandatory targets, with performance made transparent through department annual reports. As part of this, departments should deliberately plan for people with disability in workforce and diversity planning activities, and link strategies to business and operational plans.
- Review and implement flexible work options such as customised employment, job redesign and workplace adjustments to enable accessible and inclusive workplaces for people with disability.
- Involve people with disability in co-design of recruitment policies to ensure they are accessible, inclusive, and non-discriminatory.
- Give guidance and provide training and workforce development to public sector departments on contemporary workplace flexibility practices such as customised employment, job redesign and workplace adjustments to increase employment of people with disability and create workplace cultures that embrace disability employment.
- Make better use of existing government tools such as Disability Access and Employment Plans (DAIPs): Outcome 7 to ensure a greater focus on, and monitoring of, progress with people with disability obtaining and maintaining employment.
- Introduce a social procurement policy that favours suppliers which provide employment and training opportunities to people with disability, including people with intellectual disability or cognitive impairments (DRC recommendation 7.23). Victoria's social procurement policy can be drawn upon as national best practice.
- Where possible, use disability social enterprises to deliver contracted services.
- Build on initiatives such as the establishment of the Disability Centre of Employment Excellence to provide an oversight and monitoring role, with some independence from governments.



- Provide adequate funding to education departments to ensure a consistent employment transition pathway from school to employment in all schools across the state. To support this, work with people with disability, families and employers to co-design a model pathway.
- When designing foundational supports, invest in programs and initiatives to support the transition from school to work (NDIS Review action 1.13).
- Review the school curriculum to include a greater focus on life and work skills to ease the transition into employment.
- Implement initiatives to encourage, support and reward employers for achieving disability friendly workplaces.

Messages for Industry Groups and Peak Bodies

- Advance conversations with your members about the benefits of employing people with disability, including in relation to capacity, culture and performance.
- Facilitate or provide training for your members about how to become a disability-inclusive employer. This should include providing example recruitment policies (co-designed with people with disability), practical tips, and direct assistance with the customisation of employment options and job designs.
- Encourage your members to engage with schools and employment services providers, and to introduce work experience options to help with the school to employment transition for students with disability.
- Introduce mechanisms to celebrate, showcase and share member successes, e.g., expos, employer breakfasts, networking functions, industry awards.
- Engage with the new Disability Centre of Employment Excellence to share evidence-based information and good/best practice that can be disseminated more broadly.
- Lobby the State and Commonwealth Governments for effective supports and information for industry that will lead to an increase in participation for people with disability in the workforce.

Messages for Employers

- By opening employment opportunities to people with disability you can widen your recruitment pool to meet your specific business needs.
- People with a disability often have the lowest absenteeism and turnover of any category of staff.
- Leadership is required from the top (Boards and CEOs) to drive the commitment to employ more people with disability, and to insist on more inclusive recruitment practices.



- Support your employees, particularly HR practitioners and hiring managers to attend training and workforce development opportunities to raise disability awareness and confidence.
- Engage in 'job carving', examining the work you need doing and see what can be done to match the skills and strengths of a person with a disability.
- Introduce more flexibility into your recruitment practices – traditional methods can often disadvantage a person with disability.
- Put your hand up to be a champion and ambassador for the employment of people with disability by reviewing, promoting and sharing your practices.
- Increase your engagement directly with schools and employment services providers to facilitate the transition of students with disability into employment.
- Involve people with disability on recruitment panels.



Appendix 1

DAWA Board

Sally Hollins (Chair)
Amy Clark
Bruce Langoulant
Charmain FitzGerald
Erin Marshall
Esme Bowen
Grace Mills
Paul Fleay
Tony Vis

DAWA Council

Sally Hollins (Chair)
Amy Clark
Barbara Goodwin
Bruce Langoulant
Carrie Clark
Charmain FitzGerald
Erin Marshall
Esme Bowen
Carol Franklin
Grace Mills
Kathy Hough
Mark Fitzpatrick
Mary Butterworth
Michael Chester
Monique Power
Neil Guard
Paul Fleay
Russell Smith
Susan Male
Tony Vis
Victor Patrick



APPENDIX 2

KEY THEMES FROM THE INAUGURAL DISABILITY ASSEMBLY WA (DAWA) SUMMIT HELD JULY 2022 – “IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY”

1. Action is needed now!

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

2. Focus on the person

Participants were clear that to achieve success, all involved accept that jobs and careers are, by definition, personal. Employment approaches should be individualised and designed and implemented to understand the person first, and include a process of “discovery” to explore their interests, skills, motivations, and the person’s situation.

3. Real Government, Public Sector and Industry Leadership is required

Participants called loudly for these bodies to “step up to the plate” and actively drive the changes required, to improve employment outcomes for people with disability.

4. Consistent support required at the school to employment transition point

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

5. Training and Capacity Building of Employers

Participants considered that the development and delivery of a range of training for organisation leaders (and HR managers) is urgently required to increase disability awareness and confidence among employers (and to upskill their HR teams).

6. Inclusive Recruitment Practices

Participants called for a fundamental reform of recruitment processes to ensure accessibility and effectiveness from the perspective of a person with disability.

7. Address other Gaps, Disconnects, and Barriers

Participants identified the need for greater system navigation support to help connect people with disability with ‘interested’ companies, job opportunities and employers.

8. Funding Support Required

Participants called for:

- a. consideration of a period of additional funding, where an employer experiences difficulties, to cover a percentage of an employee’s wages,
- b. funding to be made available to assist employers to explore the potential engagement of people with disability, and to assist with training and any reasonable adjustments required to enable the employment of the person, and
- c. greater funding support to be available for ‘items’ such as employment exploration and development, and for the funding to be able to be used flexibly, and to be able to be continuous and portable.