

Good research paper on disabilities in australia: policy barriers

[Health & Medicine](#), [Disability](#)



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Improving Employment Opportunities for People with

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Introduction

The Australian government disability policy and legislation are geared towards empowering people with disabilities in the country to live normal lives just like their abled counterparts. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was ratified by Australia in 2007, and it became effective by 2008. This ratification ensures that people with disabilities enjoy human rights on the same level as their abled counterparts (WWDA, 2014). In November 2009, the Australian Prime Minister stated that the National Disability strategy would be developed (WWDA, 2014). The Council of Australian Governments would ensure that CRPD is implemented

in the country. Eighteen percent of all Australians are disabled in one way, or another; this represents close to four million Australians (WWDA, 2014).

Despite the ratification of the CRPD, it is evident that people with disabilities in Australia still face unequal treatment when compared to their abled mates. The employment sector is one area in which people with disabilities are underrepresented. Because of their disability, the majority of them are denied the chance for employment. This inequality can be attributed to the shortcomings inherent in the current Australian policies for people with disabilities.

Background Information

The Australian Bureau of Statistics Report (ABS) (2013) on Disability, education and employment outlines that there is a drop in the participation of people with disabilities in the labor force. A Survey of Disability Ageing and Caring (SDAC) (2012) had significant findings. It indicates that there were minimal changes in the number of Australians in the working age (15-64 years) who participated in the labor force between 2009 and 2012 (ABS, 2013). This was just a slim drop: 1% decrease from 54% in 2009 to 53% in 2012 (ABS, 2013). However, when compared to people with disabilities, the difference is high. Between 2012 and 2009, there has been a drop in the participation of people with disability in the labor force. As of 2009, the participation stood at 9.4%, but as of 2012, it had dropped to 7.8 percent (ABS, 2013). In the same period, a drop with respect to abled people was only 0.2 per cent (ABS, 2013).

Literature Review

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2011) outlines that in order to attain greater economic independence and inclusion, it is paramount to champion education and employment access for people with disability. There is a collective agreement that more needs to be done in support of people with disability (O'Brien & Dempsey, 2014; Macali, 2006). If the latest statistics are anything to go by, it is evident that the current Australian government policies are still proving to have gaps in the system between service providers and people with disability. There is a need to up-regulate some these policies, in order to enhance their specificity on people with disabilities.

In addition, in his submission to the Federal Parliament Heads in 1981, Sir William Cole, chairman of the Australian Public Service board expressed his concern in relation to the equal employment opportunities for people with disability. It is ironical that despite lengthy struggles in Australia to empower people with disabilities, the success that has been registered is still below the mark. Cole emphasized on the need to transcend beyond recruitment and placement if significant success in the fight for the rights of people with disabilities has to be realized. Government departments must play an important role in removing barriers in place (Byrnes & Lawn, 2013; Burges, French & Strachan, 2009). This goal can be attained through the provision of inductions and orientations, and access and job site modifications, as well as amendments to the current policies. In addition, departments can enhance and coordinate the personal development and reintegration of people with disabilities into the labour force.

In a report published by OECD (2003), it was documented that Australia has the seventh lowest employment rate for people with disabilities. In other words, when compared to other OECD countries, Australia has poor employment rates for people with disabilities. Such a statistic must not be taken lightly because it's a reflection of bigger issues. Besides, if empowered, people with disabilities can contribute to the economic progress of the country.

Barriers that people with Disability from Accessing Employment

The Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) (2014) has sought to investigate why employers are having difficulties in employing people with disabilities in Australia. First, CIT (2014) states that people with disabilities in Australia encounter challenges in their quest to gain employment including inadvertent and blatant barriers raised by employers. This statistic is supported by a confession from employers that they are reluctant to employ the disabled. CIT (2014) reports that employers are not discriminatory, but it is because of the lack of confidence. In essence, the employers are afraid that they may cannot effectively facilitate disabled employees in the workplace.

A report published by the Australian National Center for Vocational Education and Research documents that the disability confidence of employers is worryingly low (CIT, 2014). In other words, the employers have the opinion that they lack sufficient resources or knowledge needed to manage a person with disabilities. In addition, this could mean that the employment of people with disabilities causes the employer to incur some costs if they have to

accommodate the disabled employee. For instance, it would mean that the employer buys new equipment that meets the expectations of the disabled employee. The employer would be expected to invest in their money prior to recruiting employees with disability. No employer is ready to go to this length unless they are compelled by the government. In fact, employers who invest in disabled employees do so only if the employees became disabled while working for the organization.

CIT (2014) has outlined barriers that employers face, but these barriers would easily have dealt with if the current Australian policies on people with disability would be amended. In the first barrier, CIT (2014) reports that employers desist from employing people with disability because they lack the necessary knowledge and resources that are needed to address the needs of a disabled employee. They do not know the extent to which they are expected to provide such support, the exact cost that they would incur, and if funding is available or not. If this barrier has to be addressed, there is a need to make amendments to the Discrimination Disability Act (DDA) 1992. Under this act, it has been outlined that it is the duty of employers to make reasonable adjustments for any employee. Such adjustments would include things like making the bathroom more accessible for the disabled, providing sufficient breaks, or investing in special visual software for people with learning and vision impairments. This act requires that employers make these reasonable adjustments unless if they amount to unjustifiable hardships (CIT, 2014).

Most of the time, such justifications stem from the heavy financial burden that employers are likely to encounter when making these adjustments. The

Australian Work Modifications Scheme is mandated to cover costs of reasonable adjustments made by employers. Therefore, it would be helpful if the government maps up a plan to evaluate the adjustments costs that all employers would go through should they hire a disabled employee.

Consequently, the government ought to cater for those expenses or, an agreement should be made between the government and the employer to decide how much each party would pay. In compensation, the government can give the employer some benefits such as a tax lift for a specified period. If this measure is implemented, employers will not have the fear of employing people with disabilities. In addition, another amendment to this act would be including a clause that requires every employer to employ a certain percentage of people with disability in their organizations. In this case, every employer would have no option but to create room for employees with disabilities.

The second barrier as reported by CIT (2014) is most employers do not want to do the wrong thing in relation to people with disability. There is a general fear among employers that should they hire a disabled employee, they would lock horns with the government in cases where the needs of the disabled employee are not met. This barrier can be solved by educating employers on the requirements that are needed to hire employees, as well as the rights and privileges of those employees. Bodies such as the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) of Western Australia ought to educate employers on what it expects of them when they have hired disabled employees. One of the goals of the EOC (2014) is to create awareness on the principles and recognition of equal opportunity. The commission focuses on

the education part. It helps people understand the significance of equal opportunities. In line with this, employers would know what is expected of them when they have a disabled staff.

CIT (2014) also reports that employers lack sufficient knowledge on people with mental disabilities. In fact, the Australian Employers Network on disability reports that employers do not know how to respond to mental health challenges of mentally challenged job seekers or employees. In line with this, it is paramount for the government to educate employers on the needs of mentally challenged employees, as well as train them on how to deal with such employees. The Department of employment should amend its policies in order to work with the relevant government agencies in providing the needed awareness to the employers. In addition, the CIT (2014) reports that employers do not know how to locate people with disabilities that are searching for employment. The Australian Government Department of Employment (ADE) (2014) should be tasked with the role of finding people with disabilities and linking them with employers. This step requires policy amendments. This department is in charge of nation-wide policies and programs that help Australians find work. It also ensures that those working environments are fair, safe, and productive workplaces. This department recognizes the fact that employment is key to the Australian way of life (ADE, 2014). It acknowledges the fact that having a job and financial security helps people take charge of their housing, education and health needs. It helps people boost their self-esteem, self-confidence and social skills (ADE, 2014).

However, the department does not have a tailor-made program for people

with disabilities. Therefore, it is paramount for amendments to the objectives of this department to be made with the aim of including the priority of people with disabilities. In other words, the department must have nationwide centers where people with disabilities can access support and information regarding job opportunities and job requirements.

Furtemore, Chris Bennett (2011) of Pwc Australia on his part documents that if a real transformative impact is to be realized, there is a need to make several fundamental changes. Besides, Bennett (2011) contends that these changes need to occur at every level of the system. This should range from the people with disabilities themselves, their families and service providers and government policies. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) ought to champion social and cultural change (Llewelyn, 2014; Honey, Kariuki, Emerson & Llewellyn, 2014). However, success will only be realized if key stakeholders such as employers are empowered with the necessary tools and resources (Llewelyn, 2014; Honey, Kariuki, Emerson & Llewellyn, 2014). On the other hand, the National Disability Strategy (NDS) outlines of policy action that must be addressed if Australian with the disability have to get equal opportunities like their abled mates. First, people with disabilities have been found to live in areas with restricted access to cultural and social events, and economic, political and civic opportunities as a result of inaccessible features of the built environment. In line with this, it would be paramount to remove these barriers. It is essential to incorporate universal designs in the design and construction of community resources. There is the need to enhance the accessibility of built environment through the reevaluation of planning and regulatory systems, in order to maximize the

participation of all members of the society.

Secondly, the Australian Human Rights Commission outlines that all Australians have the duty to respect and protect the human rights of others. The Disability and Discrimination Act of 1992 was engineered with the aim of championing this endeavor. In addition, the ratification of CRPD is another strong evidence that the government is committed towards empowering people with disabilities in the country. Many disabled Australians continue to encounter unequal employment opportunities. Policy amendments ought to be made in order to increase the awareness and acceptance of the rights of people with disability. The majority of people with disabilities can work and become financial independent, but access to work is the chief challenge. Therefore, it is vital to increase job awareness as the principle step towards empowering Australian with disabilities.

Recommended Policy Changes

Currently, the Disability and Discrimination Act of 1992 only compels employers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees. The government often compensates employers through the Australian Work Modifications Scheme if the adjustment cost is reasonable. There is a need to make changes in the Disability and Discrimination Act of 1992 that will help increase funding from the Australian Work Modifications Scheme. Since many employers lack the information on the resources and knowledge that are needed in order to accommodate disabled employees, the Australian Work Modifications Scheme must be compelled to educate employers about the same. This calls for additional funding for this government agency. Policy

changes must be enacted if these steps have to be realized.

Secondly, there is a need to make amendments on the Disability and Discrimination Act of 1992 to compel each employer to employ a defined percentage of disabled people in their organization. Thirdly, there is a general fear among employers that should they hire a disabled employee, they would lock horns with the government in cases where the needs of the disabled employee are not met. Government agencies such as the department of employment ought to be compelled to increase awareness about the requirements and policies that govern employment of people with disabilities.

Fourthly, it is mandatory to make amendments to the objectives of the department of employment. The department must be compelled to have custom made programs for Australians with disabilities. The department must have nationwide centers where people with disabilities can access support and information regarding job opportunities and job requirements.

Fifth, the National Disability Strategy (NDS) outlines policy actions that must be addressed if Australians with a disability have to get equal opportunities like their abled mates. It is paramount to amend policies and regulations that govern the design and construction of built environment to accommodate the needs of disabled people. These changes need to occur at every level of the system.

Furthermore, The Australian parliament champions the formation of laws that govern the country starting from the departmental level. In line with this, it will play a crucial role in the enactment of the desired changes. For instance, policy changes in the department of employment can only be

introduced if they have been discussed and ratified by the Commonwealth Parliament. Activists who champion the rights of people with disabilities should work with government officials in identifying policies that need to be changed. Thereafter, such policies and laws ought to be discussed in parliament. In order to bring the desired changes, everyone must be involved. People with disabilities should be on the forefront by identifying policies or laws that are limiting their ability to get employment. They should forward those insights to the relevant authorities and the Commonwealth Parliament for amendments. However, the government must necessitate this process by providing efficient communication tools between all stakeholders who champion the rights of people with disabilities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has highlighted the policy changes that must be implemented if Australia has to register considerable success in enhancing the employment opportunities of people with disabilities. It is vital to note that Australia has made significant strides in the fight for the rights of people with disabilities, but shortcomings in some of the country's policies limit the maximal realization of this goal. Top of the list of the policy amendments is the Disability and Discrimination Act of 1992. A clause should be included that compels every employer to employ a defined percentage of employees with disabilities. In addition, another clause should enhance the finding of the Australian Work Modifications Scheme in order to boost its plan of assisting employers make reasonable adjustments for employees with disabilities. Besides, policies and regulations that govern the design and

construction of built environment must be amended in order to accommodate the needs of disabled people. These changes must occur at every level of the system.

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