An untapped workforce...

Employers’ guide for hiring people who are blind or vision impaired
People who are blind or vision impaired are four times more likely to be unemployed than the average Australian.

**Ministerial Foreword**

As Minister for Disability Services, I am pleased to support Guide Dogs NSW/ACT’s initiative to assist employers in making informed decisions about hiring people who are blind or vision impaired.

Understandably, you may initially question how someone with no or low vision can do the job that you advertised for – how would they read emails or find their way to work? You may also wonder whether changes need to be made to your workplace and if so, the costs involved.

I encourage you to read this Guide to alleviate your concerns. It highlights the benefits of employing someone who is blind or vision impaired, and provides solutions to common concerns.

These job-seekers are loyal and will be an inspiration to your workforce. All they need is an opportunity.

I hope that in using this Guide, you will become better informed on the abilities of people who are blind or vision impaired, and the range of supports and techniques they can use to be productive employees in your organisation.

John Ajaka MLC
Minister for Ageing
Minister for Disability Services

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5 reasons to hire a person with a vision impairment

**Lower staff turnover rate**

A person with a vision impairment is more likely to show loyalty to an employer, giving you a lower turnover rate and a lower overall cost of employment.¹

**Flexible, resourceful**

Due to the access challenges they face every day, people with vision impairment tend to be great problem-solvers, flexible and resourceful.²

**Less workplace incidents**

People with a disability are far less likely to have an accident at work than their peers.³

**More days at work**

People with a disability have lower levels of absenteeism and use less sick leave than their colleagues.⁴

**Diversity = good business**

A more diverse workforce will increase organisational effectiveness. It will lift morale and enhance productivity. In short, diversity is good for business.⁵
What are some of the concerns you have?

How is someone with a vision impairment able to travel to work or find their way around the office safely?

Guide Dogs provides free training to enable people who are vision impaired to get to and from work. We provide training on public transport and also with GPS devices. Guide Dogs also provide training in the workplace to ensure that a new recruit is confident in their surroundings.

How will my staff know what to do, how to work with them?

Guide Dogs offers free on-site training to companies to help educate and train staff to ensure that they feel confident working with someone with a vision impairment.

How do I know they will be able to do the job?

From the outset, talk to the person about your concerns so you can work together to identify solutions. As with any potential employee, you could consider a trial period or include a probation clause in the person’s contract. See Fair Work Australia’s website, fairwork.gov.au.

Each day, 28 Australians are diagnosed with an uncorrectable vision condition, including nine who go blind. These figures are set to increase 20% by 2020.

Will someone with impaired vision need other people to help them to do their work and get around the office?

People with vision impairment are very self-sufficient. Technology gives them the independence to read and write, and training with a provider like Guide Dogs gives them the skills to find their way around a workplace safely on their own.

How can they meet business contacts or attend external meetings?

People with a vision impairment are very independent. Through the training they receive from Guide Dogs they can catch public transport, taxis (which are often subsidised), and can travel on foot using a talking GPS.

Will we have to buy expensive new computer hardware and software?

The Australian Employment Assistance Fund provides financial assistance to help cover the cost of modifications needed for the workplace. Visit jobaccess.gov.au for more information.

Will I have to make major changes to the layout of our office?

Depending on the person’s needs, you may need to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ and costs can be covered by the Employment Assistance Fund. But simple things like ensuring hallways and pathways are obstacle-free are beneficial to all employees.

There would be greater WH&S risks, which could be costly for the business.

To help create a safer workplace for all staff, Guide Dogs provides free workplace appraisals to help you to identify and provide solutions for potential risks and hazards.

If someone can’t drive, how can they meet business contacts or attend external meetings?

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How does someone with a vision impairment work on a computer or read emails?

People with impaired vision can access the majority of documents and programs used in a workplace. This includes emails, using a range of screen readers that read content on a computer screen out loud and magnification software that enlarges text on the screen.

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Majella's advice to employers:

Look beyond the disability of the person and embrace their skillset. Think outside the norm and be open to consider how the role could be performed in an alternative way. It is essential to focus on the person's skillset rather than what they can't do. In most cases there are always work-arounds for that person to succeed. In my experience, if people with the right skillset for the role are employed, they will prove your decision to be a good one.

"To me, having a job means independence. It means I can do what I want to do. Without it, I wouldn't have been able to enjoy a weekend skiing at Perisher, or a week recently at the Gold Coast. It means I have options. Like anyone, if you don’t have money, you don’t have options."

People who are disabled make up 15% of the working-age population, but they represent just 10% of the total workforce.
How do I ensure I am giving people with a vision impairment a ‘fair go’?

According to Australia’s Disability Discrimination Act, you are giving people who are blind or vision impaired a ‘fair go’ if you treat them like you would any other job applicant, i.e. assess them for a job based on their ability to complete the requirements of the job.

However, the Act also says that employers must consider how an applicant with a disability could be provided with reasonable adjustments to help them do the job. An adjustment is reasonable if it does not impose ‘unjustifiable hardship’ on the employer.

All employers are legally obliged to actively prevent disability discrimination in their workplace, including in the areas of recruitment, work conditions and salary, promotion, training and development, disciplinary action and termination.


Writing a good job description

When creating a job description, focus on what is to be achieved in the job – rather than how it is to be achieved. This will allow applicants to demonstrate how they can complete the inherent requirements of the job.

Consider if including a driver’s licence as a prerequisite for a job is absolutely necessary. Can a person catch public transport, use a taxi, or car-pool?

Consider whether any of the ‘desirable’ or ‘preferred’ criteria in your job description could discriminate against someone with a disability. In some instances, people with a vision impairment may have less experience as they may previously have had difficulties in obtaining employment.
Sadly, 45% of Australians with disabilities are living in poverty

Advertising for the job

If you are using a recruitment agency, ensure that you discuss your openness to considering a candidate who has a disability.

Register your business and advertise your position with a local Disability Employment Service (DES) provider. disabilityemployment.org.au

Ensure your website’s recruitment page is accessible and includes information on how to apply.

Ensure images and non-text items have text labels so that people with a vision impairment can use the site using screen-reading software.

Interviews and assessments

Ask your candidate to let you know whether they have any specific requirements for attending an interview.

During the interview, discuss any concerns you have with the candidate in relation to being able to perform the job. By discussing this early in the process it will give the candidate a better opportunity to address your concerns.

If assessments are planned as part of the interview process, ensure tests are in an accessible format. For example if a written test is required, ensure that it can be undertaken on a computer and with a program or document that is accessible.

When meeting the candidate for an interview, ask if they need assistance and if so, how would they like to be assisted. If they ask to be guided, allow them to take your arm near the elbow so you can guide them as opposed to dragging them. In the interview, identify yourself to the applicant and introduce other people who may be with you.

Providing feedback to unsuccessful applicants

As for anyone, if you find that an applicant’s job skills and personality do not fit the role, it’s important that you provide them with constructive feedback to help them better prepare for their next application. This feedback will help create a more confident job-seeker, giving them a better opportunity to secure a job in the future.

Accepting applications

If you require applicants to fill in forms or complete documents to apply for your position, ensure that they are in an accessible format like Word or an accessible PDF, which can be read by screen-reading technology.

Employment

If the best person for the job has a vision impairment, discuss any requirements or concerns before the commencement of the role.

Remember, you can apply for financial assistance via the Australian Employment Assistance Fund to cover the cost of modifications needed for the workplace, including new technology.

Book in a free workplace appraisal and staff training with Guide Dogs to ensure that you and your employees are comfortable, confident and ready to build strong working relationships with your new staff member.

Other things to consider

Like any other job-seeker, it is important that a person with a vision impairment has an opportunity to develop their work skills and experience. Consider whether you can offer work experience or internships to help people with a disability gain experience and confidence in the workplace.
Further Reading

If you would like additional information about hiring someone with a vision impairment or any other disability, here’s where you can learn more:

Advice for hiring

National Disability Recruitment Coordinator (NDRC) – for employers looking for advice on the recruitment of people with disability. workfocusgroup.com/ndrc

Job Access – Supporting employers in hiring someone with a disability. jobaccess.gov.au

Australian Network on Disability – provides advice and services on disability to employers. and.org.au

Blind Citizens Australia – see Advocacy Resources. wordpress.bca.org.au

Vision Australia – see Employer support and recruitment services. visionaustralia.org

Australian Blindness Forum – see Employment Information Pack. australianblindnessforum.org.au

Finding employees

Disability Employment Australia – find a local disability employment service provider. disabilityemployment.org.au

REFERENCES (page 3)

1. Blind Citizens Australia Policy Paper, Employment: the cornerstone of social inclusion for people who are blind or vision impaired.
2. Blind Citizens Australia Policy Paper, Employment: the cornerstone of social inclusion for people who are blind or vision impaired.

Setting up your workplace

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT – call 1800 GUIDE DOGS
Employment Assistance Fund – jobaccess.gov.au
Media Access Australia – search ‘disability employment’. mediaaccess.org.au

Resources for vision impairment

Vision Loss – visionloss.com.au

A special ‘thank you’ to the clients of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT whose photos are included in this guide: Sally-anne Giliam, Majella Knobel, Dawson Ko, Nic Parsons, Ploy Sirayanyong and Deb Warren.

Photos courtesy of Lee Lucas Photography & Christian Trinder Photography