Myths and misconceptions about disability are common.

These incorrect assumptions are often triggered by fear, lack of understanding and/or prejudice. Promoting negative images of disability is a form of discrimination because it creates barriers to full citizenship for people who have a disability.

**Common myths and stereotypes that emerge repeatedly in society include the following assumptions.**

**Disability Myth 1**

**A person’s disability defines who they are as an individual**

People often label individuals with a disability according to their condition or limitations. It is common in our daily lives to hear references such as “the disabled” or “the epileptic.” Individuals with disabilities are people first. Remember the slogan “Label Jars, Not People.”

**Disability Myth 2**

**People with disability can only do basic unskilled jobs**

People with disability bring a range of skills, talents and abilities to the workplace. They work in all sorts of jobs and hold a range of tertiary and trade qualifications. People with disability have a clear understanding of their abilities and are unlikely to apply for jobs they can’t do.

**Disability Myth 3**

**People with disabilities are brave, courageous and inspirational for living with their disability**

People with disabilities are often portrayed as superhuman or courageous as they triumph over adversity. George Covington, a writer who is blind, has said, “We’re seen as inspirational, and inspiration sells like hotcakes. My disability isn’t a burden: having to be so damned inspirational is.”

**Disability Myth 4**

**People with disability always need expensive and high tech equipment**

Simple and inexpensive devices are often all that is needed to help people with disability live and work to their full potential.
Busting Disability Myths

Disability Myth 5

**People with disabilities are a one-dimensional group**

There are societal assumptions that tend to view people with disabilities as a one-dimensional group who all have the same needs, interests and opinions. People with disabilities reflect the same diversity that exists in the rest of society, including varying social, economic, cultural, family and educational characteristics. The viewpoints expressed by an individual with a disability are not representative of those of all people with disabilities.

Disability Myth 6

**People with disability will not fit in a workplace environment**

In most cases customer and co-worker acceptance comes with awareness and observing that workers with disability are competent and efficient in their jobs. People with disability make up 20% of the Australian population and the likelihood of customers and co-workers having a relative or friend with disability is high. Hiring people with disability can result in increased staff morale. A business that supports all members of society often grows strong team spirit.

Disability Myth 7

**People are confined to their wheelchair**

People with disabilities typically do not view themselves as ‘confined’ to their wheelchair. In the same way, a person without a disability is not described as confined to their car. A wheelchair, like an automobile, is a form of mobility that contributes to a person’s independence.

Disability Myth 8

**People with disability have lower productivity levels at work**

The productivity of people with disability at work is largely not affected by their disability. Most people with disability are as productive as their colleagues without disability and receive full wages. In a very small number of cases where productivity may be impacted upon as a result of disability, the Australian Government offers specialist support and assistance.

Disability Myth 9

**People with disabilities cannot lead a full and productive life**

People with disabilities are capable of fully participating in community life. The challenge is to focus on a person’s ability, not their limitations. Researchers at Dawson College and MacKay Centre in Montreal remind us: ‘Mechanics who are blind, nurses who are wheelchair users, teachers who are hard of hearing, painters without arms, and chemists with shaky limbs—it’s all been done!’

To find out how you can encourage inclusion and diversity in your business, contact Sean Willenberg on 02 9458 7928 or at sean.willenberg@nswbc.com.au

These myths have been adapted from the information provided by Job Access and Together We Rock. For more information on disability, diversity and inclusion visit www.jobaccess.gov.au and www.togetherwerock.com