

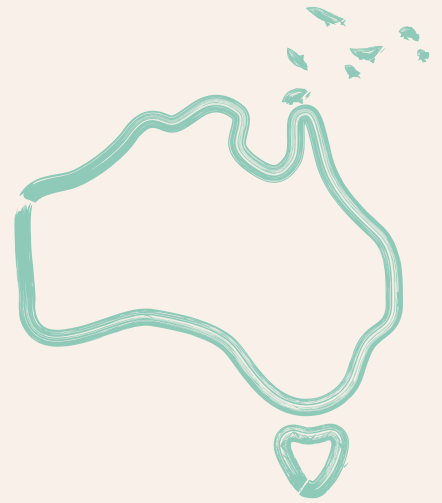
Creating safety, equality, inclusion and respect for women with disabilities in the workplace

A guide



**Our
Watch**

Preventing violence
against women



Acknowledgement of Country

Our Watch acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay respects to Elders past and present and recognise the continuing connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to land, culture, knowledge, and language for over 65,000 years.

As a non-Aboriginal organisation, Our Watch understands that violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is an issue for the whole community. As highlighted in Our Watch's national resource *Changing the picture*, the evidence clearly shows the intersection between racism, sexism, and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Our Watch has an ongoing commitment to the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, who continue to suffer from violence at a significantly higher rate than non-Aboriginal women. We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations who continue to lead the work of sharing knowledge with non-Indigenous people and relentlessly advocate for an equitable, violence-free future in Australia.

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About this guide

The *Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report* (2020) was unequivocal: 'Workplace sexual harassment is prevalent and pervasive: it occurs in every industry, in every location and at every level, in Australian workplaces. Australians, across the country, are suffering the financial, social, emotional, physical and psychological harm associated with sexual harassment.'

This is particularly so for women.¹ While there is limited data, people with disability are more likely than those without disability to have experienced workplace sexual harassment.

Creating equal, safe, inclusive and respectful work environments is key to stopping sexual harassment before it starts. In doing so, employers ensure compliance with legal and ethical obligations, while also contributing to a broader culture of equality and respect.

Promoting equality for women with disabilities in the workplace will contribute to a society where the human rights of women and girls with disabilities are upheld, and they can participate to their fullest potential.

– *Changing the landscape*

Creating safety, equality, inclusion and respect for women with disabilities in the workplace: A guide primarily draws on *Changing the landscape: A national resource to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities*² (henceforth *Changing the landscape*) and is designed to provide a starting point for workplaces in promoting gender and disability equality for all women and girls with disabilities. Other resources that inform this resource can be found in the Further reading section.

While the content in this guide may apply to various roles across the workplace, the primary audience is people and culture teams, diversity, equity and inclusion teams, and managers.

Changing the landscape: A national resource to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities is Our Watch and [*Women with Disabilities Victoria's*](#) national, evidence-based resource to guide the prevention of violence against women and girls with disabilities. This resource names ableism and gender inequality as the two consistent, intersecting drivers of violence against women and girls with disabilities.

It sets out the actions that must be taken to address these drivers and stop this violence before it starts. It points to the many stakeholders that need to take action – from individuals to communities, schools and workplaces, disability and health services, and governments. It makes clear that we all have a role to play in preventing this violence.



This guide was developed for Our Watch by Jess Boccia and her colleague. Jess is a social worker with a wealth of experience working in both response and prevention roles to address violence against women and gender inequality. This has included work around gender and disability in various roles including work with Women with Disabilities Victoria on their Gender and Disability Workforce Development Program. Her colleague is a professional woman with a lived experience of physical disability and chronic mental health disabilities.

Using this guide

This guide includes practical ideas and further resources to begin working towards gender and disability equality within the workplace. The best approach is generally to set up a working group, where different staff come together to look at which actions might be good to start with, how they can be undertaken, and who will take on various responsibilities in implementing them. Where possible, women with disabilities employed within your workplace should be part of this working group. [Good Practice Guidelines for Engaging with People with Disability](#) is a useful resource to guide this work inclusively and respectfully.

A simple action plan can be established and monitored via regular working group meetings to support implementation.

While actions do not need to be undertaken in a specific order, it is recommended that organising resourcing and training for staff (particularly senior and management level staff, but ideally all staff) are prioritised, as many of the other suggested actions will require these commitments to be effective.

For more information contact equalityandrespect@ourwatch.org.au or seek support from organisations led by people with disabilities, particularly women with disabilities. A list of advocacy organisations for people with disabilities see the [Australian Federation of Disability Organisations](#).

Further Reading

- Australian Federation of Disability Organisations. (2024). [Social model of disability](#).
- Australian Human Rights Commission (n.d.). [IncludeAbility - Equality at work](#).
- Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services). (2023). [Good Practice Guidelines for Engaging with People with Disability](#).
- Multicultural Centre for Women's Health's [Five ways to apply intersectionality to gender equality planning and action in the workplace](#).
- Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of New South Wales. (2010). [Violence Through Our Eyes Improving Access to Services for Women from non-English Speaking Backgrounds with Disability and Carers Experiencing Violence Project Report](#). Sydney, Australia: Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of New South Wales.
- Our Watch (2017) [Prevention handbook](#). Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch.
- Our Watch. (2021). [Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia](#) (2nd ed.). Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch.
- Our Watch, & Women with Disabilities Victoria. (2022). [Changing the landscape: A national resource to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities](#). Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch.
- United Nations. (2006). [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#). Treaty Series, 2515, 3.
- Women With Disabilities Australia's [Response to the NDS position paper](#).
- Women with Disabilities Victoria's [Inclusive planning guidelines for the prevention of violence against women with disabilities](#).
- Women With Disabilities Australia's [Response to Promoting inclusion issues paper](#).
- Women With Disabilities Victoria's [Submission to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, Violence in the Home Issues Paper](#).



Key concepts and language

Language matters because the words we use affect how people with disability feel and are perceived. Disrespectful language is a barrier to inclusion. Equally important is a good understanding of key concepts that should inform all work on creating equal, safe, inclusive and respectful workplaces.

Disability, and the social model of disability

When we use the term 'disability' in this guide, we are referring to the range of physical, cognitive, sensory, psychosocial and other disabilities people experience, including chronic illness. Some people identify as 'disabled' and some people prefer the person-first messaging of 'person living with a disability'. Everyone is different.

Disabilities are also not always visible, or apparent in all situations, and capacity can fluctuate from week to week, day to day (for example, someone may require the assistance of a wheelchair one day, however, they may be fine to walk small distances unassisted or use a cane at another time) or even hour to hour. Disability and ability can be fluid.

Rather than focus on 'impairments', **the social model of disability** encourages a focus on how societies – including built environments – are set up largely for able-bodied people. The social model asks workplaces to consider making changes so everyone can participate fully, regardless of ability. This includes changes to policy, practices, physical environment, technology, communication, behaviours and attitudes.^{6, 7, 8, 9}

It is not an individual's disability that creates barriers to inclusion and participation. It is environments, systems, processes and practices that create these barriers – a result of the world being set up and oriented around able-bodied people.

Did you know?

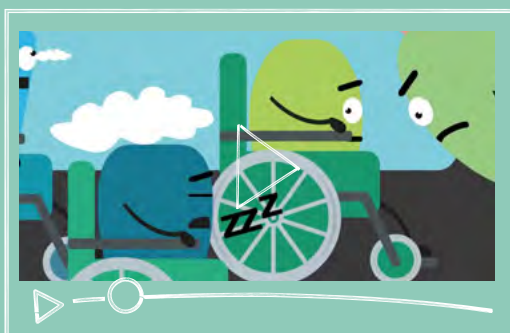
Around 20 per cent of Australians have a disability.³ It is important to note that not everyone experiences or identifies with disability in the same way. For example, there are a variety of attitudes towards diagnosis. Some people may prefer not to get a diagnosis or may not identify with the diagnosis they have been given. People can be misdiagnosed due to a range of factors including bias around gender and culture.⁴ Societal stigma and discrimination can also be a barrier to a person disclosing disability.⁵

In this [video](#) Karina Noble (she/they), former Project Manager, Advancing Women, People with Disability Australia, explains how sometimes we make assumptions about people with disability, further entrenching discrimination.

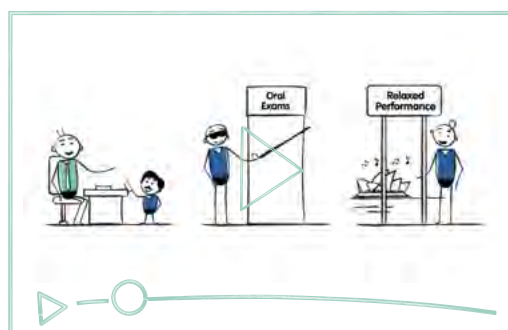


Build your knowledge

These videos can help you understand the social model of disability and what it means for workplaces:



The Welsh Government's short film '[Let's Raise the Roof](#)' illustrates the **social model of disability**. The film is about Sam, a person without disability, in a world full of wheelchair users. The animation follows Sam as he tries to make a good first impression at his new job. It's a light-hearted film with a serious message.



In this video, [Social Model of Disability](#), People With Disability Australia explain what the concept means, and how it affects the way we do things.



This [short clip](#) from Our Watch explains what **ableism** means.



In this [video](#), Karina Noble (she/they) former Project Manager, Advancing Women, People with Disability Australia, explains **how ableism shows up in the workplace**.

Gender equality in the workplace

According to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency,¹⁰ gender equality in the workplace aims to achieve broadly equal opportunities and outcomes for women and men, not necessarily outcomes that are exactly the same for all.

Workplace gender equality will be achieved when people can access and enjoy equal rewards, resources and opportunities regardless of gender.

It will require:

- workplaces to provide equal pay for work of equal or comparable value
- removal of barriers to the full and equal participation of women in the workforce
- access to all occupations and industries, including leadership roles, regardless of gender
- elimination of discrimination based on gender, particularly in relation to family and caring responsibilities.

Build your knowledge

Our Watch's Workplace Equality and Respect Standards support creating inclusive gender equality in workplaces. This [video](#) explains the five Workplace and Equality Standards.¹¹



Women

At Our Watch, when we use 'women' we mean anyone who identifies as a woman and lives as a woman, which includes cisgender women (whose gender aligns with the sex assigned at birth) and trans women.

Build your knowledge

To understand more about the language used in Our Watch frameworks/resources/guides see:

- » [Change the story](#), Appendix 2
– Language and conceptual framing.¹²
- » [Changing the landscape](#), Appendix 1
– Notes on language.

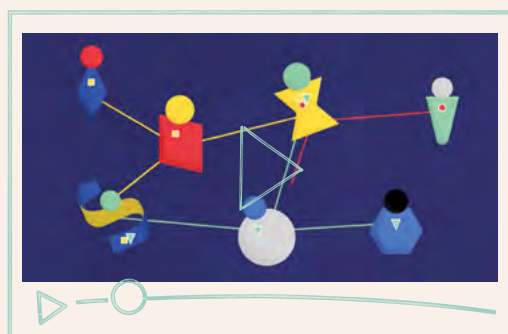
Women with disabilities, gender and disability inequality

Women with disabilities experience inequalities, barriers and discrimination, both as women and as people with disabilities. However, it is not as simple as adding gender equality and disability equality together and hoping this will create equality for all women with disabilities. The way that these two forms of inequality combine creates unique barriers to equal participation in the workplace that are only experienced by women with disabilities.

While this guide can be useful in promoting both gender and disability equality more broadly, it has been specifically designed to address the unique inequalities and barriers faced by women with disabilities.^{13,14, 15, 16} It is also important to note that women with disabilities are a diverse group, and may identify with other groups who experience other barriers and other forms of inequality and discrimination, such as those resulting from the impacts of colonisation, racism, transphobia, homophobia or ageism.¹⁷

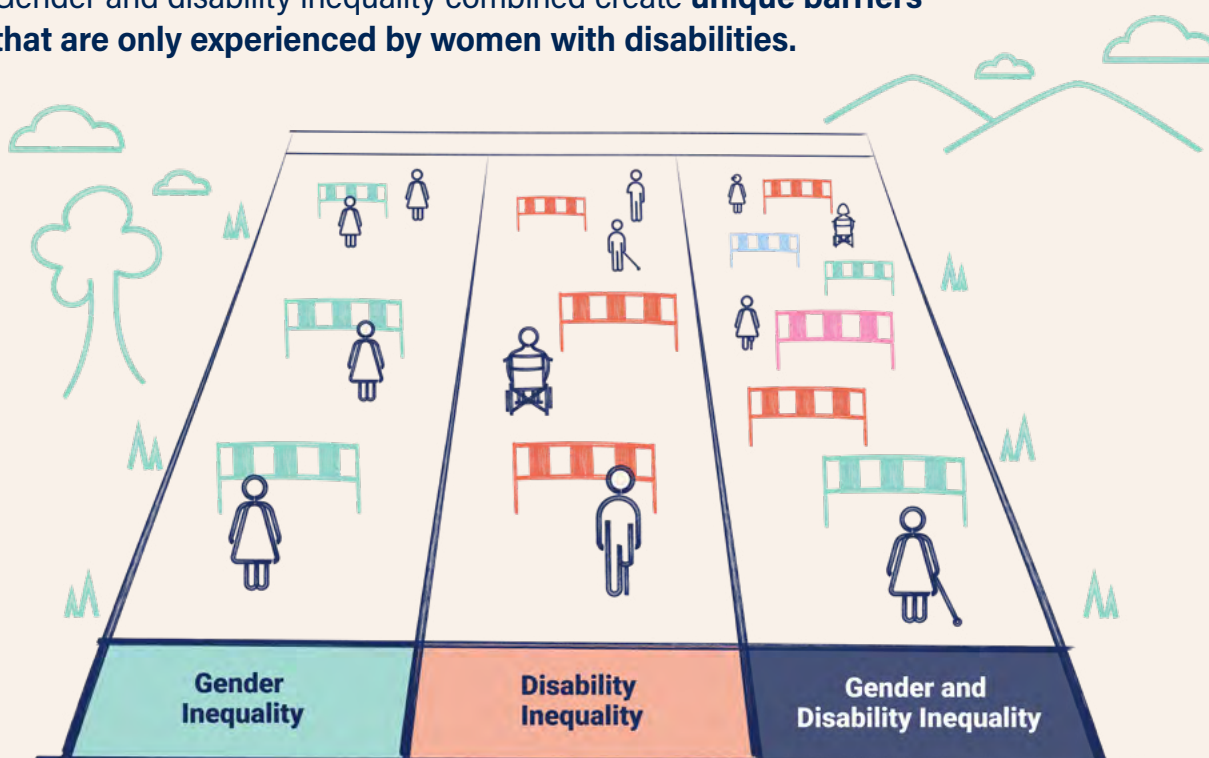
Build your knowledge

The concept that different forms of inequality can combine to create further discrimination and barriers is known as *intersectionality*. This [video](#) explores the concept.



» *Changing the landscape* (pages 34–36) also provides more information on the intersections between gender equality and disability.

Gender and disability inequality combined create **unique barriers that are only experienced by women with disabilities.**



Understanding the experience of women with disabilities in the workplace

Nationally, there is limited data on the experiences of women with disabilities in the workplace. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2018 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, men with disability (60.4 per cent) are more likely to be in the labour force than women (60.6 per cent).¹⁸

The issues faced by women with disability in the workplace include:¹⁹

- Gender-neutral workplace needs assessment that ignores the specific needs and experiences of women with disabilities.
- Lack of workplace flexibility – women with disability may find it difficult to work a standard full-time week because of care and health needs and transportation barriers.
- Income inequality – in the absence of national data, the Victorian Gender Equality Commission's workplace gender audit workforce data and the 2021 People Matter Survey (PMS) found that women with disabilities were more likely than men (with or without disabilities) or women without disabilities to report full-time base salaries under \$95,000.
- Higher rates of violence (including sexual harassment at work). Sixty-five per cent of women with disabilities report they have experienced at least one incident of violence since the age of 15.²⁰ They are also much more likely to have experienced sexual harassment than men with a disability (92 per cent, compared to 71 per cent of men with a disability).²¹ The person perpetrating the violence is usually a known man, most likely a man without a disability. In some cases, it may also be perpetrated by a known woman (such as a female support worker).^{22, 23} This violence is often perpetrated by more than one person.²⁴ While experiencing violence can have long-lasting negative impacts on anyone, women with disabilities are even more likely to experience negative impacts on their mental health (such as anxiety and depression) due to the effects of the violence itself and the barriers and discrimination they can face when reporting violence, or attempting to access support and justice responses. These impacts can include existing disabilities getting worse and can even result in new disabilities.²⁵ For women with disabilities, violence can also have a significant financial impact. This can occur through perpetrators limiting access to paid employment, making it difficult for women to work, or controlling their finances, often under the guise of control being a requirement because of their disability.²⁶

What can workplaces do?

Workplaces can address issues faced by women with disability, particularly sexual harassment, by promoting gender and disability equality and ensuring that policies and practices support women with disabilities to feel safe to disclose their experiences of violence and provide them with options for support.

Align your work on gender and disability equality with these principles^{27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33}

- Prioritise the voices, input and experience of women with disabilities. Use the [Good Practice Guidelines for Engaging with People with Disability](#)³⁴ to assist you to engage with people with disability in an inclusive, respectful and appropriate way.
- Wherever possible, include women with disabilities at all levels of work around gender and disability equality.
- Make sure there are opportunities for women with disabilities to be involved in decision-making and planning.
- Be informed by and seek support from organisations led by people with disabilities, particularly women with disabilities. A list of advocacy organisations for people with disabilities can be found on the [Australian Federation of Disability Organisations'](#) website.
- Ensure accessibility needs are met so that women with disabilities can participate in planning, decision-making and implementation of gender and disability equality work.
- Promote work and messaging of organisations that are led by women with disabilities.
- Respect that women with disabilities may not want to share, discuss or have other people share their personal experiences of inequality or violence. This type of sharing always needs to be a choice and women who choose to share these experiences should be offered appropriate support.
- Consider how your organisation can be responsive and supportive towards people who have experienced trauma. Given the high rates of violence women with disabilities experience, it is particularly important that workplaces can provide safe and supportive spaces. The concept of a trauma-informed workplace is particularly useful here.³⁵

Build your knowledge

In this [video](#) Karina Noble (she/they) former Project Manager, Advancing Women, People with Disability Australia, talks about where to start when it comes to creating inclusive workplaces.



Understand the drivers of hostile work environments

Building safe and respectful workplaces for women with disability means addressing the key drivers of violence that create hostile workplaces. These include gendered and ableist drivers.

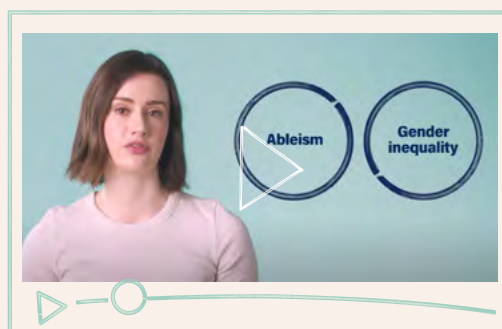
Changing the landscape identifies four gendered drivers of violence and four ableist drivers of violence against women with disabilities, including sexual harassment.

Gendered drivers of violence

1. Condoning of violence against women – in workplaces this shows up as excusing or minimising violence against women and sexual harassment (for example, dismissing women's experiences of sexual harassment, sexually suggestive comments, or jokes that intimidate or offend), or trying to justify why the violence occurred.
2. Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life – in workplaces, this manifests as gender inequality such as gender pay gaps, lack of women in leadership, and lack of respect for women, including women from marginalised groups.
3. Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity – in workplaces, rigid gender stereotyping limits the ways people can express themselves (for example, through assumptions that certain types of work are better suited to women or men).
4. Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control – in workplaces, this can be in the form of male peer relations that disrespect women and each other (for example, 'locker-room talk'; unwanted touching or sexual gestures; readily excusing a peer's disrespectful behaviour; men being discouraged from taking a stand because they fear rejection by their peers).

Build your knowledge

How gender inequality drives violence – 'Take note' Episode 5 explains how gender inequality drives violence, and the actions we can take to address this issue. This explainer video is part of a suite of *Changing the landscape* practice resources, produced by Our Watch in partnership with Women with Disabilities Victoria and supported by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

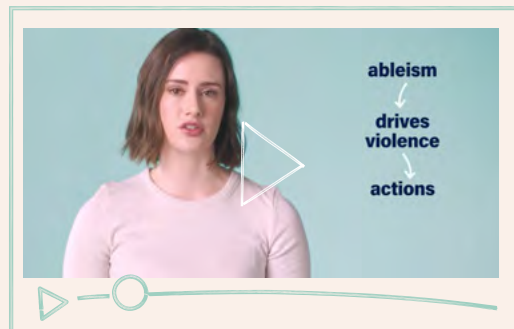


Ableist drivers of violence

1. Negative stereotypes about people with disabilities – in workplaces, this shows up as stereotypes that people with disabilities are incapable of doing certain types of work or that they are only capable of doing basic unskilled tasks or that they are not intelligent enough to understand what sexual harassment means.
2. Accepting or normalising violence, disrespect and discrimination against people with disabilities - in workplaces this can show up in the form of a “halo effect” where a carer supporting a person with a disability in the workplace is seen as an ‘angel’ who can do no wrong and any violence they use is dismissed or defended.
3. Controlling people with disabilities’ decision-making and limiting independence – in workplaces this may manifest as few women with disabilities in leadership positions or paying people with disability less for the same work done by someone without a disability.
4. Social segregation and exclusion of people with disabilities – are reflected in only employing them in segregated workplaces where are paid less than the minimum wage or setting up networking or work social events that are inaccessible to staff with disabilities (through timing, venue accessibility, or ability to hear in a crowded noisy space, etc).

Build your knowledge

How ableism drives violence – ‘Take note’ Episode 6 defines ableism and how it drives violence against women and girls with disabilities. She also shares some actions we can take to prevent this violence. This explainer video is part of a suite of *Changing the landscape* practice resources, produced by Our Watch in partnership with Women with Disabilities Victoria and supported by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.



This short clip from Shift the culture explains how workplaces can address ableism.



Here are some examples of how these drivers of violence may present in a workplace.

What happened	Gendered driver				Ableist driver			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
A male staff member says during a lunch break that he controls the finances in his household because his female partner is crazy and can't be trusted to make good financial decisions.	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Two managers say they feel a staff member is unsuitable for a promotion because she has a hearing impairment and clients expect that women in senior positions will be good at listening.		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Male colleagues share a disrespectful sexualised meme focused on women of short stature.	✓			✓	✓	✓		
Two colleagues discuss how lucky another of their colleagues (a woman who uses a wheelchair) is to have such a wonderful husband to look after her and comment that not many men would want to be in a relationship with a woman with a disability.			✓		✓	✓		
Male team members organise a golf day as a team social activity. They don't think about accessibility requirements because the only person with a disability on their team is a woman and they figure that women aren't interested in golf.		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
When a group of colleagues discover that their new manager is a woman with a disability, they say privately that they don't feel she can be trusted to make good decisions, and question why she was hired instead of their able-bodied male colleague, who also applied.		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

Essential actions to address the drivers of hostile work environments

To address the gendered and ableist drivers of violence against women with disabilities, *Changing the landscape* outlines four essential actions. These actions also align with Our Watch's [Workplace Equality and Respect Standards](#).³⁶ While actions align with more than one Standard, broadly speaking they map in the following way:

Essential actions

Action 1.

Address the underlying social context that gives rise to violence against women and girls with disabilities.

Action 3.

Improve attitudes towards women and girls with disabilities by challenging ableist and sexist stereotypes.

Action 2.

Challenge the acceptance and normalisation of violence against women and girls with disabilities.

Action 4.

Promote the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in all aspects of life.

Action 5.

Promote women and girls with disabilities' independence, agency and participation in leadership and decision-making.

Action 6.

Engage men and boys to challenge controlling, dominant and aggressive forms of masculinity.

Workplace Equality and Respect Standards

Culture:

We promote a workplace culture where all people feel safe, confident, and supported to actively challenge gender bias and discrimination, gender stereotypes and harmful gender norms without adverse consequences.

Support:

We listen to, respect and support people who experience sexual harassment and gender-based violence (including domestic and family violence) through policies and practices that consider the impact of trauma.

Conditions:

We apply a gender lens to our workplace policies and practices to ensure they are fair and equitable.

Commitment:

We demonstrate an ongoing commitment to workplace gender equality and preventing sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence.

Core Business:

We promote gender equality in our external engagement with customers, stakeholders, and the community.

Essential actions checklist

Action 1.

Address the underlying social context that gives rise to violence against women and girls with disabilities.

- Ensure all work around disability inclusion considers gender equality and the unique barriers for women with disabilities.
- Develop whole-of-workplace initiatives that challenge ableism and gender inequality and promote the human rights of women and girls with disabilities.
- Audit all policies to ensure they support equality for women with disabilities.
- Conduct a gender and disability audit using an audit tool such as the Gender and Disability Analysis Toolkit developed by CBM ([Disability and Gender Analysis Toolkit](#)).
- Implement the following actions based on the recommendations of the [Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability](#) (2023) regarding employment for people with disabilities.
 - Increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities where they work as part of the mainstream operations of the organisation, including opportunities for people with cognitive impairment or intellectual disability. Ensure employment settings are inclusive and accessible.
 - Make sure all new communication and information technology purchased complies with the current Australian information and communication technology (ICT) accessibility standard. For more information see [Buy accessible ICT products and services](#).
- Check to ensure workplace policies and work around violence against women (family violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault) consider the rights and needs of women with disabilities.



Action 2.

Challenge the acceptance and normalisation of violence against women and girls with disabilities.

- Keep a record of any reported or observed incidences of disrespect, discrimination or abuse towards women with disabilities in the workplace.
- Ensure there are clear consequences for the perpetration of violence towards women with disabilities in the workplace which consider the seriousness of this violence and promote the rights and safety of the victim/survivor.
- Ensure all policies and procedures related to disability, gender equality and violence include relevant measures to protect women with disabilities from violence in the workplace.
- Ensure there are clear and accessible ways to report disrespect, discrimination or abuse within the workplace and that all staff are aware of these.
- Provide staff training and support in understanding, recognising and responding to violence against women with disabilities (including disclosures of violence that is happening outside of the workplace).

Action 3.

Improve attitudes towards women and girls with disabilities by challenging ableist and sexist stereotypes.

- Provide education and training for staff around equality for women with disabilities, including how they can recognise and challenge sexist and ableist norms and stereotypes to promote equality within their work environments. Include content that challenges sexist and ableist attitudes about the ability of women with disabilities to be effective leaders, be independent and make decisions.
- For businesses that employ young people, employ young people with and without disabilities and have them work alongside each other to build understanding and respect.
- Implement initiatives that highlight and recognise the contributions, talents and skills of women with disabilities in the workplace.
- In written documents and communications, ensure language and images are disability-inclusive and equitable. See People With Disability Australia's [What do I say? A guide to language about disability](#) or the Australian Government Job Access resource [Using inclusive language](#).
- Ensure women and girls with disabilities are represented positively and without stereotyping in digital and print publications that include images of people.
- Promote the rights of women and girls with disabilities through social media and promotional materials such as signage and posters.

Action 4.

Promote the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in all aspects of life.

- Monitor disability and gender equality in the workplace. The Australia Disability Network can support a workplace to become a [Disability Confident Recruiter](#) using the [Access and Inclusion Index](#), and/or by helping them create [employee resource groups](#).
- Create a disability inclusion plan, ensuring it considers the needs of women with disabilities. If you already have a disability inclusion plan, review it to ensure it is inclusive of all women with disabilities. For help with developing and implementing an action plan, see the Australian Government [Job Access Disability Job Inclusion Action Plan template](#).
- Ensure that you have detailed your process for 'reasonable accommodations' for different roles, as well as being clear on the 'inherent requirements' of your roles (so that you can be as flexible as possible, and access the broadest range of possible talent).
- Make sure relevant services your business provides are accessible to women and girls with disabilities.
- Check that workplace policies and practices are in line with Australia's [Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#) and [Sex Discrimination Act 1984](#), as well as state and territory equal opportunity and anti-discrimination acts.

When my mental health condition flares up I find it really triggering to be in the office. Having flexible, work-from-home policies and practices, I am able to continue working and take less sick leave.

– Woman with a disability

- Some businesses currently employ people with disabilities in segregated employment such as Australian Disability Enterprises or closed workshops. If this is a current practice within your organisation, consult employees with disabilities, trade unions and relevant disability advocacy organisations to phase out these models and transition women with disabilities into inclusive, accessible and open employment of their choice that includes industrialised workplace rights and award wages.
- Consider how women with disabilities are being supported around career progression including providing training and support to enable them to successfully apply for promotions and leadership positions. This should also include broader work as outlined in this document to ensure promotional opportunities are being offered to women with disabilities on an equal basis.
- Make reasonable adjustments as required to enable women with disabilities to participate fully in both job applications and employment. For more guidance on this, see [Workplace modifications made easy](#).
- Check in with new and existing employees regarding their accessibility needs and purchase all required equipment, aids or technology to enable them to participate fully in the workplace.
- Listen to what staff say about accessibility needs and respect that they know their situation best. Don't make assumptions or ask too many questions about why someone might need particular equipment, flexible working conditions or other adaptations.

In my first week of employment my manager observed me using free online screen reading software and offered to buy me the paid version. No special approval was required – she simply identified the software would make it easier for me and just did it. I wasn't going to ask, due to previous experiences of non-supportive

managers and being unable to overcome the hurdles and red tape for approval. This small action made me feel supported and valued for all that I am.

– Woman with a disability

Due to my chronic illness I need to attend appointments twice a week. My boss lets me start and finish late on those days. She's never probed as to the details of my appointments or even the nature of my chronic illness. By creating space for me to take care of my health, my chronic illness remains well managed and I use less sick leave than I have in past employment.

– Woman with a disability

- Ensure all workspaces are accessible, and when fitting out or building new facilities incorporate universal design principles. For more information see the Australian Human Rights Commission's [Creating an accessible and inclusive workplace](#) and the Victorian Health Building Authority's [Universal design](#).
- When deciding where to locate business premises, consider whether they are easily accessible by public transport, to provide access to people who are unable to drive.
- Provide quiet and sensory spaces within the workplace.
- When planning in-person meetings or other workplace events, make sure they are accessible. For more information on this, see the Australian Human Rights Commission's [Hosting accessible and inclusive in-person meetings and events](#).
- When planning online meetings, ensure the platform used is accessible to all participants and enables the use of closed captions. For more information, see [Hosting accessible and inclusive online meetings and events](#).
- When planning team-building or social activities, make sure they are safe and accessible for everyone. Invite input from women with disabilities in the workplace

around which activities and venues are suitable. Some examples of general considerations are: is the venue wheelchair accessible? Will employees with hearing loss be able to hear and participate in conversations? Is the environment suitable for people who may be sensitive to bright or flashing lights and/or excess noise? Is the venue accessible by public transport? For a more detailed guide to choosing appropriate venues and activities, see the Australian Government Disability Gateway's [Plan accessible in-person activities](#).

We had team planning last week, about 40–50 people together. The director ensured that whenever someone spoke they used the microphone, no exceptions. In this situation, I normally wouldn't be able to hear feedback after an activity, [but this time] I didn't miss anything and was able to fully contribute to the day.

– Woman with a disability

- Implement the [Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability's](#) recommendation to improve remuneration for people with disabilities by paying at least the minimum standard wage.

Action 5.

Promote women and girls with disabilities' independence, agency and participation in leadership and decision-making.

- Set aside resources to invest in work around gender and disability equality.
- Ensure all work around gender equality (at both policy and practice levels) considers and includes the rights of women with disabilities.
- Implement measures to increase the number of women with disabilities employed by

your workplace. This could include targeted recruitment (see the Australian Human Rights Commission's [Guidelines for the targeted recruitment of people with disability](#)), and/or setting up gender and disability employment targets (see the Australian Network on Disability's [The business case for disability employment targets](#)).

- Increase the representation of women with disabilities in leadership positions by putting supports in place. One model highlighted by [People with Disability Australia](#) is both mentoring and intentional 'sponsorship' of women with disabilities. For more information see [People with Disability Australia's Advancing women with disability in the workplace](#) and the World Economic Forum's [How 'sponsors' can achieve gender parity in leadership](#).
- Ensure women with disabilities are included in governance roles in bodies such as boards, advisory groups and steering committees.

Action 6.

Engage men and boys to challenge controlling, dominant and aggressive forms of masculinity.

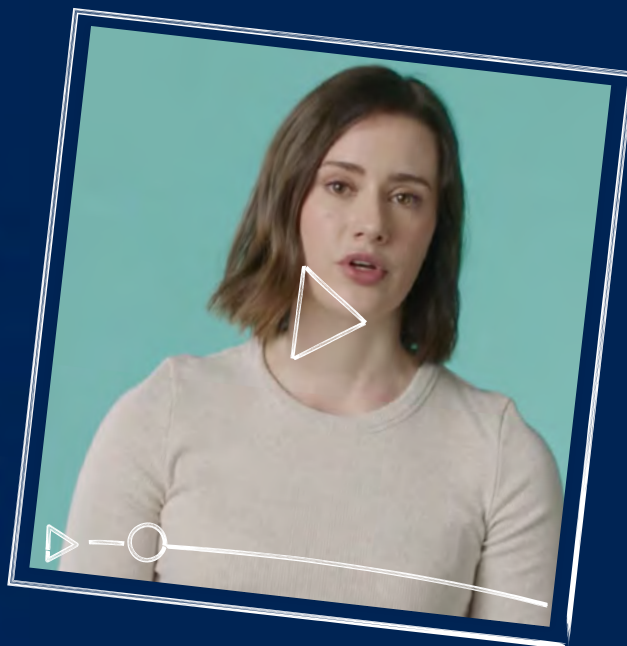
- Be aware that social norms around masculinity (what it means to be a man) intersect with norms around disability, presenting unique challenges and opportunities for engaging men in promoting gender and disability equality.
- Ensure that your initiatives on engaging men as allies for gender equality include men with disability.
- Ensure that any communication materials you develop to challenge harmful norms around masculinity in the workplace are developed in partnership with men and women with disability.

Final Words

We can all play an important role in promoting gender and disability equality and, in turn, contributing to the prevention of violence against women with disabilities.

When workplaces implement gender and disability equality, they challenge stereotypes, foster economic independence, enhance social inclusion, and promote positive representation of women with disabilities across the broader society.

Be an Ally



following the lead of women
and girls with disabilities

creating accessible,
trauma-informed spaces
and events

engaging lived
experience expertise
from the start

Let's start the conversation by...

valuing lived
experiences

setting up
inclusive policies

asking about
accessibility needs

making information in
accessible formats

challenging ableism
and biases



Turn talk into action to involve and
support women with disabilities in
every part of life.

Scan the QR code to view actions and resources, or visit:
ourwatch.org.au and search Changing the Landscape

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Women with
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victoria

Endnotes

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