

## Employment Opportunities for People Living with Disabilities, Family and Carers

People living with disabilities may currently access the full range of employment options;

- Open employment, including operating their own business;
- Open employment with some support;
- A mix of open and supported employment;
- Supported employment; and
- Many people remain under employed or unemployed.

As a rule, Australia's performance in the area of employment for people living with disabilities remains behind other comparable economies (27th in the OECD group during 2015). Performance has reduced in relative terms over the past decade.

In WA, people living with disabilities are under-represented in the workforce and experience higher unemployment rates, 11.4% as compared to 4.9% for non-disabled persons (2015). The participation rate also varies for people with disabilities 53% in total, compared to 83% for people without disability (National employment rates, 2015, aged 15-64 years).

In the WA Public Service, about two percent of all employees have some type of disability. The Disability Services Commission Annual Report 2016/17 (page 102) states that 3.9% of their employees live with disabilities. The National Disability Insurance Agency reports that over 14 percent of their employees live with disability (NDIA Annual Report 2016/17, page 82). This is an exceptional figure for a government corporation. For the Australian Public Service the comparable figure is 3.6%.

Often there are thoughtless barriers placed in front of people that with some planning, utilisation of universal office design principles and the provision of some supports can result in employment opportunities becoming more accessible for people living with disabilities. Assistive technologies can support with people with low and no vision, manual dexterity, mobility, cognitive, learning and hearing impairments. For a 20 minutes video on reverse discrimination you may wish to view ['Jeremy the Dud': The Aussie Short Film Flipping The Script On Living With Disability.](#)

As you might expect supported employment services are undergoing a major review by the Department of Social Services concurrent with the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). All current contracts will be reviewed and potentially renewed by 30 June 2018.

Supported employment may act as a foundation point for some individuals living with disability who are interested in moving onto open employment and may have difficulty obtaining or

sustaining mainstream employment. Individuals may develop their performance and social skills within a commercial environment. Through ongoing support from professional and dedicated staff, employees are encouraged to work towards achieving their personal goals.

Where practical, employment goals are to be considered and included in all person-centred plans. In the current NDIS environment, 27 percent of people have paid employment but only 14 percent of plans for adult persons include meaningful employment goals. This figure needs to improve and we must avoid ...'the soft bigotry of low expectations' (George W Bush 2000).

There are also over four million Australians who provide some form of care and support to family members living with disabilities. The allocation of individualised funding and support services to people living with disabilities may also ease some of the burdens of care on many family members and carers. I am aware of a number of situations where primary and secondary carers have carefully reconsidered their individual situation and have taken the opportunity to return to paid employment, most often on a part-time basis. These people become part of the workforce, assist to increase overall productivity and make a constructive and tax-paying contribution to Australian society.

It was this factor that prompted the Productivity Commission to predict that when fully implemented the NDIS will add one percent to Australia's annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP), or over four billion dollars in net revenue. These are worthy and ambitious employment and social goals. It remains to be seen whether these forecasts happen and Nulsen will continue to monitor and report on the outcomes.

As this is the last Chair Chat for 2017, may I take the opportunity to extend the best wishes of the Nulsen Board members and the blessings of the Christmas season to all residents, community customers, families, staff members, volunteers and supporters. Let us look forward with confidence to a safe and successful New Year.



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Professor David Gilchrist is a chartered accountant and a historian. He holds a PhD in economics from the University of Notre Dame Australia and is currently a professor of accounting at the University of Western Australia. Over his 25-year career, David has held many senior roles in the not-for-profit, commercial and public sectors. He has taught at several universities across the globe, sits as Chairman on multiple boards and has published several key national reports. A few of his achievements include; working as the Assistant Auditor General for Western Australia, and the Associate Dean of the School of Business, University of Notre Dame Australia. As a Chairman to Nulsen Disability Services, and the Kimberley Individual and Family Support Association. Also producing the "Australian Charities 2013" and the "Australian National Costing and Pricing Framework" issued jointly with National Disability Services. He is widely published as an academic and a journalist. [See David's full profile here.](#)