



National Inquiry into Employment and Disability

Guide to the Inquiry

Disability is a normal part of life. Anyone in the community might experience a disability at some stage of their life – men and women, young and old, city and country dwellers. In fact, almost 20% of Australians – 3.96 million – have some sort of disability.

Having the chance of obtaining and retaining meaningful work is a crucial part of anyone's quality of life, and people with disabilities are no exception.

Over the course of 2005, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (the Commission) will conduct a public inquiry on the issues that affect equal opportunity in employment for people with disabilities in Australia (the Inquiry).

Why do we need an Inquiry into employment and disability?

Australians with a disability are much less likely to be employed than people without a disability. They have a comparatively lower labour force participation rate (53.2% compared to 80.1%) and a higher unemployment rate (8.6% compared to 5%) than those without a disability.

The Inquiry aims to identify the reasons for the disadvantages faced by people with disabilities in the open workplace and to work towards practical, achievable solutions.

In this way, the Inquiry seeks to make an important contribution towards improving employment outcomes for people with a disability in Australia .

What are the terms of reference?

Dr Sev Ozdowski, Human Rights Commissioner and Acting Disability Discrimination Commissioner, will conduct on behalf of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and pursuant to sections 31(a)(b)(c) and (e) of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986 (Cth), an inquiry into equal opportunity in employment and occupation for people with a disability in Australia.

The purpose of the inquiry is to:

- *identify existing systemic barriers to equal employment opportunity for people with disabilities;*
- *examine data on employment outcomes for people with disabilities including workforce participation, unemployment and income levels; and*
- *examine policies, practices, services and special measures implemented to advance equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities.*

The scope of the inquiry includes:

- *Commonwealth government as an employer and service provider; and*
- *private sector employers.*

The inquiry will report in November 2005.

What will the Inquiry achieve?

The goal of the Inquiry is to work constructively with a broad range of parties to come up with practical solutions to the problems facing people with disabilities entering mainstream employment.

To do this, we need to look at a few key issues, including:

- Participation; whether or not people with disabilities decide to join the competitive workforce.
- Employment; whether people with disabilities can get a job once they have decided to enter the workforce.
- Retention, promotion and development for people with disabilities once in a job.

The first step to addressing these issues is to identify the major barriers facing people with disabilities and employers.

Having done that, the Inquiry will concentrate on identifying, developing and supporting groups to put in place strategies to improve the opportunities for people with disabilities in employment.

How will the Inquiry work?

The Inquiry is committed to a cooperative and responsive approach to developing solutions to the issue of employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

The Inquiry's methodology will include the following steps :

- distributing four short Issues Papers for comment (additional Issues Papers may be developed depending on the issues that arise throughout the Inquiry process)
- calling for public submissions
- holding consultations with government, employer groups, unions, community groups and other interested parties
- working with a range of parties to identify and develop practical initiatives that improve equality of opportunity for people with disabilities
- publishing our findings and recommendations.

What would the Inquiry like from you?

The Inquiry wants to hear about and learn from your experiences.

In particular we are interested in hearing from:

- employer groups and individual employers
- people with disabilities
- community groups who represent people with disabilities
- disability service providers
- government agencies
- employment services
- unions.

The Inquiry would like to hear about:

- personal employment experiences, from the perspective of employers and employees
- views about barriers to employment, from the perspective of employers and employees
- ideas about how to overcome these barriers in a practical and efficient manner.

The Inquiry has published four initial Issues Papers which will help focus attention around specific questions. These Issues Papers will be available from the Inquiry website at www.humanrights.gov.au/disability_rights/employment_inquiry.

The papers discuss the following issues:

- *Issues Paper 1*: Employment and disability: The statistics
- *Issues Paper 2*: Employment and disability: The issues for people with a disability
- *Issues Paper 3*: Employment and disability: The issues for employers
- *Issues Paper 4*: Employment and disability: Commonwealth Government assistance

Copies of the Issues Papers will be provided on request.

How do you make a submission?

Further information about the Inquiry can be found at:

www.humanrights.gov.au/disability_rights/employment_inquiry/index.htm

Submissions are due by **15 April 2005**.

You can email your submission to: employmentinquiry@humanrights.gov.au.

Submissions may also be sent in hard copy, audiotape or videotape, to:

Employment Inquiry
Disability Rights Unit
Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
GPO Box 5218
Sydney NSW 2001

Questions can be directed to:

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Phone: 02 9284 9767