

Women with Disabilities (WWD) Working in Healthcare Settings

This fact sheet is designed for WWD working in any role within healthcare services, including service provision, administration, management, governance and other paid or voluntary roles.

1. Employing WWD will:

- Influence retention rates and diversity of workforces.
- Increase the depth of organisational knowledge and disability expertise.
- Ensure that workforces are representative of the clients that they serve as it is likely that many service users will have disabilities.
- Add to inclusive workplace culture and increased empathy.



2. What can employers do to be more inclusive?

- Organisations that are not disability specific can gain value from organisation-wide upskilling of all staff, volunteers, management and the board of directors on disability inclusive practices.
- Prioritise the lived experience of WWD to increase skills and knowledge across the organisation.
- Incorporate disability inclusion in the organisational strategic plan with indicators of progress and accountability.
- Involve organisational leaders in planning, implementing and reviewing inclusion activities.
- It is important for workplaces to be open to negotiation of flexible hours and rosters to support the individual needs of WWD.

- Consider and accommodate invisible aspects of disability such as fatigue or chronic pain. Keep in mind that even for women who have a 'visible' disability these often aren't recognised.
- Implement processes that discreetly discuss employee accessibility needs to ensure that confidentiality is upheld. Ask about accessibility needs upfront, consider the organisational environment and regularly follow up as accessibility needs may change.
- Actively recruit WWD across all organisational roles including service delivery, administration, management and governance. This will ensure that WWD can contribute their expertise across the entire organisation.
- Organisations' COVID-19 processes need to be inclusive of all employees, with accessible adjustments available.

3. Barriers WWD may face in the workplace

- The healthcare system and the organisations that operate within it are often guided by a medical model, and the social model of disability does not always inform healthcare practice.
- It can often be difficult for WWD to maintain a desired level of privacy and yet disclose enough information to ensure that their needs are met. Disclosure of disability and access needs is a personal decision, it is up to the individual when and if it takes place.
- If WWD feel the need to challenge organisations to get necessary accommodations, their confidence, motivation and engagement at work may be impacted.

- WWD may feel socially isolated at work due to the impact of accessibility barriers. This can lead to role confusion as both professional and service user.
- Often WWD are required to take on responsibility as sole advocates for change, resulting in higher stress levels.

4. Tips for navigating the healthcare system as an employee who is a WWD

- **Find allies** – connect with other women, try to work out who your allies are in the workplace. Try to create a network of support people. This helps with burnout and knowing you are not alone.
- It can be hard to know where to go to resolve accessibility needs and issues. **Create connections** within the community. Disability support services can help you figure out how to navigate systems and where to turn to for support.
- If you are interested in committee membership or **leadership in your organisation**, don't hesitate, go for it!
- Remember to emphasise your **expertise** as a person with a disability alongside your other attributes. Your lived experience is valuable and should always be recognised and appreciated. If consulting for an organisation, ask and expect to be paid for your time, effort and expertise at all times.
- Nothing about us without us – **promote and advocate** for voices of WWD to be heard throughout the organisation, at every level. If and when you can, challenge any decision-making about WWD where the voices of WWD are not prioritised in the process.
- Accessibility in the workplace is important and reasonable adjustments are a legislated right. Remember that you have the **right to ask** for and receive your accessibility needs. You can contact [Job Access](#) for information, support, assessments and potential funding for modifications.
- It is **helpful to be upfront** with what you need from your employer. You may need more than just the 'obvious' things such as ramps etc and you are entitled to this.

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...I really believe that no matter what kind of illness, injury or disability that you have, you have the right to participate in society like anyone else, and you sometimes just need to keep telling yourself that, and other people that...

– Michelle

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This resource was prepared by Women with Disabilities Victoria.

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