



# **Disability Employment Strategy**

# **2021 –25**



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Veterans' Affairs**

### **Acknowledgement of Countries**

The Department of Veterans' Affairs acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We recognise and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia and their continuing spiritual and cultural connection to land, sea and community.

### **Contributors to the Strategy**

Thank you to the following contributors who helped in the development of this Disability Employment Strategy:

- Diversity and Inclusion Network
- Janice Silby, Disability and Diversity Champion
- Sonia-Jane Roberts, Disability and Carers Lead Advocate
- Participants who shared their time and insights within focus groups and surveys.

A special thank you to the strategy co-design group, who gave their time, shared their lived experiences and provided invaluable insights throughout the development of this strategy.

# Contents

<b>Secretary's introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Executive Disability Champion message</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>DVAs foundational position 2021</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Workforce profile of staff with disability</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>A future focused strategy</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>How will the Strategy be implemented?</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2021–25 Implementation Plan</b>	<b>10</b>

# Secretary's introduction

**This *Disability Employment Strategy 2021–25* (the Strategy) provides a foundation for an inclusive and diverse workforce. It is about ensuring we have a positive workplace that is welcoming and inclusive of people with disability, growing a culture of respect and having zero tolerance for discrimination.**

The Strategy will guide our ongoing commitment to engaging staff with disability and collaborating with carers and representative organisations to achieve our diversity goals and recognises the immeasurable contribution made by people with disability to the work of the Department.

The development of the Strategy includes input from staff across the Department, and I thank you for your contributions ensuring that our Strategy is both robust and meaningful.

By nurturing a diverse workforce that is inclusive, respectful and innovative, we are better able to deliver high quality and connected services to all generations of veterans, veterans' families and the wider veteran community.

I encourage you to familiarise yourself with this important strategy.



**Liz Cosson AM CSC**

Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs



# Executive Disability Champion message

Disability affects many people, directly and indirectly. Increasingly, disability is recognised as something that affects most people, to varying degrees and at different life stages.

The Strategy is an important component of DVA's ongoing commitment to improving employment outcomes for people with disability. DVA seeks to be an employer of choice for people with disability and seen as a leader in developing a dynamic and diverse workforce, that delivers inclusive policy and service delivery to our veteran communities and their families. DVA will embrace innovative actions and harness our knowledge to design and deliver services to the veteran community and their families that are accessible to everyone.

Through this strategy, our leaders will empower our workforce to be disability-confident and build an accessible, equitable, inclusive and safe workplace for people with disability.



I encourage everyone to embed the objectives of this strategy and be empowered to positively influence the culture and environment you work in each day.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Janice Silby'.

**Janice Silby**

Diversity and Disability Champion

## Definitions

This strategy supports all staff with disability and the use of inclusive language to discuss disability. This strategy recognises the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definition of disability for reporting purposes.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definition of disability states that 'a person has a disability if they report they have a limitation, restriction or impairment, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least 6 months and restricts everyday activities'.

However the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* definition of disability will be utilised more broadly, in support of contemporary language within a social model of disability rather than a medical model.

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* defines disability as:

- total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions; or
- total or partial loss of a part of the body; or
- the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness; or

- the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness; or
- the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body; or
- a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; or
- a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment or that results in disturbed behaviour;

and includes a disability that:

- presently exists; or
- previously existed but no longer exists; or
- may exist in the future (including because of a genetic predisposition to that disability); or
- is attributed to a person.

To avoid doubt, a *disability* that is otherwise covered by this definition includes behaviour that is a symptom or manifestation of the disability.

# Introduction

DVA has a long and proud history of working with people with disability as both clients and staff. DVA seeks to be an empathic and empowering organisation that is purposeful in supporting inclusion and assisting clients and staff to achieve their goals.

DVA has an integrated workforce of Australian Public Service (APS) employees and contingent workers through labour hire arrangements. This strategy encompasses our integrated workforce.

The *APS Disability Employment Strategy 2020–2025* has two focus areas:

- attract, recruit and retain more people with disability
- accessible and inclusive workplace cultures and environments.

The Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) has set a target of 7% employment of people with disability.

The Strategy defines the path that DVA will take to ensure we provide an equitable, accessible and safe workplace, while proactively planning for the future needs of our clients and staff.

## DVA's foundational position 2021

DVA's 2020 APS Employee Census results reveal 8% of our workforce acknowledge a disability, which exceeds the APSC target of 7% of our workforce. The priority for this strategy will be to focus our resourcing on retaining our valuable staff, while building an accessible and inclusive workplace culture. This strategy will also focus on quality career development and organisational culture outcomes.

“At DVA, I decided to be open about my ‘invisible’ disability. By being open with my manager and having conversations about how I was coping, when I needed to change my medication and was warned by the doctor that I could have negative side effects, I felt comfortable raising this at work. My manager supported me by offering reasonable adjustments, including being flexible around my work hours. I was able to monitor how I was reacting to my medication, while feeling confident that if I needed to change my work hours and start later in the day I would be supported to do so”.

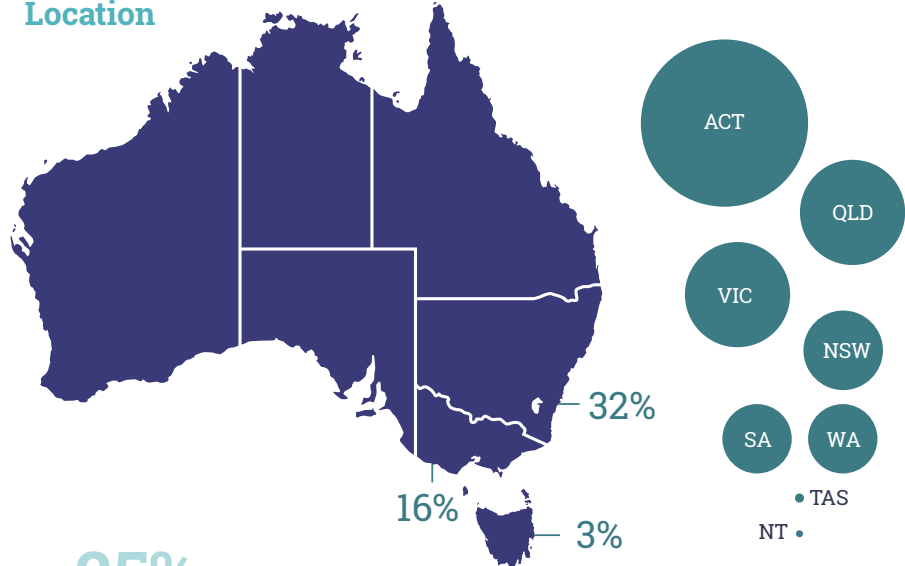


# Workforce profile of staff with disability



Workforce profile information was sourced from the 2020 APS Employee Census (October/November 2020). Figures presented on this page represent only the 8% of DVA staff who identified with disability in the 2020 APS Employee Census.

## Location

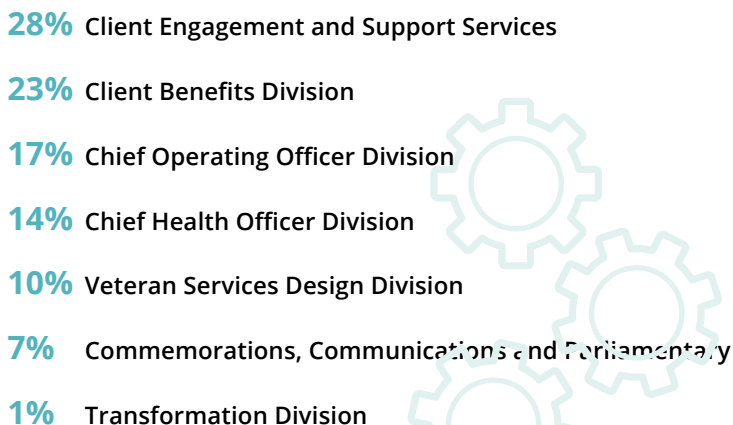


## Age



## Business Area

\*as in the census at September 2020



## Workplace adjustments



**87%** utilise flexible working arrangements



**53%** work away from the office/from home



**24%** utilise flexible hours of work

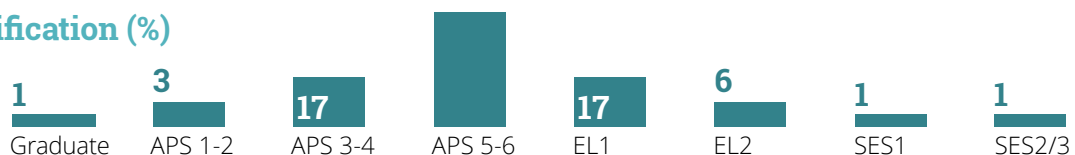


**9%** work part time



**1%** utilise a compressed work week.

## Classification (%)



9% of respondents selected 'Non APS'.

DVA's leadership is committed to supporting disability employment initiatives, by listening to our staff with lived experience, to ensure they are supported and receiving equitable opportunities in a safe, accessible and inclusive work environment.

Although DVA has been successful in the attraction and recruitment of staff with disability, a substantial discrepancy exists between staff identifying openly in our HR system (2.7%) and staff identifying anonymously in the APS employee census (8%). DVA has an opportunity to understand the reticence or barriers to self-identification.

This strategy seeks to understand and address barriers faced by staff with disability at DVA and improve our workplace culture and employment environment.



**2.7%**

of DVA staff self-identified as a person with disability within our Human Resources Information System (Essentials) as at 31 March 2021.

**8%**

of DVA staff anonymously self-identified in the 2020 APS Employee Census.

### Understanding the employee experience – the 2020 APS Employee Census

■ Positive ■ Neutral ■ Negative ■ No response

I would recommend my agency as a good place to work.



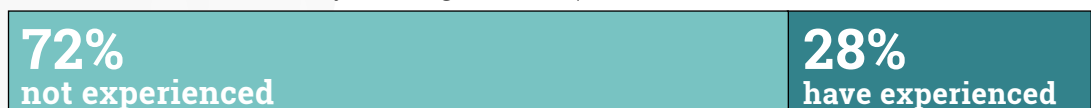
My agency supports and actively promotes an inclusive workplace culture.



I receive the respect I deserve from my colleagues at work.



During the last 12month and in the course of your employment, have you experienced discrimination on the basis of your background or a personal characteristic?





## A future focused strategy

In Australia, the proportion of people reporting a disability increases with age. At DVA approximately 6% of staff are above the average DVA retirement age of 63, which means they will statistically identify in the category where 1 in 2 Australians in this age range report some form of disability.



DVA has a mature workforce with 58% of the current workforce aged 45 years or older. As we mature as an agency, there will be an increased likelihood that we will be supporting a larger percentage of staff with disability. It is essential that we remain engaged with our workforce to ensure we are proactive in planning for both existing staff with disability and staff who are likely to acquire disability over time.

By providing an accessible, inclusive and safe workplace, we can continue to engage a workforce which reflects the community in which we operate. This will result in an increased ability to understand the client and family experience, demonstrate empathy and provide a genuine commitment to assisting veterans and their families through the design of inclusive and flexible policies, programs and services.

Increasing career engagement for staff with disability will support reduced turnover, retaining expertise, providing continuity and increasing morale in the organisation. This perspective is drawn from the evidence base that employing staff with disability has substantial benefits for business and our clients.

For example, research by ManpowerGroup Australia shows staff retention levels amongst people with disability are up to 73% higher than staff without disability. Research by Deakin University and the Australian Safety Compensation Council suggests staff with disability tend to have lower absenteeism and incidence of workplace injury.

What is less measureable but equally important is the genuine and empathic opinions and perspectives staff with disability bring to the workplace. These perspectives, based on lived experience will build on DVA's ability to understand and support our veterans and their families.

The retention of an ageing workforce is an asset to DVA. We will continue to gain valuable insights from years of experience, which can be passed onto future generations.

## How will the Strategy be implemented?

This Strategy will focus on four strategic focus areas relevant to disability employment outcomes:



### Attract and recruit

Expand the range of employment opportunities for people with disability and remove barriers in our recruitment practices.



### Support and value

Foster inclusive cultures and safe work environments, which celebrate and welcome diversity of thought.



### Develop and uplift

Invest in developing the capability of staff with disability, while increasing the representation of staff with disability in senior roles.



### Retain

Offer varied career development experiences in an accessible and flexible working environment.

Leadership commitment at every level of our Department, paired with dedicated roles such as Assistant Secretary People Services Branch, Disability Champion and Disability Lead Advocates will provide accountability for driving progress through successful implementation of strategic focus areas. Achievement of each strategic focus area will occur via the initiatives outlined in the supporting Implementation Plan.



I have found the DVA HR staff to be **AMAZING** in organising reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

They (DVA HR Staff) organised a specific equipment and software for me in a rapid time. I have felt very supported by them.



## Accessibility

DVA will support lead agencies identified within the *APS Disability Employment Strategy* to implement key deliverables, to build accessible and inclusive workplace cultures and environments including:

- Audit of existing Australian Government owned and rented premises for their current levels of accessibility (led by the Department of Finance).
- Collaborate to share assistive technology and equipment across APS agencies and digital environments (Led by Department of Social Services and Digital Transformation Agency).
- Agencies must consider accessibility when procuring goods and services (Led by Department of Finance).

## Nothing about us without us

A common and important message heard during consultation, in the development of the *APS Disability Employment Strategy* was: nothing about us, without us. To ensure feedback, insights and lived experiences are consistently and effectively applied to strategy implementation, a Strategy Reference Group will be formed. This Strategy Reference Group will be comprised of members who identify as a person with disability, offering a formal avenue for members with lived experience to advise on the decision points for each Strategy-led project.

## Governance

DVA has identified reporting limitations and continues to engage in systems projects to enhance reporting output and aligned data analytics, to support strategy evaluation and evidence based decision making.

DVA will develop a comprehensive implementation plan and evaluation framework to support effective implementation of strategy deliverables. Where applicable, DVA will align with APS-wide initiatives within the APSC implementation roadmap.

## Ensuring progress: evaluation and reporting

This strategy is a live document. A mid-term review will be conducted in 2023 to inform the approach for the remainder of this strategy, whether continuing as planned or piloting new initiatives.

The People Services Branch will coordinate:

Strategy progress reports to the People and Culture Committee, Strategy Reference Group, Disability Champion and Assistant Secretary People Services Branch.

Mandated reports will be sent to relevant external entities.

Public reporting will provide transparency in Strategy implementation and progress. DVA will be held to account by publicly reporting progress through:

- our Annual Report
- our annual State of the Service Report
- a mid-Strategy progress report to the APSC
- a final evaluation of the Strategy.

“Support from my management to implement strategies to improve my work and assist in feeling better about my day to day role.”

*A DVA staff member's positive experience regarding being open about disability in the workplace and having a successful outcome.*

# 2021–25 Implementation Plan

According to the Australian Network on Disability, disability confidence in the workplace refers to building capacity to support and promote the inclusion of people with disability within a workforce. This is achieved by having a greater understanding of what disability is in Australian society, the right language to use, the value of inclusive behaviour and attitudes, key concepts such as reasonable adjustments, inherent requirements and sharing information, ensuring barrier free recruitment and

selection processes, understanding disclosure from the managers and employees perspective, awareness of legislative requirements and knowing where to find further information and assistance.

Timeframe to implement definitions:

- Short term: 6–12 months
- Medium term: 12–24 months
- Long term: 24–48 months

## Attract and recruit

A sustained effort is required across DVA to improve employment outcomes and expand the range of employment opportunities for people with disability by building an inclusive and diverse workforce. DVA will focus on advancing the equitable inclusion of people with disability at each stage of the employment lifecycle, starting with the inclusive attraction and recruitment of people with disability at DVA.

How will we achieve this?	Timeframe to implement	Outcome sought
<b>1. By acknowledging and understanding barriers to inclusive recruitment practices.</b>	Short term	<p>Foundational disability confidence training included in mandatory Corporate Capability offering.</p> <p>Within 6 months of training launch date, most DVA employees will have completed mandatory foundational disability confidence training.</p> <p>Evaluate impact of training on hiring manager's ability to demonstrate disability confidence.</p>
<b>2. By supporting our hiring managers to access the skills and talents of people with disability, internally and externally to DVA, at all levels.</b>	Long term	<p>Undertake a pilot program to engage industry professionals to provide guidance on how to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• design and advertise job positions so that people with disability are encouraged to apply</li> <li>• ensure position descriptions focus on the fundamental requirements of the job.</li> <li>• broadcast vacancies internally to DVA.</li> <li>• broadcast vacancies externally utilising Disability Employment Services providers.</li> </ul>

## Support and value

DVA requires a culture which celebrates and welcomes diversity, where we promote how to recognise, value and support our staff. We are committed to developing a barrier-free and disability-confident workplace, where staff can bring their whole self to work and share their disability so that, where appropriate, arrangements can be made to maximise job satisfaction and engagement.

How will we achieve this?	Timeframe to implement	Outcome sought
<p>3. By reviewing policy, procedures and guidelines aligned to reasonable adjustments, to provide a foundation for an inclusive and barrier-free workplace.</p> <p>4. By enabling consistency in support provided to staff with disability when moving within DVA and the APS.</p>	Short term	<p>External provider engaged to review and advise on amendments to existing reasonable adjustment related policy, procedures and guidelines.</p> <p>Promote revised reasonable adjustment policy, procedures and guidelines to all staff.</p> <p>Create and implement a method for staff to voluntarily provide information on their disability and required reasonable adjustments.</p> <p>Evaluate and report on the use and positive impact of method to facilitate consistency in support, when moving within DVA and the APS.</p>
5. By ensuring workplaces are accessible	Short term	<p>DVA Property to support the APS Accessibility Audit led by the Department of Finance.</p> <p>DVA Property to continue to support accessibility for people with disability, on a case by case basis, for all DVA premises.</p> <p>DVA Property to consider addition of Accessibility on to Property meeting agenda/s (Note. Property to consult with employees with disability and experts as required).</p>
<p>6. By working with the APSC, Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and Services Australia (SA) to implement the Disability Liaison Officer Model.</p> <p>7. By providing staff with disability a knowledgeable touchpoint to navigate systems and access.</p> <p>8. By ensuring managers have a point of contact for one-on-one support to provide advice about supporting people with disability.</p>	Medium term	<p><i>Aligned APSC Action – Projected Delivery Date 2022</i></p> <p>Introduce and promote Disability Liaison Officer Model at DVA.</p> <p>Evaluate and report on the impact of the model from the perspective of staff with disability and their manager.</p>

How will we achieve this?	Timeframe to implement	Outcome sought
<p>9. By ensuring our Performance Management Framework is an enabler for staff with disability and their managers to proactively discuss required support and reasonable adjustments.</p> <p>10. By understanding reasonable adjustments as a performance enabler and the positive impact this can have on experiences in the workplace.</p>	Medium term	<p>The Performance Management Framework is updated to reflect how to include disability confident practices in performance management conversations, with staff who identify with disability.</p> <p>Guidance will be provided on the service offer of a Case Manager and when a person with disability or their manager should seek the support of a Case Manager.</p>
11. By establishing and operating a voluntary Disability Employment Network (DEN) to be key allies of change and enhance the workplace experience of staff with disability.	Medium term	<p>Within 6 months of Strategy launch date, investigate the establishment of a voluntary Disability Employment Network.</p> <p>Investigate opportunities to expand on number of Disability Advocate roles within DVA.</p>
12. By collaborating with the APSC to build a clear understanding across DVA of the benefits of sharing and updating disability status in the internal HR system.	Medium term	<p><i>Aligned APSC Action – Projected Delivery Date 2022</i></p> <p>Promote the benefits of sharing and updating disability status in the internal HR system.</p> <p>Evaluate impact of promotional efforts, on percentage of staff with disability identifying in the internal HR System.</p>
13. By ensuring employees with disability do not have barriers to their performance.	Medium term	DVA to ensure an accessible and inclusive Performance Framework Scheme (PFS) for all employees
14. By ensuring support for accessibility when procuring goods and services	Long term	DVA will support Department of Finance to ensure all policies, relating to procurement of accessible goods and services, are incorporated into DVA procurement processes.



How will we achieve this?	Timeframe to implement	Outcome sought
<b>15. By ensuring content and systems are accessible.</b>	Long term	<p>DVA to collaborate with our ICT Shared Services Partner and third party vendors to:</p> <p>Ensure all future ICT procurement meets AS EN 301 549:2016 and that accessibility functionality is made available to all users with disability, as required.</p> <p>DVA to identify accessibility of DVA systems and compatibility of assistive technology with current systems. DVA to undertake an audit of all services for Veterans services and systems to determine accessibility.</p> <p>Continue to leverage existing processes to ensure barriers on any content or services are escalated and resolved.</p>
<b>16. By ensuring employees with disability have mobility and career development opportunities</b>	Long term	DVA to develop an accessible and inclusive mobility program to support career development opportunities for all employees.
<b>17. By ensuring employees have access to information and training on accessibility</b>	Long term	DVA to provide all employees access to information and training on accessibility, so they can produce documents, conduct meetings, communicate with colleagues and the general public and collaborate in an inclusive way.
<b>18. By celebrating, raising awareness of and promoting understanding of people with disability and their rights and wellbeing.</b>	Ongoing	<p>All Enterprise Diversity Events endorsed through relevant Networks and promoted on time and within budget.</p> <p>All Enterprise Diversity Events promoted to all DVA staff in an accessible format</p>
<b>19. By reviewing all DVA People policies, processes and guidelines through a disability awareness and confidence lens.</b>	Ongoing	In accordance with the People Policy Review timeline all DVA People policies, procedures and guidelines to be reviewed by a dedicated Subject Matter Advisor (SMA) before being presented to the Executive for endorsement.
<b>20. By ensuring all policy and practices reviews remove barriers to inclusivity and accessibility.</b>		A 3 year review cycle will be implemented to ensure all DVA People policies, procedures and guidelines are evaluated by dedicated SMAs at specified review points.

## Develop and uplift

DVA will invest in the career pathways and development opportunities of staff with disability, while promoting and valuing the capabilities of people with disability.

How will we achieve this?	Timeframe to implement	Outcome sought
21. By ensuring DVA led induction programs are accessible for staff with disability.	Short term	<p>Review existing induction programs for accessibility issues.</p> <p>Address accessibility issues in revised induction programs.</p> <p>If applicable, promote disability employment network in induction program.</p> <p>Evaluate induction programs for impact of accessibility on staff with disability.</p>
22. Completion of an Access and Inclusion Index Self-Assessment	Short term	Completion of an Australian Network on Disability Access and Inclusion Index Self-Assessment.
<p>23. By developing a staged Disability Awareness and Confidence Framework, to reduce organisational barriers and progress disability confidence in the workplace.</p> <p>24. By supporting the development of safe and accessible work spaces and services, in a more inclusive organisation.</p>	Medium term	<p><i>Aligned APSC Action – Projected Delivery Date 2022</i></p> <p>A Disability Awareness and Confidence Framework will be developed and launched in an accessible format for all staff.</p> <p>Supported by the APSC and Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) to provide disability awareness and capability uplift for managers and senior leaders</p> <p>A suite of formal training and supporting toolkits will be launched to progress disability confidence for all staff.</p> <p>Framework will be evaluated for positive impact on reducing organisational barriers to disability confidence in the workplace.</p>
25. By ensuring staff with disability are supported through pathways into and within DVA.	Medium term	<p>Design and operationalise a Disability Employment Pathway Framework. Including targeted initiatives to support the needs of DVA staff.</p> <p>Evaluate impact of framework on supporting staff with disability to enter or develop within DVA.</p>
26. By understanding the impact choices people make about language have on the way people with disability feel and are perceived.	Medium term	<p>An inclusive language guide is promoted and published to all staff.</p> <p>Guidance material focused on how staff appropriately engage with clients and staff with disability promoted and published to all staff.</p>

How will we achieve this?	Timeframe to implement	Outcome sought
27. By implementing development and training opportunities to progress our leader's awareness of their focus and intention, and how well they are connecting with staff, to create an environment of mutual trust and sustained high levels of performance.	Long term	<p>DVA Management Development Program encompasses initiatives to support our leaders to model a disability confident culture.</p> <p>From 2025 DVA State of Service Employee Census results will be equal to or greater than like agencies, as they relate to staff who identify as a person with disability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved general perception of the Senior Executive Service.</li> </ul>
28. By modelling consistent and unbiased behaviours, our leaders and managers can foster a culture where all staff feel safe, valued and respected, and are supported to perform optimally.	Long term	Evaluate and report on the impact of the program from both the staff and leaders perspectives.
29. By analysing the specific needs of staff with disability at DVA and engaging with tailored charters to proactively provide guidance and support.	Long term	<p>Identify types of disability staff at DVA are living with.</p> <p>Develop and promote tailored support framework for predominant types of disability.</p> <p>Develop and promote guidance and support on less dominant types of disability.</p> <p>Evaluate impact of guidance on workforce knowledge of disabilities within DVA.</p>

## Retain

The retention of staff correlates with how included, safe and valued people feel in the workplace. By working together we can embed an inclusive culture, improve recruitment processes, streamline accessibility, create rewarding career pathways and increase the job satisfaction of staff with disability at DVA.

How will we achieve this?	Timeframe to implement	Outcome sought
<p>30. By ensuring good matching between a person's abilities and a particular job.</p> <p>31. By focusing on a person's abilities rather than their disabilities.</p>	Medium term	<p>Engage an external provider to advise on how to appropriately create a successful match between a person with disability and a role, using an inclusive and merit based practices.</p> <p>Guidance on inclusive job matching methods promoted and published on DVA intranet.</p> <p>Evaluate the impact of the job matching on staff satisfaction and performance.</p>
32. By ensuring staff with disability are given the opportunity to provide insights and feedback on the effectiveness of existing Human Resource (HR) practices throughout the employment lifecycle.	Medium term	<p>On boarding and Off boarding method reviewed to ensure accessibility for all staff.</p> <p>On boarding and Off boarding information provided by staff identifying with disability analysed to identify trends in experience of attraction, recruitment, engagement, support and development initiatives at DVA.</p> <p>Trends utilised in evaluation of internal HR practices.</p>
33. By ensuring DVA staff have confidence that a career at DVA can meet their needs and aspirations where possible.	Medium term	<p>Managers engage with staff who identify with disability, to put in place individual career development and advancement plans supported by targeted development initiatives and advancement opportunities.</p> <p>Evaluate impact of tailored plans on job satisfaction and retention of staff with disability.</p>
34. By utilising APS Employee Census results to understand the key themes relating to career satisfaction for staff with disability.	Ongoing	<p>Analyse APS employee census results from staff with disability for key themes.</p> <p>Respond to key themes within implementation plans.</p> <p>Evaluate implementation plan for impact on following years APS Employee Census results for staff with disability.</p>



