

Working well with women with disability

Foundational Knowledge

The target audience for this series is sexual assault, domestic violence and women's health and wellbeing service workers in Queensland.

Workshop 1

Foundational Knowledge

This workshop series was designed, developed and delivered with women with disability. It is targeted to people who work in the sexual assault, women's health and wellbeing and domestic and family violence workforce.

Workshop 1 provides foundational knowledge to build workers' understanding of women with disability. This workshop was developed by Siobhan Gibbs with contributions from Karin Swift.

Please watch the Workshop 1 video and explore the resources linked in this handout to learn about the following topics:

- What is disability? Definitions, statistics, prevalence, and history.
- Language when describing and discussing disability.
- Decision makers, support workers and disability support.
- Tips for good practice.

Taking Care

The subject matter in this workshop will discuss gendered violence, abuse and neglect. This may be triggering or difficult for some.

Here is a good organisation for both personal and professional help and support:

<https://www.1800respect.org.au/>

1800RESPECT
NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT, DOMESTIC
FAMILY VIOLENCE COUNSELLING SERVICE

Key statistics

One in 10 (9.6%) aged 15 years and over had experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months because of their disability, up from 8.6% in 2015

Of those with disability who experienced discrimination, the most common sources of discrimination were:

- service and hospitality staff (36.3%)
- family and friends (21.0%)
- their employer (20.7%).

5.9% of women and 5.6% of men living with disability or a long-term health condition experienced violence in 2016

The risk of violence was greater for adults with intellectual/psychological disability than those with physical disability



Source: [ABS, 2021: Disability and Violence](#)

In 2016, women with disability or a long-term health condition were more likely than women without disability or a long-term health condition to experience:

- Physical and/or sexual violence by any perpetrator (5.9% compared with 4.3%)
- Physical violence (4.8% compared with 2.9%)
- Sexual harassment (19% compared with 17%)
- Stalking (3.7% compared with 2.7%)

The 2014 General Social Survey also found that of persons living with disability or a long-term health condition, those who identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or other were more likely to experience physical and/or threatened violence (19%) compared with those who identified as heterosexual (8.2%).

Source: [ABS, 2020, General Social Survey](#)



Approximately 36% of Indigenous Australians had some form of disability.

About 6.4% of the Indigenous population had a severe or profound disability – approximately 18% of Indigenous people with disability.

Indigenous Australians were twice as likely as non-Indigenous Australians to have severe or profound disability.

Source: [Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: 2015](#) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare)

47% of Australians had one or more chronic conditions. Over the last decade the prevalence of chronic conditions increased (from 42%). Females aged 15 years and over were more likely than males to have a chronic condition (57% compared to 51%). The prevalence of chronic conditions increased with age.

Source: [ABS 2018](#)

Definitions

Disability is defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) as:

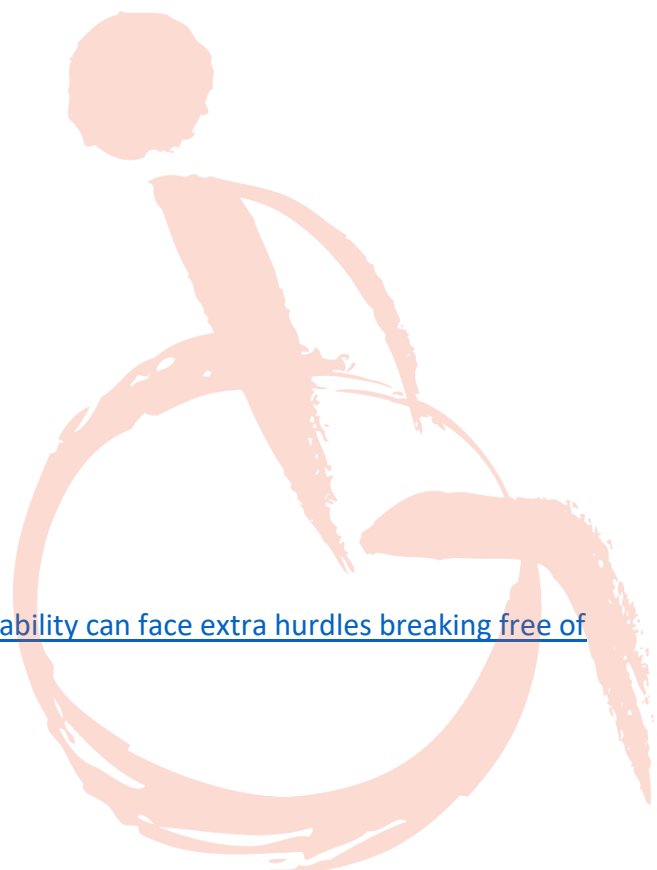
- (a) total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions; or
- (b) total or partial loss of a part of the body; or
- (c) the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness; or
- (d) the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness; or
- (e) the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body; or
- (f) a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; or
- (g) 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:
 - (h) presently exists; or
 - (i) previously existed but no longer exists; or
 - (j) may exist in the future (including because of a genetic predisposition to that disability); or
 - (k) is imputed 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.

Source: [Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#)

Featured Articles

- ABC article: [Women living with disability can face extra hurdles breaking free of abusers](#)



Medical Model of Disability vs. The Social Model of Disability

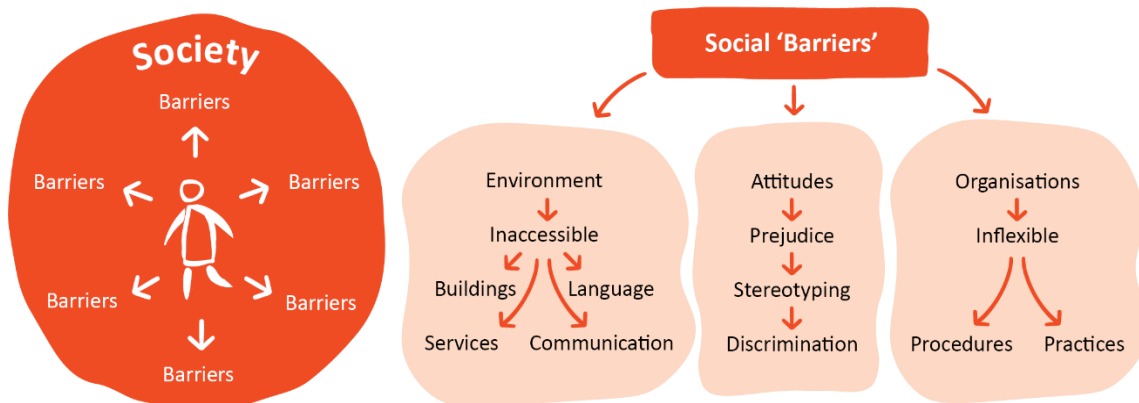
The **medical model** of disability is the perception that a person's disability creates barriers for them to access society. It is the perception that it is the person's 'fault' for having a disability, and that the onus is on the individual to find solutions. It creates narratives and stereotypes in communities that sees the person with a disability as the problem. This is of course, incorrect.

The **social model** of disability is now enshrined in international law and is acknowledged by the United Nations as the correct way to view disability. It reframes the medical model and refocuses that an inaccessible society and systems are the problem, not the person with a disability. Organisations and workplaces being inflexible in their practices, environments being inaccessible (including language, building access, services, communication etc.), and discriminating community attitudes, together create an unaccepting and ablest world for people with disabilities to try to access. The social model reminds us as workers that **accessibility should be standard practice**, not just when someone requests it. See the link below for more about this model.

Visit this source to find out more about the Social model.

Source: [Democracy, Disability and Society Group UK, 2005](#)

The Social Model of Disability



Source: [Democracy, Disability and Society Group UK, 2005](#)

Tips for asking a person about their disability

The [Centre for Research Excellence in Disability and Health](#) 2021 community attitudes survey found **78% of people agreed that people are unsure how to act toward people with disability**. It is important as workers we break down this hesitance and ensure we are comfortable in connecting with people with disability.

Here are a few tips:

- Interrogate your own bias – do you feel challenged when working with a person with disability? Why?
- What can you do to shift your attitude?
- Each person's experience of disability is unique to them, so it is important not to assume everyone shares the same experiences.
- When asking someone to disclose their disability, make sure to be polite. 'Do you mind telling me if you have a disability?' for example.
- Share with the person the reasons why you want to know their disability. Sharing why it is helpful for you to know (access to more support etc) can make a person feel more comfortable to disclose.
 - People with disabilities often receive more discrimination once someone knows they have a disability, so it is important for them to ensure their information is safe and won't be used against them.
- Use the language that each person uses for their own disability.
 - We can be guided for language that is appropriate and not, however the best way to ensure your language is okay is to adjust to each individual and use the language they use themselves to describe their disability.
- Be honest about whether your service can meet their accessibility needs before committing to supporting them. Be careful not to make the person feel responsible for any 'extra work' you may have to do so they can easily access your service.
- Use clear and easy to understand language. Be mindful of using acronyms or complex words. Always check for understanding proactively and rather than make assumptions.

See Workshop 2 for more information about interrogating your own bias.

For a guide around appropriate and inappropriate language when describing disability, see this resource developed by People with Disabilities Australia. [People with Disability Australia Guide to Language to Describe People with a Disability](#)

Talking about disability

Whatever language the person uses is okay for them and varies from person to person. If you are unsure what is the correct language to use, just ask the person. Here are some examples.

Respectful language	Outdated terms and phrases
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lives with a disability • has a disability • lives with a chronic health condition • has a chronic health condition • people with disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • afflicted by • crippled by • diffability • differently abled • handicap(ped) • handicapable • specially abled • special needs • suffers from • the disabled • victim of • with different abilities

Source: [People with Disability Australia 2021](#)

Case study - Shelley

You are a worker at a crisis Domestic Violence service. You receive a call from a woman named Shelley that says she needs some help.

She said that she is feeling frightened at home. She says that she is stuck in bed because her boyfriend has left for the day. She says she would rather meet in person and her boyfriend can give her a lift to your service.



1. You suspect Shelley has a disability. How would you ask her?
2. What language would you use to share with Shelley your concerns right now? (eg. Her safety and wellbeing)

Find out more

- What does DFV look like for women with disability? WorkUP Queensland. [DFV & Women with Disability](#)

Resources

<p>Resources for workers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>National Disability Services: Disability Types and Descriptions</u> • <u>People with Disability Australia Guide to Language to Describe People with a Disability</u> • <u>WWILD Online Training: Introduction to Intellectual Disability (FREE)</u> (See Step 2: People Describe their Disability)
<p>Resources for people with disability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>WWILD Easy Read Resources for Clients and Workers (Includes “You Deserve to be Safe” Booklets)</u> • <u>Queenslanders with Disability Network</u> • <u>First Peoples Disability Network Australia</u>
<p>Further information/reading</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Definition of Disability in QLD) (legislation.gov.au)</u> • <u>ATTITUDES MATTER Paper: Findings from a national survey of community attitudes toward people with disability in Australia. CRE-DH, The University of Melbourne 2021</u> • <u>Intellectual Disability Definition AAIDD 2021</u>