



Fair Work
OMBUDSMAN

Disability employment strategy



Acknowledgment of Country

The Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters, skies, and community. We pay our respects to them, their Cultures, and Elders, past and present.

We also respectfully acknowledge the Fair Work Ombudsman's First Nations employees, customers, partners, stakeholders, and visitors.

Artwork: Stepping Forward by Timothy Buckley

Acknowledgment of the lived experience of people with disability

The FWO acknowledges the lived experience of people with disability, their family members, carers, friends, and other support people. We recognise their strength and resilience in challenging social attitudes and barriers to inclusion, and we value the skills, knowledge and experience they bring to our workplace and communities.

We thank the employees who generously contributed their lived experience and insights in the development of the Fair Work Ombudsman Disability Employment Strategy 2025 – 2027 (Strategy).

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Foreword by the Fair Work Ombudsman

As Fair Work Ombudsman I am honoured to present our Disability Employment Strategy 2025-2027 (Strategy).

I am the mother of a daughter with a moderate intellectual disability. She has a great job in open employment as an administrative assistant. I am acutely aware of the importance of her having this job both for her workplace colleagues and her own sense of self. These two things are mutually reinforcing, and I know from personal experience that everyone benefits from supporting the employment of people with disability.

At the FWO we recognise that our people are our strength. We strive to create a welcoming, inclusive and safe work environment for all our workers.

The Strategy communicates our strong commitment to identifying and removing barriers that negatively impact employment opportunities for employees with disability. We will use responsive and affirmative actions to improve the representation and experience of employees with disability in our agency. The whole agency will benefit from the diversity of experiences and perspectives, enhancing the growth and contribution of all FWO employees.

As the leader of a public service agency, I am committed to fostering a workforce which reflects the diversity of the community we serve. I am confident that increased representation and inclusion of people with disability within our agency will contribute to our understanding of, and response to, the needs of people with disability who access our services.

The launch of the Strategy, our first Disability Employment Strategy, represents the commitment of every person working at the FWO. It is the culmination of a broad and deep consultative process, bringing together views from across the agency, including employees with lived experience of disability and caring roles, to identify the most important and impactful priorities and actions. With this spirit of shared ownership and responsibility, I look forward to working alongside every person at the FWO to meet the challenges and achieve the goals of the Strategy.



Message from Disability Champion

As the Executive Champion for Disability Inclusion at the FWO and a person with lived experience of disability, I am proud to present the Strategy.

This Strategy is the product of a collaborative consultation process with our employees, diversity experts and leaders. I am grateful for the input from all parts of our agency, to develop a Strategy with deliberate and proactive actions we will take to provide a safe and inclusive workplace where our employees with disabilities are valued, respected, and thrive.

Increasing the representation of people with disability who work at the FWO is a key measure of success for the Strategy. This will not only enhance the diversity of our workforce, bringing different perspectives to decision making and how we work, it will mean we better reflect the community we serve and how we deliver advice, education and compliance activities to workplace participants. Successful implementation of this Strategy will also contribute to the objectives of the FWO Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and the Australian Public Service Disability Employment Strategy 2020–25.

Providing sustainable and fulfilling careers for employees with disabilities, complemented by adjustments and working arrangements that address barriers and meet individual needs, together with employment opportunities and career growth is another key feature of this Strategy. Since I joined the FWO, I have benefited from an inclusive workplace culture and the support of many leaders and peers who have valued and appreciated me for who I am, including my disability. This must be the norm for all of our employees regardless of where they work and the type of work they do.

To achieve this goal for a disability inclusive workplace, we must collectively commit to cultural change in addition to building practical capability in our managers and leaders so that our employees feel confident about sharing that they have disability should they choose to do so, without concerns of discrimination, stigma or bias. The Strategy builds on the best aspects of our agency's culture.

I look forward to working collaboratively with leaders and employees across the agency on the successful implementation of this Strategy.

Our commitment

We strive to build a diverse workforce that delivers inclusive services to our community.

By engaging in actions that uplift the agency's culture, capability, workplace arrangements and accessibility, we are committed to ensuring a positive experience of inclusion for FWO employees with disability, and reaching at least 7% representation of people with disability by the conclusion of this Strategy.

Evaluation and monitoring progress

The Strategy will operate until 2027 and will be reviewed after 12 months to ensure that objectives and initiatives are aligned with the current employment environment and the FWO Corporate Plan.

The Strategy's outcomes will be reported annually to the FWO's Corporate Board through the People and Internal Communications Branch and to all staff via the Disability Champion.

Feedback and updates on the implementation of the Strategy will occur through People and Internal Communications Branch to ensure continued progress and success of the Strategy.

Contributors' acknowledgement

The Strategy acknowledges the efforts of the following teams and individuals who contributed to the development of this Strategy: Strategy development workshop participants, FWObility employee network, Disability Champion, People and Internal Communications Branch Leadership Team, Diversity and Inclusion Team, and other FWO employees who provided expertise and feedback.

Background

Who are we?

The FWO is Australia's workplace regulator, and our purpose is to promote harmonious, productive, cooperative, and compliant workplace relations. We regulate around 14.5 million workers and 1 million workplaces around Australia. The community expects the FWO, as the national workplace regulator, to uphold Australian workplace standards and protect the most vulnerable workers in our community. We are here to help all workers and employers in Australia to understand their rights and responsibilities at work.

We have a workforce of approximately 1,000 employees nationally, with offices in 22 locations.

The FWO's functions are set out by the Fair Work Act and require us to:

- ✓ Provide education, assistance, advice and guidance to employers, employees, regulated workers, regulated businesses, persons in a road transport contractual chain, outworkers, outworker entities and organisations.
- ✓ Promote and monitor compliance with workplace laws.
- ✓ Inquire into and investigate breaches of the Fair Work Act.
- ✓ Take appropriate enforcement action.
- ✓ Perform our statutory functions efficiently, effectively, economically, and ethically.

Diversity and inclusion

We respect, value and celebrate the diversity of our workforce. We are committed to creating an environment that respects and encourages diverse perspectives, knowledge, skills and abilities, and where lived experiences are valued and encouraged. We draw upon this diversity to maximise our service delivery.

Our vision for diversity includes:

- ▶ creating employment and career opportunities that are free from barriers.
- ▶ promoting our commitment to sustainable and flexible careers.
- ▶ supporting and maintaining open and transparent communication channels.
- ▶ making the best use of the diverse talents of our people through planning and talent management initiatives.
- ▶ actively supporting the careers and cultural needs of our employees.

Definition of disability

For the purposes of this Strategy, the terms ‘people with disability’ and ‘person with disability’ refer to a person or people who have one or more disabilities as defined by the [Australian Bureau of Statistics *Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings 2022*](#):

‘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 six months and restricts everyday activities.’

This includes:

- loss of sight (not corrected by glasses or contact lenses).
- loss of hearing where communication is restricted, or an aid to assist with, or substitute for, hearing is used.
- speech difficulties.
- shortness of breath or breathing difficulties causing restriction.
- chronic or recurrent pain or discomfort causing restriction.
- blackouts, seizures, or loss of consciousness.
- difficulty learning or understanding.
- incomplete use of arms or fingers.
- difficulty gripping or holding things.
- incomplete use of feet or legs.
- nervous or emotional condition causing restriction.
- restriction in physical activities or in doing physical work.
- disfigurement or deformity.
- mental illness or condition requiring help or supervision.
- memory problems or periods of confusion causing restriction.
- social or behavioural difficulties causing restriction.
- long-term effects of head injury, stroke or other acquired brain injury causing restriction.
- receiving treatment or medication for any other long-term conditions or ailments and still being restricted.
- any other long-term conditions resulting in a restriction.

This Strategy operates in addition to all obligations and responsibilities established by the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, as it relates to people with disability as defined by that Act.

Introduction

The FWO is committed to increasing the representation of people with disability across its workforce to better represent the community we serve, achieving at least 7% representation of employees with disability under this Strategy.

The FWO aims to provide all employees with the tools, capabilities, environment, working arrangements and resources to maximise their opportunities and contribution.

We acknowledge that the way in which someone experiences their disability, within and outside of the workplace, is as unique as each individual. We also recognise that whether, and how, a person chooses to identify as having disability is a personal choice. The long history of social and workplace discrimination, stigma and bias has contributed to entrenched views and attitudes about disability. Our goal at the FWO is to provide a psychologically safe and inclusive workplace where employees can feel confident about sharing that they have disability should they choose to do so, without concerns of discrimination, stigma or bias. We recognise this will require deliberate and affirmative steps, and consistency in demonstrating the agency's commitment, to overcome barriers of distrust and uncertainty.

'Disability' includes a wide variety of limitations, restrictions and impairments, which includes apparent or visible disability, as well as non-apparent or invisible disability. Disability may be experienced as a consistent state, or through symptoms which can vary in severity and duration.

Under the social model of disability, the environment or situation encountered by a person plays a critical role in the extent to which people with disability are limited, restricted or impaired in their ability to contribute or participate. An employee may have disability which doesn't require any workplace adjustments, but they may face challenges outside of work, or vice versa. As an agency, we're committed to putting in place environments, systems and work practices that are inclusive of as many people and experiences of disability as possible, rather than placing obligations on employees with disability to adapt or carry the burden of exclusion.

Principles for strategy implementation

In developing and implementing this strategy, the agency commits to the following principles:

- ✓ **Placing the voices of people with disability at the centre of this Strategy**, including understanding and sharing the practical impact and experience of the Strategy and other workplace initiatives, so employees and prospective employees with disability see themselves reflected in the culture and priorities of the agency.

- ✓ **Not putting the obligation on people with disability to lead change.** This includes a focus on ways in which the agency can be more inclusive, reduce barriers and administrative burden, promote awareness and improve outcomes for people with disability, without placing the obligation on people with disability to do all the work of educating or adjusting to the workplace.

- ✓ **Applying an intersectional focus**, by ensuring that disability inclusion is not considered in a vacuum, but instead, considers how all the different parts of a person's identity will shape their experience of inclusion.

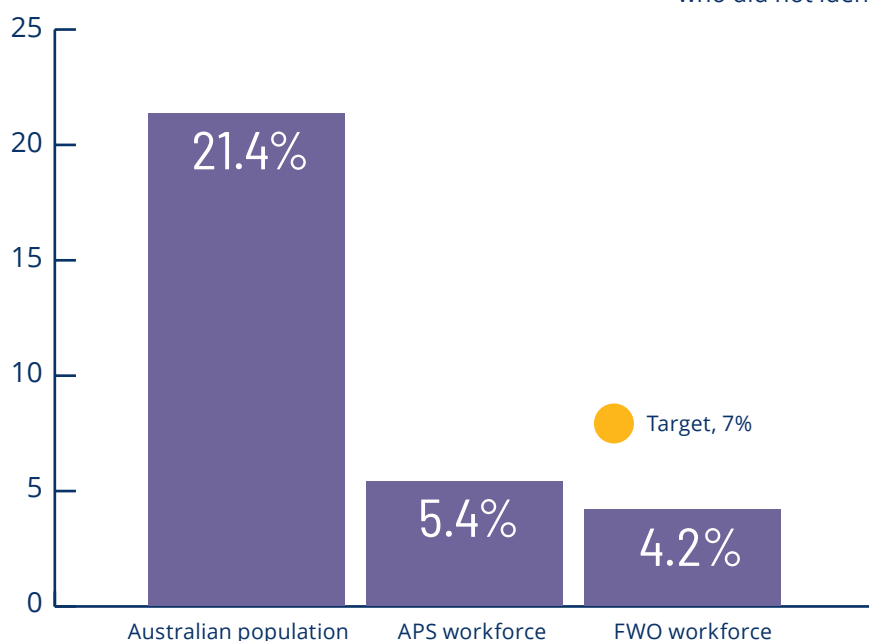
Purpose

The purpose of this Strategy is to detail a plan of actions that the FWO will carry out over the duration of this Strategy, ending in 2027.

Australian Public Service Disability Employment Strategy 2020-25

In 2022, there were 5.5 million Australians with disability, or 21.4% of the population¹. However, the proportion of Australian Public Service (APS) employees with disability had declined over several decades, and in 2020 was just 4% of the APS. The Australian Public Service Disability Employment Strategy 2020–25 (APS Strategy) was developed to provide a foundation for building an inclusive and diverse APS. It establishes a compelling business case for actively attracting and retaining more employees with disability and increasing our focus on accessible and inclusive workplaces and culture. The APS Strategy places responsibility on leaders in every agency to ensure all outcomes are achieved. It includes an employment target of 7% of people with disability across the APS by 2025. At 30 June 2024, APS employment of people with disability was 5.4%².

Figure 1: Percentage of people with disability



Staffing profile

As of 30 June 2024, 42 FWO employees self-identified as having a disability in the FWO HR system. This equates to 4.2% of our workforce, which is below that of the APS. It should be noted that a higher percentage of our workforce identifies as having disability in the anonymous APS Employee Census, with 10% of respondents in 2024 indicating they have disability, however the Census is not a compulsory survey and therefore can only provide this data as a percentage of those who responded. This data also cannot be used for reporting on progress towards APS disability employment targets. Nevertheless, it does indicate that the FWO's employment of people with disability may be higher than employee records suggest, and that employees with disability may be choosing not to share this information in HR systems.

Agency-level results from the 2024 APS Employee Census show that FWO employees with ongoing disability have a much less positive response to the Wellbeing Policies and Support Index, with only a 68% positive response, compared to employees who do not report having disability (76% positive). Across all Census questions, responses from people who identified as having ongoing disability were, on average, 7 percentage points lower compared to those who did not identify as having disability.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024) 'Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022'

² Australian Public Service Employment Database, 30 June 2024

The Strategy

This Strategy sets out how the FWO will identify and remove workplace barriers that negatively impact the opportunities and experience of employees with disability and use affirmative action measures to improve the representation and experience of employees with disability in our workplace. Providing individual measures and adjustments will remain an important complement to our journey of creating more inclusive roles and workplaces, however with the acknowledgement that these adjustments are required to address an ongoing gap in workplace environments, systems or processes which do not inherently meet the needs of all employees in our diverse workforce. It is vital that employees with disability, who already face barriers to employment, are not presented with additional barriers or red tape.

This Strategy provides an overarching framework, setting out how the FWO will identify and remove barriers that affect employment opportunities, staff retention, disability confidence, professional development, and career progression, and the daily workplace experience of people with disability.

We are committed to ensuring that people with disability can secure employment and establish a sustainable and fulfilling career within the FWO. We are also committed to supporting employees who care or provide support for a person with disability to undertake this important role.

This commitment is further underpinned by our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2027 which details our ongoing commitment to strengthen our diverse and inclusive workplace.

The FWO aims to achieve at least 7% employment of people with disability by the end of this Strategy.

To assist in accomplishing this goal, the Strategy includes actions across five key focus areas:

1. Culture and Disability Confidence
2. Talent Attraction and Recruitment
3. Retention and Opportunities
4. Workplace Accessibility and Adjustments
5. Accountability and Responsibility

It is the expectation of the Fair Work Ombudsman that all business areas across the agency will contribute to the achievement of every focus area by increasing recruitment of employees with disability, and implementing and supporting actions that build retention, inclusion and accessibility.

The agency will continue to build disability awareness and confidence among the workforce, equip managers with the policies, processes and skills to remove barriers for people with disability and support employees who care for a person with disability. In addition, the agency will engage in initiatives that celebrate the contribution of people with disability.

Actions in Key Focus Areas

1. Culture and Disability Confidence

- ▶ Celebrate the contribution of people with disability to our workplace
- ▶ Ensure workplace is inclusive and supportive for people with disability
- ▶ Provide disability confidence training to leaders and managers

Activity	Responsibility	Timeline
1.1. Plan and implement a celebratory launch event for the Disability Employment Strategy, which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Re-affirms commitment of the agency ▶ Celebrates contributions of colleagues with disability ▶ Emphasises importance of role modelling and matching words with actions. 	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications, Executive Champion Disability	July 2025
1.2. Maintain bronze level membership of the Australian Disability Network	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	April 2026, 2027
1.3. Identify essential disability confidence learning expectations at all levels, as well as optional learning opportunities.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	February 2026
1.4. Deliver disability awareness and confidence training for senior leaders, based on the lived experiences of employees with disability.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	March 2026
1.5. Provide disability awareness and capability training for all managers, including the lived experience of disability, intersectional awareness, making workplace adjustments, and handling sensitive/challenging conversations.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	September 2026
1.6. Update self-paced disability awareness training module and make available to all employees.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	December 2025
1.7. Develop and implement a series of short manager communications addressing implementation of the strategy, agency benefits, expectations of managers and role modelling behaviours.	Executive Champion Disability	June 2026
1.8. Update FWObility intranet page to feature stories and examples from employees at all levels about their disability or carers experience and experience of inclusion at FWO.	Executive Champion Disability	December 2025 and 2026
1.9. Conduct pulse polls or an inclusion questionnaire which measures the experience of people with disability and access to disability inclusion measures such as adjustments, workplace adjustment passports and disability leave.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	December 2026
1.10. Maintain engagement with APS networks.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications, Executive Champion Disability	Ongoing
1.11. Through high-profile speaking opportunities, highlight the agency's approach and success in building disability inclusion.	Fair Work Ombudsman	Ongoing

Activity	Responsibility	Timeline
1.12. Deliver at least one Listen to Lead Conversations program, or similar initiative, during the period of this Strategy (A facilitated program where five staff with disability share their disability experience and/or FWO experience with five Senior Executives, promoting change through the power of storytelling).	Executive Champion Disability	March 2027
1.13. Participate in a disability employment or development program each year, such as the Australian Disability Network's career mentoring, or similar. Evaluate participation and promote the benefits for participants.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	June 2026, 2027
1.14. Celebrate and promote International Day of People with Disability each year, with an event and/or invited speaker at least every two years.	Executive Champion Disability	December 2025, 2026

2. Talent Attraction and Recruitment

- ▶ Establish agency as a desirable employer for people with disability
- ▶ Increase avenues for attracting talent
- ▶ Create employment opportunities for people with disability
- ▶ Increase number of people with disability employed in the agency to >7%

Activity	Responsibility	Timeline
2.1. Provide information on FWO website Careers page about disability inclusion, workplace adjustments, RecruitAbility and affirmative measures.	Executive Director, Advice and Education Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	June 2026
2.2. Explore barriers to employment and career progression at different levels through feedback and qualitative analysis opportunities.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	Ongoing
2.3. Explore use of different recruitment advertising channels to reach candidates with disability.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	Ongoing
2.4. Explore communication channels and connections with tertiary institutions to identify pathways to employment with the agency.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	June 2026
2.5. Explore partnership with one or more disability employment providers to provide employment opportunities and create new roles through job customisation that are suitable for particular clients of the provider.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	June 2027
2.6. Review recruitment and EOI and role information to ensure it provides explicit messaging about welcoming applications from people with disability, informative details about the nature of the role and working environment, and availability of workplace adjustments.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	December 2025
2.7. Review and update the Affirmative Measures Toolkit for Recruiting People with Disability.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	June 2026
2.8. Partner with a business area to conduct a pilot of using affirmative measures – disability for bulk round recruitment.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	December 2026

Activity	Responsibility	Timeline
2.9. Ensure affirmative measures and Recruitability are considered when planning each recruitment process.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications All Senior Executive Service Officers	Ongoing
2.10. Look for opportunities within APS pathways to attract and develop people with disability.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	February 2026, 2027
2.11. Provide training for all staff involved in the recruitment process, including asking about and providing reasonable adjustments to recruitment processes.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	September 2026

3. Retention and Opportunities

- Support development opportunities
- Remove barriers to performance and career progression
- Ensure workplace supports and entitlements are consistently provided

Activity	Responsibility	Timeline
3.1. Implement the disability contact officer model to support employees with disability.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	June 2026
3.2. Promote FWOability during onboarding, agency communications and team meetings.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications Executive Champion Disability	December 2025, and ongoing
3.3. Provide employees with avenues and opportunities, both identified and anonymous, to raise concerns about inclusion or accessing adjustments and entitlements.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	June 2026, and ongoing
3.4. Ensure employees with disability are supported and encouraged to take up mobility and career development opportunities.	All Senior Executive Service Officers	Ongoing
3.5. Ensure clear messaging about availability of workplace adjustments is included in EOI processes.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications All Senior Executive Service Officers	December 2025, and ongoing
3.6. Support at least two FWOability members each year to attend a relevant disability or diversity focussed conference.	Executive Champion Disability All Senior Executive Service Officers	June 2026, 2027
3.7. Develop consistent messaging to all staff about the purpose, use and confidentiality of employee demographic data regarding disability.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	December 2025
3.8. Develop, or incorporate into existing resources, guidance about having conversations with all employees about how they perform their best, such as communication methods, maximising working styles and times for productivity, receiving feedback etc.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	August 2025, 2026

4. Workplace Accessibility and Adjustments

- ▶ Promote and embed conversations about workplace adjustments at all stages of the employee lifecycle
- ▶ Incorporate accessibility considerations into the earliest stages of developing or changing office environments, products and services
- ▶ Review accessibility of existing environments, systems and processes

Activity	Responsibility	Timeline
4.1. Ensure all new internal and external products and services are accessible. For example, new website tools, customer service systems, workplace equipment and office spaces.	Executive Director, Advice and Education Executive Director, Corporate Services Executive Director, Technology All Senior Executive Service Officers	Ongoing
4.2. Promote and embed conversations about workplace adjustments and workplace adjustments passports at all stages of the employee lifecycle.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications All Senior Executive Service Officers	August 2025, and ongoing
4.3. Undertake an internal workplace accessibility audit of physical environment, systems and processes to assess accessibility and adaptability for people with disability, including psychosocial disability and neurodivergence.	Executive Director, Corporate Services Executive Director, Technology	December 2026
4.4. Audit HR policies and guides for accessibility, disability inclusion, and clear manager expectations.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	June 2027
4.5. Develop and promote practical guidance/case studies on the application of workplace adjustments, availability of common adjustments, and using existing workplace flexibility, via agency resources and/or training.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	March 2026
4.6. Ensure representation of accessibility considerations, and the needs of people with disability, early in the planning for new office environment procurements or refit.	Executive Director, Corporate Services	Ongoing
4.7. Promote the availability of disability leave and workplace adjustments.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications	Ongoing

5. Accountability and Responsibility

- ▶ Monitor the implementation of the Strategy
- ▶ Evaluate progress and adjust actions as required to ensure success
- ▶ Ensure accountability for the implementation of the Strategy and its initiatives

Activity	Responsibility	Timeline
5.1. Overall accountability for implementing the Strategy and taking actions to support the key areas of the Strategy.	CEO, All Senior Executive Service Officers	Ongoing
5.2. Promote and drive the implementation of the Strategy, advocating across all levels.	Executive Champion Disability	Ongoing

Activity	Responsibility	Timeline
5.3. Collaborate with other FWO Executive Champions on communications and initiatives, to increase intersectional awareness.	Executive Champion Disability	Ongoing
5.4. Collaborate APS-wide through the APS Disability Champions Network.	Executive Champion Disability	Ongoing
5.5. Collaborate with other agencies to develop and share exemplary initiatives and innovative practices.	Executive Director, People and Internal Communications Executive Champion Disability	Ongoing
5.6. Report on progress to Corporate Board each year.	People and Internal Communications Branch	November 2025, 2026, July 2027
5.7. Provide an agency update on the Strategy progress each year, highlighting successes and challenges or calls to action.	Executive Champion Disability	December 2025, 2026
5.8. Introduce targets for employment of people with disability at Group level.	All Senior Executive Service Officers Executive Director, People and Internal Communications Branch	October 2025, 2026
5.9. Include taking active steps to improve representation, inclusion and accessibility, and relevant Strategy actions into Senior leadership performance agreements.	CEO and Senior Executive Service Officers	August 2025, 2026
5.10. Ensure employees who are FWOability members are given time/capacity to contribute to network activities, any barriers to participation are removed and they are encouraged to do so by their managers.	All Senior Executive Service Officers	Ongoing

Contact Us

The FWO welcomes feedback on our Disability Employment Strategy. For more information about the development or contents of the Strategy, contact us through diversity@fwo.gov.au