



# Breaking the glass ceiling and smashing the legacy of low expectations:

A QDN position paper  
on the economic security  
of women with disability  
in Queensland.

## User-friendly Version

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## About QDN

QDN stands for Queenslanders with Disability Network.

It is a group in Queensland made up of people with disability.

QDN makes sure that people with disability are treated fairly and included in everything in Queensland.

QDN listens to what people with disability have to say and speaks up for them to make sure things change for the better.

QDN works with:

- the government,
- community groups, and
- businesses

to make sure that

- policies,
- services, and
- products are made with input from people with disability.

QDN helps shape the rules and ideas about disability in Queensland and across Australia.

QDN wants to see a world where:

- people with disability are leaders,
- things change for the better,
- and everyone works together to make a more inclusive society.



## About QDN's Women's Network

The QDN Women's Network is an online group where women with disability in Queensland can connect and share together.

It is a safe and friendly space where all women, including those who identify as

- non-binary - people who don't feel like either a boy or a girl
- feminine - people who feel like a girl or
- gender diverse - people who feel different about their gender, not just boy or girl can join.

This group is for women living in Queensland who want to:

- talk about important things,
- share helpful information, and
- support each other.

It's been around since 2016 and welcomes anyone who wants to be part of it.

## **QDN's work**

QDN learns about the challenges people with disabilities face by:

- doing research,
- talking to members,
- studying policies, and
- working in communities.

They ask for changes in policies and start new projects to make things like

- buildings,
- services, and
- jobs more accessible and fair.

QDN talks a lot with:

- governments,
- businesses,
- universities, and
- groups in the community to make sure everyone works together for change.

Through many projects and working together with others, QDN tries to fix big problems that stop people with disability from being treated fairly and being part of everything in life.

They believe everyone should be treated with respect and have the chance to be involved in society.

## **Thank you**

We want to thank the Queensland Government for giving us the money to make these events happen.

We also want to thank our friends at WWILD-SVP for working with us and supporting us as we try to make life better for women with disability.

Big thanks to our keynote speakers for sharing their knowledge and inspiring us to make things better.

And thanks to our panel speakers for talking about their experiences and ideas on how to help women with disability find jobs.

Their words helped us have important conversations and work together to make society fairer for everyone.

Thanks also to everyone who took part in our events.

Your ideas and support mean a lot so we can all try to make life better for women with disability at work.

## **Why co-design is important**

Co-design is a very important idea for QDN.

It means that everyone, especially women, girls, and others with disability, gets to help make decisions.

QDN makes sure to listen to their ideas and experiences when figuring out what to do.

They work with lots of different groups, like

- the government
- and businesses, to come up with solutions that really help women with disabilities.

Co-design helps find out exactly what problems women with disability face and creates plans that fit their lives.

By using co-design, this project hoped to make sure everyone felt included and responsible, leading to real and lasting changes for a fairer society.



## Introduction

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Women with disability in Queensland are an important part of our community. They have many skills and talents that make our society better.

Even though they face many challenges, like problems with getting jobs, they show strength and creativity in reaching their goals and helping the economy.

Their different experiences and ideas bring new solutions to different jobs and industries.

They are:

- leaders,
- innovators, and
- advocates who make our society more diverse and better.

By supporting them and giving them opportunities, we can make Queensland a fairer and more prosperous place for everyone.

But women with disability in Queensland face many challenges in finding jobs and being part of the economy.

These challenges include:

- discrimination,
- not having enough support,
- not being able to access education or training, and
- facing negative attitudes from others.



They also face problems like:

- domestic violence,
- not having a safe place to live, and
- being involved in the child safety system more than others.

This paper talks about all these challenges and how we can fix them.

It asks

- the Queensland government,
- businesses,
- universities, and
- community groups to work together to make things better.

By:

- making fair rules,
- making things easier to access,
- supporting education and services,
- fighting discrimination, and
- dealing with social issues, we can help women with disability have better lives and be more involved in our society.



# Addressing the Legacy of Low Expectations

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One of our panel members talked about the legacy of low expectations affecting:

- women,
- girls, and
- others with disability in Queensland.

For a long time, people haven't believed in what they can do.

They have been:

- kept from going to school,
- getting jobs, and
- being part of society like everyone else.

This low expectation has made it hard for them to be independent and included.

QDN knows this is a big problem and wants to change it by speaking up and showing leadership.

They believe that if we expect more from people with disability and give them the same chances as everyone else, they can do amazing things and be successful in life.





## About the forums

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The events held by QDN were very important for women with disability.

They gave them a chance to:

- talk,
- share their stories, and
- fight for their rights.

These events happened both online and in-person, where women could:

- meet,
- work together, and
- speak up about issues like getting jobs and being included in society.

During Queensland Women's Week, QDN organised two big events

- a meeting online and
- one at Parliament House

to talk about the problems women with disability face.

Lots of different people came to these events, like community leaders, and women with disability.

They talked about how to fix problems and make things better.

By giving women with disability a chance to speak and work together, QDN's events helped them feel stronger and fight for their rights to have good jobs and a good life.



## Who attended?

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Many different people came to the events hosted by QDN.

This included:

- women with disability,
- people who make rules,
- leaders from communities,
- people who fight for rights, and
- others from different groups.

Both the online forum and the meeting at Parliament House had more than 40 people.

They all talked and shared what they knew.



## Why QDN hosted these forums

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During Queensland Women's Week, QDN organised two important events to help women with disabilities:

- talk,
- work together, and
- lead.

The first event was online, where people from all over Queensland talked about the challenges they face in finding jobs.

They shared ideas and solutions to make things better.

The second event happened in person at Parliament House.

It gave women with disability a chance to talk to important people like politicians and community leaders.

They talked about their experiences and how to make changes to help women with disabilities have better jobs and lives.

QDN organised these events to bring women with disability and important people together.

They wanted to talk about the problems women with disability face and find ways to solve them.

By working together and talking about important issues, they hoped to make Queensland a fairer and better place for everyone.





## Main things people talked about at the forums

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During the QDN forums, different people talked about important topics to help women with disability.

These speakers were:

- Women with disability,
- experts, and
- advocates.

They talked about things like:

- How easy it is for women with disability to find jobs and go to school,
- The problems women with disability face when they try to work,
- Ways to make sure women with disability feel included and strong, and
- Why it's important to think about all the different things that make women with disability unique.

They also talked about what rules and programs could help make things better for women with disability.

Their ideas and stories were helpful in finding out how to make the world a fairer and better place for all women with disability.

### Online Forum

The online forum was led by Karin Swift, who is very involved in different groups and also works as a consultant.

She introduced Dr. Sharon Boyce and Professor Linda Agnew as the main speakers.

Sharon talked about her leadership roles and how she helps people with disability.

Linda talked about her job as a teacher and how she doesn't let her blindness stop her from doing what she loves.

Then, Karin introduced the panel members:

Sarah Empy, who works in the arts,

Claire Mitchell, who is on the board of Down Syndrome Australia, and

Leanne Watts, who helps people with rehabilitation.

Each of them talked about their jobs and how they don't let their disabilities hold them back.

Their stories helped start conversations and ideas for how to help women with disability more,

We will talk more about this in this paper.

## **Face-to-face forum**

The face-to-face forum happened at Parliament House in Brisbane on International Women's Day, 8 March, 2024.

Karin Swift and QDN CEO, Michelle Moss, led this event together.

Karin talked about her long career working for the rights of people with disability and women.

She also talked about how COVID-19 gave new work opportunities for women with disability to work from home using online meetings.

Then, Michelle introduced Professor Linda Agnew to give her speech again.

After that, Karin introduced the other speakers:

- Jane Britt,
- Stephanie Dower, and
- Kristy Hall.

Jane talked about her job in policy and helping people with disability.

Stephanie talked about her job in making films and media, and how she wants to change how people see disability in movies and TV.

Kristy talked about her job helping people who have faced domestic violence.

The speakers encouraged everyone to work together and come up with ideas.

Their passion and knowledge helped everyone to have good conversations and come up with ideas to help women with disability.



# What we heard

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## At the forum:

QDN members talked about the difficulties they face in finding jobs and making money. They talked about:



### 1. Problems at work:

They felt frustrated because they said they have been treated unfairly and judged because of their disability.

This makes it hard for them to find good jobs and get paid well.

They also find it hard to get around and do their work because many places are not accessible.



### 2. Learning and training:

QDN members said they don't have many chances to go to school or get job training, which makes it harder for them to find good jobs.



### 3. Help with getting around and using technology:

They found it hard to get help with things like transport and using special tools that can help them work better.



### 4. Family problems:

Some of our members also talked about having problems at home, like violence from family members.

This makes it even harder for them to make money and be independent.

These stories show why we need to

- act quickly to fix the problems
- help women with disability be more independent and
- have better jobs in Queensland.

## Over the last 22 years

QDN members and people with disability in Queensland have shared their thoughts on what is important for improving jobs and money for people with disability.

QDN has talked a lot about making sure there are fair rules and programs to help people with disability get good jobs.

They have asked for things like

- special training for bosses,
- help with changing things in the workplace, and
- bonuses for businesses that hire people with disability.

QDN has also asked for

- more chances for people with disability to get job training,
- help with changing things at work, and
- better support services.

They have also asked for opportunities for people with jobs to keep learning and growing in their careers.

Through speaking up, QDN keeps fighting for the rights of people with disability at work and wants to make sure everyone has a fair chance to work and earn money.





## Recommendations

These suggestions come from the work QDN has done in this area for the past twenty years, and also from the ideas and actions shared by people who took part in QDN's 2 forums.



### Recommendations for Government

Government needs to make sure they put rules and plans in place that help women with disability join the workforce and be treated fairly.

This means

- making laws against discrimination,
- improving accessibility and
- giving money to businesses that hire people with disability.

By doing these things, the government can make sure women with disability have a fair chance to work and be part of society.

Here are the recommendations women with disability made for the government:

1. **Make fair rules:** Put laws in place to stop discrimination against women with disability in all areas of life, like at work and in schools.
2. **Disability Service Plans:** Make sure each government department has plans to help women with disability.



- 3. Disability Employment Networks:** Set up networks to help women with disability find jobs.
- 4. Set goals:** Make goals to hire more women with disability in government jobs.
- 5. Make things easier to use:** Make sure workplaces, public places, and transportation are easy to use for women with disability.
- 6. Help with education:** Give money to programs that help women with disability learn new skills.
- 7. Support small businesses:** Give support to women with disability who want to start their own businesses.
- 8. Include women with disability in decision-making:** Have more women with disabilities in leadership roles at work.
- 9. Help with the Brisbane 2032 Games:** Give money to programs that help women with disability take part in the 2032 Games.
- 10. Provide more support:** Give more help to women with disability, like transport and mental health services.
- 11. Stop discrimination:** Tell people that it's not okay to treat women with disability unfairly.
- 12. Help with family problems:** Give support to women with disability who are facing family violence.
- 13. Find better housing:** Make more houses that are affordable and easy to use for women with disability.
- 14. Help with child safety:** Make sure women with disability involved in child safety cases get the help they need.
- 15. Support self-advocacy:** Help women with disability speak up for themselves.
- 16. Make sure workplaces are fair:** Make sure workplaces follow the rules to treat women with disability fairly.
- 17. Change policies:** Make rules that help people with disability find and keep jobs.
- 18. Include disability in buying:** Make sure government contracts include businesses that help people with disability.



## Recommendations for Universities

Universities need to make sure they are accessible and inclusive for women with disability, so they have the same chances as everyone else.

They should invest in programs that help women with disability succeed in higher education.

They should also provide support services and help to meet their needs.

Universities can also create programs like internships and mentorships to help women with disability get experience and develop their skills.

By creating a supportive and inclusive environment, universities can help women with disability achieve their learning and career goals.

Here are the recommendations women with disability made for universities:

- 1. Research Collaboration:** Work with disability advocacy groups to do research and find new ways to help women with disability succeed.
- 2. Inclusive Education Programs:** Make sure there are programs that help women with disability get the education they need. This includes things like accessible materials and support services.
- 3. Internship and Mentorship Programs:** Create programs that give women with disability work experience and help them build their careers.
- 4. Disability Inclusive Procurement:** Make sure the university buys from businesses that help people with disability



## Recommendations for Advocacy Organisations

Advocacy groups can help change the rules and practices at work and school to make things better for women with disability.

They can work to make sure women with disability have the same chances as everyone else to find good jobs.

This will help them be more independent and reach their goals at work.

Here are the recommendations women with disability made for advocacy groups:

- 1. Make new rules:** Work with the government to make new rules that help women with disability find good jobs.
- 2. Get more money:** Ask for more money to help women with disability go to school and get the help they need.
- 3. Change the law:** Work to make laws that stop people from treating women with disability unfairly at work and other places.
- 4. Help with buying:** Make sure businesses buy from places that help people with disability.





## Recommendations for Business

It is important for businesses to make sure everyone, including women with disability, can take part in the workforce.

This means they should

- hire women with disability,
- make changes to the workplace if needed and
- create a welcoming environment for everyone.

When businesses include women with disability, they can bring new ideas and skills to the team.

Businesses can also make changes to the workplace, like adding ramps or special tools, to help everyone do their jobs better.

Businesses can work with the government to help women with disability find jobs.

They can also work together to make sure products and services are accessible to everyone.

Here are the recommendations women with disability made for businesses:

- 1. Hire people with disability:** Encourage businesses to hire women with disability by giving them information and training.
- 2. Make sure the workplace is accessible:** Help businesses check if their buildings and services are easy to use for people with disability, and make changes if needed.
- 3. Help with changes at work:** Ask businesses to make changes at work, like letting people work different hours or using special tools, to help women with disability do their jobs.
- 4. Help with buying:** Make sure big businesses buy from places that help people with disability.
- 5. Mentorships for small business owners:** Create programs to help **women with disability who own small businesses.**
- 6. Encourage fair hiring:** Make sure businesses are fair when hiring people with disability



## Recommendations for the Community Sector

It is important for community groups to work together to help women with disability take part in the workforce.

- Community groups can provide different kinds of help, like support services and
- programs that teach new skills.

When community groups work together, they can share ideas and make sure women with disability have a say in the rules and policies that affect them.

Community groups can also create programs, like support groups and training sessions, to help women with disability connect with others and learn new things.

Here are the recommendations women with disability made for community groups:

- 1. Help community groups learn:** Teach community groups how to provide different kinds of help for women with disability.
- 2. Work together:** Make partnerships between different groups to share ideas and work together to help women with disability.
- 3. Tell people about disability:** Teach people about what it's like to have a disability and how they can help.
- 4. Help with buying:** Make sure community groups buy from places that help people with disability.



## Recommendations for policies to provide incentives to work

It is really important to have rules and programs that help women with disability when they start working.

One good idea is to reduce the money they get from Centrelink at a slower rate as they start earning money from work.

This helps make the change easier and stops them from worrying about money too much.

We can make rules so that women with disability can keep some of their Centrelink money even if they are working or studying.

This helps them still have some money to live on while they try to find a job.

We can also offer other kinds of help, like

- healthcare,
- help with getting around and
- help with childcare.

This can make it easier for women with disability to start working without worrying too much about money.

Here are some ideas that women with disability came up with to help them find jobs while still having some money from Centrelink:

- **Slowly reduce money from Centrelink:** Make rules so that women with disability still get some money from Centrelink as they start working.
- **Keep some money:** Make rules so that women with disability can still keep some money from Centrelink even if they start working or studying.
- **Offer extra help:** Give women with disability help with
  1. healthcare,
  2. getting around, and
  3. paying for childcare.



## Further Background - what we know from research and practice

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### Barriers

In Queensland, women with disability face many barriers that make it hard for them to join the workforce.

These barriers are big problems and are built into how society works.

They include things like

- discrimination,
- places not being accessible,
- not enough chances for education and training,
- not enough support services,
- people having wrong ideas about disability and
- experiencing family violence.

Dealing with these problems properly is important if we want a fairer society where everyone, regardless of disability, can have the same chances to succeed and help their communities.

At our forums, women with disability talked about these barriers, and they're also backed up by research:

- 1. Discrimination and Stereotyping:** Women with disability often get treated unfairly at work, which means they don't get as many job chances or fair pay as people without disability.
- 2. Lack of Accessibility:** Many workplaces don't have things like ramps or quiet spaces, making it hard for women with disability to do their jobs properly.
- 3. Limited Education and Training:** Getting a good education and training is really important for finding a good job. But many women with disability find it hard to get these chances.
- 4. Not Enough Support:** Things like help with transport or special tools can make it easier for women with disability to work. But lots of them can't get this help.
- 5. Negative Attitudes:** Some people have wrong ideas about disability, which can make it harder for women with disability to get jobs or be treated fairly at work.
- 6. Family Violence:** Violence at home makes life even harder for women with disability. It can make it harder to find a job or get the help they need.
- 7. Housing Problems:** Not having a safe and affordable place to live makes it really hard for women with disability to find work and be independent.
- 8. Child Safety Issues:** Women with disability are more likely to have problems with the child safety system, which can make finding and keeping a job even harder.
- 9. Advocacy and Leadership:** Women with disability need to speak up for themselves and have a say in decisions that affect them. This can help make things better for everyone.
- 10. Fair Work Conditions:** Everyone should have a fair chance at work, including fair pay and chances to move up in their jobs, no matter if they have a disability or not.





## The importance of gender diversity inclusion

Including

- women,
- girls,
- feminine-identifying, someone who feels like or acts like a woman and
- non-binary people with disability, someone who doesn't feel fully like a girl or a boy, in Queensland's economy is very important.

We need to

- break down barriers,
- make things more accessible,
- help with education and support,
- fight against discrimination, and
- work together across different areas.

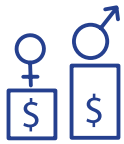
By doing this, we can create a better environment where everyone, no matter their gender identity, can do well and contribute to society.

It is really important for

- the government,
- businesses,
- universities, and
- community groups to come together and focus on the needs and rights of these groups.

If we all work together and understand how gender and disability combine, we can make a society that

- appreciates everyone's differences,
- respects everyone's rights and
- gives everyone a fair chance to succeed economically.



## The Gender Pay Gap

The Gender Pay Gap report from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) in February 2024 showed that women in Australia still earn less money than men.

On average, women earn 13.4% less than men.

This gap is a big problem because it means women have less money for doing the same work as men.

The report also said that women with disability face even bigger challenges.

They often have a harder time

- finding jobs,
- getting fair pay and
- moving up in their careers.

To fix these problems, we need to

- focus on helping women with disability
- work on making sure everyone gets paid fairly and
- doesn't face discrimination at work.

We can do this by following the recommendations from the WGEA and other groups.

This will help make our workforce fairer and more equal for everyone.



## Chances to make things better in the future and tools the government can use to make changes

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### Disability Royal Commission Recommendations

The Disability Royal Commission (DRC) Final Report gives us a lot of important information and suggestions for making life better for people with disability.

One part of the recommendations is about education and jobs.

The DRC has given some suggestions about how to improve education and job opportunities for people with disability.

These suggestions can guide

- policymakers,
- employers, and
- schools in making changes for the better.

They talk about things like making sure people with disability can:

- get a good education,
- have access to job training,
- and find employment.

They also talk about things that make things hard like

- discrimination and
- lack of support services.

When it comes to jobs, the DRC's recommendations aim to

- break down barriers and
- make it easier for people with disability to find work.

They talk about things like

- changing hiring practices to include people with disability.
- making workplaces accessible and
- providing training for employers to understand disability better.

These recommendations also suggest creating more support services and

training programs to help people with disability succeed at work.

These recommendations are important for improving the lives of women with disability too.

By making education and job opportunities more inclusive and accessible, we can help women with disability

- get better education,
- find jobs, and
- build good careers.

This will lead to

- greater independence,
- empowerment, and
- inclusion for women with disability

## **Creating a lasting effect on jobs that include everyone from the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games**

The 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games is a big opportunity to promote difference and fair employment.

By focusing on

- inclusive hiring
- accessibility and
- support,

we can set a good example for future events and workplaces.

This means making sure everyone, including people with disability, has a fair chance to work in different roles, from organising events to working in hotels and transportation.

Working with local businesses and advocacy groups can help find and train people with disability for these jobs, making a lasting impact on the community.

To make this happen, we need to:

- Use fair hiring practices for all parts of the Games,
- Provide training on accessibility,
- Create job ads that everyone can understand, and
- Offer help to applicants who need it.
- Invest in training programs for people with disability so they can improve their skills and find work during and after the Games.
- Build partnerships with disability groups and local businesses to hire and keep employees with disability, making the workforce better.

By following these steps the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games can

- have a future of inclusive employment,
- promote fairness,
- opportunity, and
- inclusion for everyone in the community.

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15 For more information on the strategy: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/strategies/participant-employment-strategy>

It is also important to look at the experiences of women with disability when making these plans.

Women often face extra challenges in finding work.

If we don't think about this we might make things worse.

By looking at the needs of women, like

- childcare and
- fair pay,

we can make sure they have the same chances as everyone else.

And by looking at gender equality, we can

- find ways to support women in leadership roles and
- close the gender pay gap.

## **The NDIS Participant Employment Strategy 2024-2028**

After our forums, the NDIS put out the Participant Employment Strategy 2024-2028.

This strategy aims to:

- Help NDIS participants think about work and find a job.
- Help local area coordinators and planning staff better support NDIS participants with employment goals.
- Make it easier for NDIS participants to use their plan to get a job and get support at work.
- Work with providers to make their supports better and share info with participants about how well they are doing.
- Make sure the NDIS works with other government services that help with employment.
- Help employers find NDIS participants who are looking for work.

QDN supports people with disability using their NDIS supports to achieve their work goals and have more control over how these supports are given.

It is important to look at the strategy through a gender lens to make sure it meets the specific needs of women with disability.

This means thinking about how being a woman and having a disability might affect things like

- caregiving,
- getting healthcare, and
- dealing with discrimination at work.

By considering these challenges, the NDIS Participant Employment Strategy can create plans and support that help women with disability find and keep good jobs.

Being aware of gender makes sure the strategy works for everyone, leading to more inclusion and economic empowerment for women with disability.

## **Possibilities of women with disability becoming sole traders**

Many women with disability in Queensland are thinking about starting their own businesses also called becoming sole traders.

They see this as a way to have more control over their work and become financially independent.

When they start their own business, they can

- create their own work environment and
- do work that they are passionate about.

Being a sole trader means they are in charge of their own work.

This gives them a feeling of power and independence.

Members of QDN have said how this has given them more options since COVID-19.

But starting a business also has challenges:

- women need support to get started, and
- they have to understand the rules for having a business in Australia.
- it's also a lot of work to run a business.

QDN sees starting a business as a great way for women with disability to be independent financially.

QDN wants to see policies and programs that help these women succeed as sole traders.

With:

- the right support,
- mentors, and
- networking,

women with disability can do well as entrepreneurs and add to Queensland's businesses.

## **Working from home**

The COVID-19 pandemic changed how we work.

For women with disability, it opened up new opportunities, especially with working from home.

Many women with disability now have more chances to work because of video calls and flexible work schedules.

Working from home gives them more control over their time and helps them manage their health needs better.

It also removes some barriers they face in traditional workplaces, like getting around in a wheelchair.

But working from home isn't perfect.

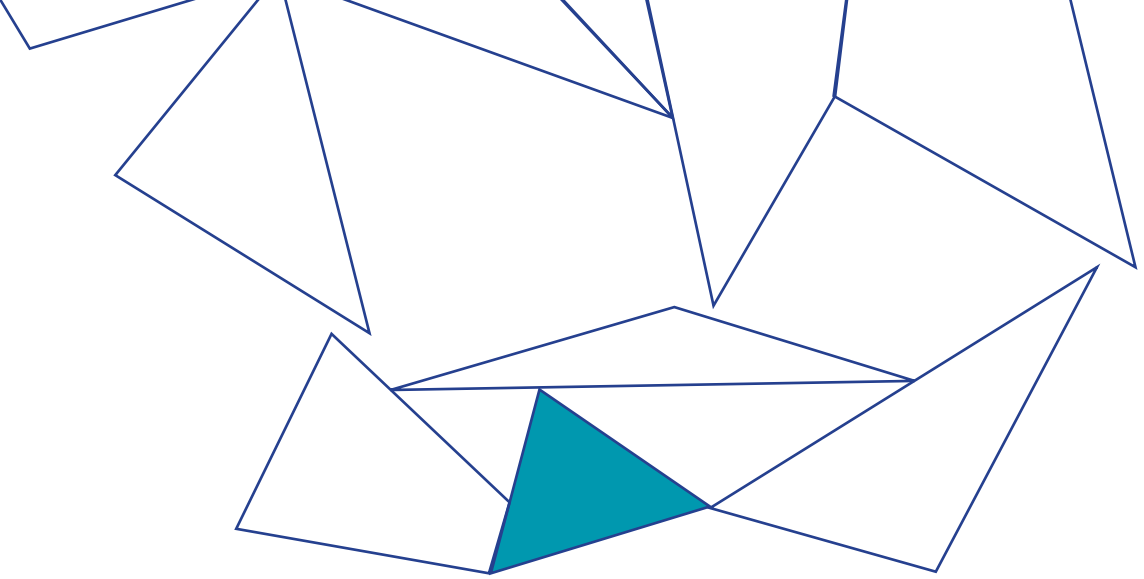
There are still challenges, like

- using technology and
- feeling isolated from others.

Some women may also struggle to get the support they need.

Still, working from home is a good step forward for including more women with disability in the workforce.





## Conclusion

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It's important for women with disability to be part of Queensland's economy.

To make this happen we need to:

- break down barriers,
- make things accessible,
- invest in education and support,
- fight discrimination, and
- work together across different sectors.

Governments, businesses, universities, and community groups must join forces and make the needs of women with disabilities a priority.

By working together, we can create a society that

- values everyone
- gives everyone a fair chance to take part in the economy, and
- treats everyone equally.

To overcome the many challenges that women with disability face in joining the economy in Queensland, we need everyone to help.

## This means

- making fair policies,
- making things accessible,
- investing in education and support,
- fighting unfair treatment,
- fixing social problems,
- offering incentives, and
- forming partnerships between
  1. universities,
  2. governments,
  3. businesses, and
  4. community groups.

Together, we can make Queensland a better place for everyone, regardless of their disability.





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